

James Island Presbyterian Church  
2015  
Advent Devotional



James Island Presbyterian Church

*A light to the nations, a beacon to the island*

# A PRAYER FOR THE ADVENT JOURNEY

God of hope, who brought love into this world,  
be the love that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought peace into this world,  
be the peace that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought joy into this world,  
be the joy that dwells between us.

God of hope, the rock we stand upon,  
be the centre, the focus of our lives  
always, and particularly this Advent time.

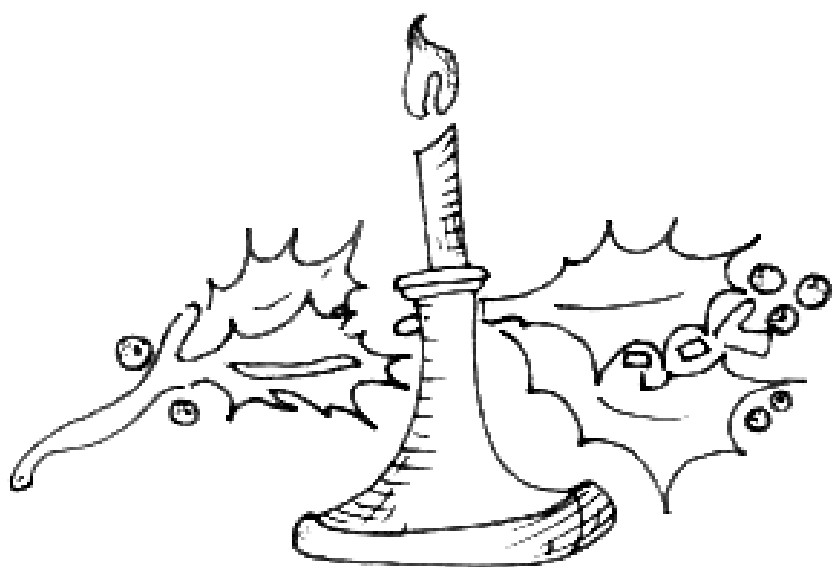
In this season of expectation  
draw us together in unity,  
that our praise and worship  
might echo in these walls  
and also through our lives.

In this Advent of expectation  
draw us together in mission,  
that the hope within  
might be the song we sing,  
and the melody of our lives.

In this season of hope and expectation  
draw us together in service,  
that the path we follow  
might lead us from a stable  
to a glimpse of eternity.

And gracious God, may it be to your great glory and  
our great joy for we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

# Hope



# *First Sunday of Advent*

November 29

***“The Lord listened and heard them”***

***Malachi 3:16***

Silence! There was not only a silent night, but also decades that turned into centuries of silence. Four hundred years with no word from God. His prophets no longer spoke to His chosen people who had continuously rebelled against His demands for holiness. Only a few, a remnant of the faithful, who feared and loved the Lord spoke often of Him to each other. In the last book of the Old Testament, the last prophet says, “...and the Lord took note and listened.” It’s interesting to note that God bent His ear to hear His people speak about Him. Even from the beginning in Eden, the Lord longed to be in touch with His children, but sin upon sin had distanced them from His presence and now they had not heard from Him in a very long time.

Yet there was hope, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) And so, after four hundred years, once again God spared His people as He placed His Son in a stable manger on a cold, silent night in Bethlehem. Immanuel (God with us) arrived. The supreme act of love was accomplished when “God leaned over, listened and blessed the earth”—blessing it with His presence in the Christ Child who would one day save mankind from all sin through His death—“We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us”... (I John 3:16).

Because of all the evil things going on in this world, it seems that God is silent again, but those of us who love God, know that He is at work. Our Lord is allowing time for many more to turn to Him. His is surely bending His ear to hear the Believers speak often of Him. During this time of advent, awaiting the arrival of the celebration of Christmas, we are also in another advent, awaiting the arrival of Christ the King who will come again. A time when peace will reign and God will once more touch the earth as His mighty hand moves to lift up His people in joyous celebration. Until then, hold fast to that hope that binds us together in Him especially in these uncertain times.

“Now may the Lord of people Himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you.”  
(2 Thessalonians 3:16).

*Lord, as we anticipate your coming, may we prepare ourselves. Help us to become better stewards of your grace. Give us hearts to accept your love and then give that love away, knowing that it will return in overflowing abundance.*

**Billie Young**



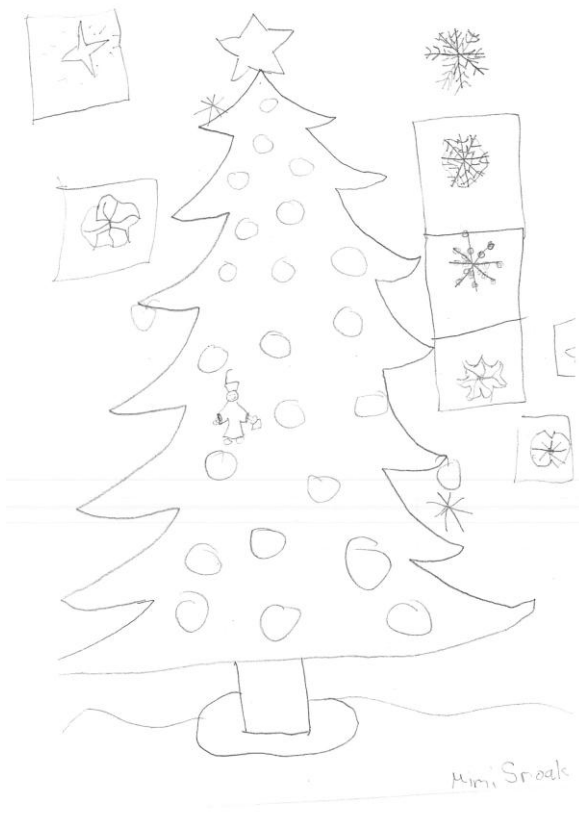
Monday, November 30

Earlier in the school year, I was really struggling because of my terrible teacher. However, I learned how to study and learned how to do it myself, and ended up getting a 95 on my test. Learning how to do these things gave me hope.

### **Anonymous**

A few years ago I was riding to football with my brother and dad. We had to turn around because we forgot Samuel's pads. We started going back and I got this feeling that I should get my seat belt right. A few seconds later the car was totaled. I think this was God watching out for me.

### **Joshua Hornig**



Tuesday, December 1

***You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and take your rest in safety. 19 You will lie down, with no one to make you afraid, and many will court your favor. Job 11: 18-19***

“You’ve got to believe that God is in control of your life. It may be a tough time but you’ve got to believe that God has a reason for it and he’s going to make everything good.” ~ Joel Osteen

Hope! That is what I feel when I drive through the gates of Montreat, North Carolina. This overwhelming sense that all is right with the world.

Every June, a large group of us from the JIPC choirs attends the Worship and Music Conference in Montreat. I start looking forward to this week the day I leave the year before. There is something so healing and encouraging about that week for me. Yes, it is a week where we attend special worship services and sing a lot, but it is much more than that.

I am with close family and friends in what I call “God’s country.” It is so beautiful up in the mountains, cooler than Charleston in the summer. We walk everywhere and the kids can come and go as they please because it is so safe. It’s the way we all want the world to be everywhere. So hopeful!

When attending worship or choir rehearsals, we experience new ideas and open ourselves to try different things: new music, new order of worship, movement during worship. Everything and everyone is accepted at Montreat.

My favorite part of Montreat week is the fellowship with my Christian family. We spend time in the moment, talking about what we are experiencing and sharing our lives with one another. We encourage each other and look to the future with hope. We always wonder what the year ahead will bring to us and to our church family, but we never doubt that we will be back again at Montreat the following year.

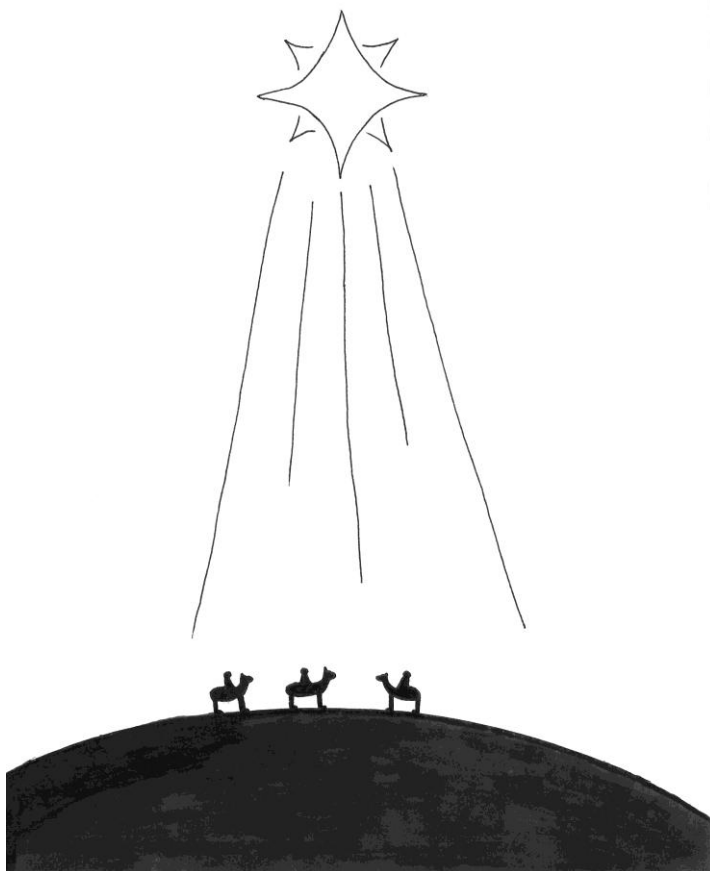
***Dear God, We are so thankful for the time and places you give us where we feel so close to you, so full of hope. We pray that we can feel this more in our daily lives as we grow closer to you during this Advent season.***

***"Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow  
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.  
Great is thy faithfulness!"  
See you in June, Montreat! Until then....  
Thank you God! Amen***

**Barbara Manaker**

Director of Music

James Island Presbyterian Church





Wednesday, December 2

I was excited because Dell offered me a job that normally requires a college degree, if I passed a computer service certification exam. The exam costs \$200, but my school offered to pay for the test, so I should be able to get the job.

**Anonymous**

Recently, my Dad had cancer in his thyroid. Whenever I was at the church, I would pray for everything to go well. So far, he has been recovering quickly. God answered my prayers.

**Josh Hornig**



Thursday, December 3

***“And now, O Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you.”  
-Psalm 39:7, NRSV***

What is this new light, spreading out its veil upon our barren land?

Our dying land, where nothing grows but languid patchwork futures and broken memories spoken by mouths dry and dusty as our weary hearts, our cries for hope now coarse whispers and afterthoughts.

Our tired land, where our spirits yearn to again be full, gleaning our bare subsistence from the famined promises left to us against the shadows, to which we cling for life.

What hope have we in this world, whose weight churns against us in our toil as we seek out wholeness in the ether?

Be not far from us, Lord, for the hope you promised us is our salvation.

Through the fragility of an infant child, you became our strength against the world. You wrote our hope into the flesh of your Son, our Emanuel, the fulfillment of your great love for us.

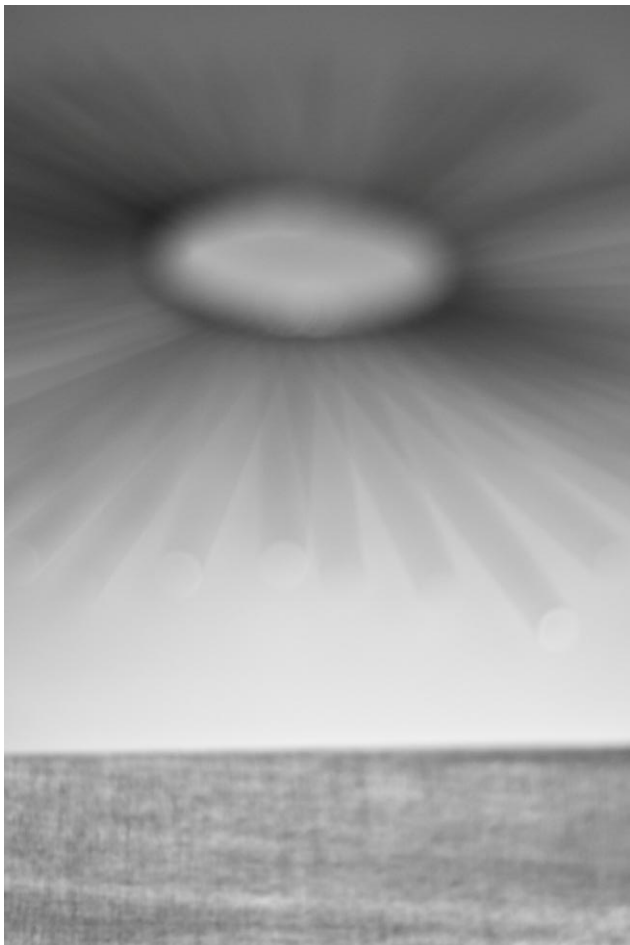
Our hope in you became certain when you became as we are. You felt the earth beneath your feet, the unyielding torment of our temptations, the brightness and the insufficiency of our love, our hunger to know your presence. You knew the pains your advent would mean, yet you came, for the sake of our joy.

You put a new fire in our hearts, and reclaimed us as your own.

Let our eyes now turn upwards, our hearts shake off their ash, our spirits breathe in a new joy. Let the earth sing its new song, written in a new hope, a thunderous ode, a dirge for the wages of sin and death.

And let us wait. Our hope is certain, our hope has come, our hope is still to come.

***Amen.***



**Duncan Meadows**

## Friday, December 4

I expected our James Island Presbyterian Church mission team visit to serve dinner and share time with the guests of the Florence Crittenton Home (FCH), to be like any other Monday. Each monthly visit with these young, expectant mothers is special. But this particular visit impacted me in a significant way.

When you visit the FCH one Monday each month for only a few hours, you have limited opportunity to serve food, listen, share, pray, play card games, laugh and witness the love of God. Every minute is a gift. And as a gift, you try to use the time together in a special, impactful way.

Following dinner, volunteers sit at different tables and play the card game, 'Uno', with the women. This evening, I was sitting with three FCH young women, ages 15, 17 & 18. I knew from previous visits that each had decided to keep their child, when born. Like many of the personal stories of the guests of the FCH, these women had limited family support, limited formal education, limited financial resources and likely a tough journey ahead.

The card playing concluded and we transitioned from casual to some more serious conversation. The exchange was now mostly between 'Sarah', the 18 year-old, and me. Sarah shared her dreams for her daughter that would soon be born. She intended for her daughter's life to be different from her own life experience. You see, Sarah's birth mother just turned 30 years old. Yes, her mother was 12 when Sarah was born. Sarah had lived in several places and had been in and out of foster care most of her life. It was a hard life. Gangs, fights, substance abuse. And then an unplanned pregnancy.

Yet, when Sarah spoke of her unborn baby, her words were full of excitement, anticipation, love and hope. She spoke of plans to complete her education, efforts to reconnect with family, a career she wanted to pursue, stability for her baby. Sarah's face radiated when she talked about what it would be like to be a mother. Being a single mom would be difficult, but...then she said it...'God's love will be sufficient.' When prompted, she then shared her faith with me. Simple but profound words. Sarah knew God loved her and already loved her unborn child.

I may never know what will happen to Sarah and her baby. But what a gift when Sarah shared, with me, her witness. Her relationship with God. A relationship based on love. God's love, first, for Sarah that then allowed her to share her love for an unborn child. God's all sufficient love that creates HOPE. Sarah shared her belief in the Word of God found in Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you HOPE and a future".

This season, every season, we rejoice in our HOPE. God's gift, Jesus, for each of us.

**Henry Meeuwse**  
**Peace and Comfort**



# Peace



Saturday, December 5

***Now may the Lord of peace give you peace in all times and in every way...***

***2 Thessalonians 3:16***

Several years ago, I found myself telling a close friend that I rarely felt peace in my life. Indeed, I told her, I could think of only a few times in my adult life when I had felt peace. Shortly afterward, my friend presented me with a hand-painted plaque of a lighthouse and the Thessalonians quote above. Aside from striking me with the thoughtfulness of my friend, this gift reminded me to seek peace actively and to recognize peace when it was present.

As I began mindfully to seek and pray for peace, I realized that I also needed to recognize and appreciate peace. I was somewhat abashed to realize that I often had not appreciated peace when it was offered or even in my midst. I learned that peace, often defined as a period of quiet or tranquility, could be fleeting and must be recognized in order for me to benefit from it.

I also began to learn that peace could be found in a variety of places, situations, and times. When we actively seek God's peace, we can be in a thronging crowd yet still seek a brief respite, pray, and receive God's peace. When we actively seek peace, we actively recognize it as well. I began remembering times I had experienced peace - yet when I got caught up in busy-ness and stress, I failed to remember those peaceful times.

I learned that in a yoga class, I could pray and work to settle my mind, not just try to exercise and stretch my body. Driving the car, I could pray and find peace. Walking the dog, cooking a meal, any of the busy things we do throughout a day, we can search for peace. And I've learned that if I seek and pray, I generally find peace.

And of course, I've re-learned a lesson I've been taught throughout my life - the Lord's offering for peace is restated again and again throughout the Bible. I just have to be mindful, recognize those offerings, and ponder them.

As we travel together this Advent season and into a new year, I invite each of you to join me in this active quest for peace - to seek for peace, pray for peace, recognize peace, and appreciate peace.

*The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.*  
**Lamentations 3:25-26**

**Elizabeth Parler**





# *Second Sunday of Advent*

December 6

***Matthew 6:34 “[Jesus said,] ‘So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.’”***

Life is full in the Smith house with four boys, a dog, and three turtles to care for. Over the past few months, Jason and I have had the added excitement and stress of building a house. We hoped to move out of our rental and into our new house sometime in January. However, a few weeks ago, we received an email from our landlord that we either needed to sign a six month lease extension or move out December 1<sup>st</sup>. Yikes!

I told myself that there was no need to worry. Certainly the landlord would change her mind when she realized that we just needed a two month extension. I pushed the worry aside, reminding myself of Jesus’ command not to borrow tomorrow’s trouble since today has enough of its own. Unfortunately, my hopes sank as we received word that she would not reconsider. We either had to sign the lease or be out by December 1.

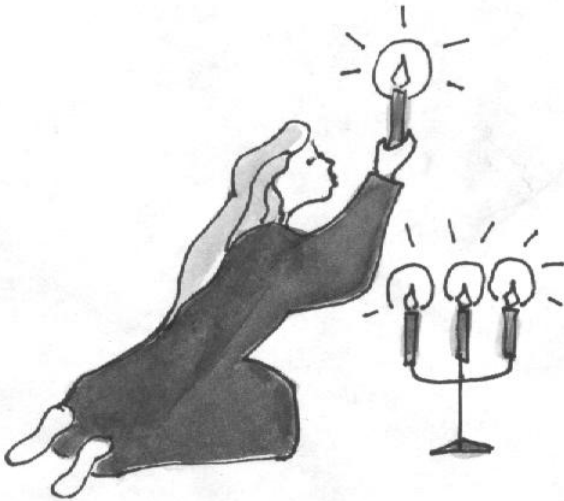
After receiving that news one Wednesday night, I went into our staff meeting Thursday morning distraught as I shared my anxious concerns with our staff. Later that day, I received a text message from Henry confirming that the Mission House calendar was miraculously free for the exact dates that my family needed. God made a way out. This was a powerful reminder that God provides in ways and timing that we can never anticipate. My peace for today is found by trusting God with tomorrow. Even when life does not go the way I have planned, I have hope that God will work all things for good as I wait and trust in His plan.

**Reverend Cameron Smith**

Monday, December 7

In October of 2013, I was diagnosed with severe anxiety and panic disorder as well as OCD. I had never been through anything like it, and didn't know what to expect. I remember the day after my first panic attack, a Sunday, none of the doctors office's were open and we didn't know what to do. The only thing that brought me through that day, waiting for a doctor, was God. I felt the prayers, although few people knew what was going on, I knew they were praying. And as my journey continued, and it was a bumpy road, I felt the prayers every day. When I got through that point in my life, my relationship with God was no longer going to church because my parents did. It was going to church, knowing I could learn more about God, and knowing that God was there. God is not only there when you're at church, God is there all the time.

**Brynnan Frye**



Tuesday, December 8

I was in a taxi cab in Washington, DC, chatting with my driver on our way to the airport. Our conversation turned to the topic of family. His beloved wife was unfortunately experiencing health challenges. In describing her, he smiled from the inside out and said “*she is my comfort*”. How beautiful, I thought, to be someone’s comfort.

Media bombards us that we should enjoy a happy, perfect Christmas. In reality, some of us are grieving a loss, heartbroken, suffering financial strain, struggling with family relationships, or experiencing health problems. Life does not suddenly turn merry just because it’s a certain time of year. Fortunately, Christians can know the wonderfully illogical, mysterious peace that surpasses all understanding and circumstance. Perhaps that message is the best gift we can give this season.

***“And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”***  
**Philippians 4:7**

***“Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we may be able to comfort those experiencing any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”***  
**2 Corinthians 1:3-4**

***Dear Lord,***  
***Thank you for your holy presence with us. Please help us to see others with your eyes and ears, and be sensitive to their circumstances. Please show us how we can bring comfort to those who need it.***  
***Amen***

**Beth Robertson**

Wednesday, December 9

On Christmas Eve 2014 I was told I had stage 3 cancer. Wow I was not expecting to hear those words. That very day two wonderful ladies told me of two friends they had that had the same type cancer. Their friends are cancer free! The ladies encouraged me to keep my faith and to pray continuously. I believe God put them in my path.

I can truly say I believed that I would be healed. I knew that God was not done with me. He brought my family closer, open my eyes to show me what a wonderful church family I had, & taught me to do my job better.(I work with senior citizens ). He constantly put people in my path that encouraged me.

God showed me so much love, that I was able to stay at peace until I heard the words "cancer free".

I share a scripture that helped me through this time....

***" do not be anxious about anything but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God.***

***Philippians 4:6***

**Sondra Baty**

# JOY

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Thursday, December 10

**“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity...”**

**Ephesians 5:15-16**

When Katie and Emma were younger, Christmas morning was a blur as they would excitedly tear open one gift after another without even really noticing or expressing thanks for what they had received along the way. One gift would barely be opened before they were anxiously tearing through paper to get to the next one. The elves always left a Scavenger Hunt that would culminate with their big gift. They were so looking forward to the gift at the end that they would barely even read the zany clues or notice the smaller gifts along the way.

As I reflected on it disappointedly and prayed on how to address it with the girls, God convicted me of doing the same thing in life. I'm guilty of often tearing through the gifts He gives me along the way each day or not even noticing the gifts as I go seeking the next big thing. Anxiously I rush through the days trying to get to what's next without recognizing the joy along the way. How often have I been looking for the next big thing God was going to do instead of finding the blessings and joy He's giving in the small things right now? How often have I said "I can't wait until this is behind us" instead of noticing the gift of His joy and love through the present? How often have I left God's gifts behind barely unwrapped and unappreciated because I was looking for something else? How often have I just been so fixed on getting somewhere bigger that I forgot to acknowledge that where I already am is a blessing too?

Too often we are just focused on our LFTs (Looking Forward Tos) --note this way of writing is a "gift" I'm learning from the girls...along with OTW (on the way) and TBH (to be honest) --that we miss the GIFTS(that's just all caps for emphasis) in the now. We are often tearing through our days longingly just looking forward to when we have more time, when we get the job, when we can have a week off, when we can see someone again, when the family drama settles down, when the house is finally finished, when we are finished with school, when the holidays are over, when the kids are grown, when we can retire, when we aren't sick... Yet sometimes those LFTs derail us from recognizing and fully appreciating God's love and joy in the present.

Some days it's difficult to find the "gift" in all of it, but God's teaching me that if I take time to look and to notice, His gifts are all around no matter the circumstance. Are we just looking for the next present to unwrap instead of enjoying the one in front of us right now? Are we passing by God's small gifts because we're so focused on the next big thing coming? Are we missing the joy in the mundane because we are fixed on finding the magnificent? May His presence direct our eyes and our hearts to the presents in each day.

***Prayer:***

***Dear Lord, Thank you for the gifts in each day. Help us to unwrap each day and to savor the love and joy we find in You and through You. Help us to not be so busy on the way to wherever we are going, that we forget the gifts where we already are. Thank you for giving us eyes to see and hearts to appreciate each small gift on the way to the great things you have planned for us. Help us to remember that Your presence surrounds us and is indeed the greatest present.***

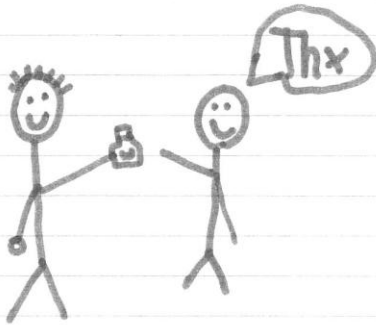
**Emily Oswald**



Friday, December 11

I felt close to God when I was helping people at cross.

I felt close to god when I  
was helping people at cross.



food Bank



**Mark Steffan**

A time I felt God was when I saw Logan kick the ball for the first time. It was amazing because when I saw it, I knew he would be a soccer player

**Matthew Smith**



Saturday, December 12

Many of you know I have quite a collection of nativities and I lovingly display them every year. Some are beautiful, some are from other countries, some are playful, some are large and some are small. They all have one thing in common, they remind me of the true meaning of Christmas and the joy that God gave to the world when he sent his only Son to us.

One of my favorite memories of Christmas as a child was setting up the nativity in our home. My parents and grandparents each made a ceramic nativity set while stationed in Panama. It was extra special knowing my parents had hand painted the figures. I loved unwrapping the figures and putting each one in it's special place. In that simple act, I believe God was calling me to him.

A couple of years ago, my mother passed the nativity on to me and each year, I feel the joy of God's love for me when I unwrap the pieces and display them for all to see. It also reminds me of all of my many blessings.

Each nativity reminds me of God's love and grounds me from getting so caught up in the materialism of today's Christmas. Last year, I bought a child's nativity to introduce to my granddaughter Darby. I look forward this year to Kenny and I sharing the story of Christ's birth with her and sharing the tradition of putting out her nativity. I want her to understand the true meaning of Christmas.

Advent is such a wonderful time of the year to remember our many blessings from God.

When I focus on the true meaning of Christmas, I am filled with the four themes of Advent: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love, such a comfort in today's unsettling world.

**Nancy Tassin**

# *Second Sunday of Advent*

December 13

I play football for James Island High School. This year we have had a rough season, but when we played Cane Bay, I saw hope in our team because Cane Bay did not score on our defense for the whole game, and they have one of the best offenses in the region.

**Gresh Meggett**

I am blessed because I have a wonderful family and am really good at having fun. I am blessed because I have money and have enough to eat every day. Love means a feeling of happiness or when you really like something or someone. I felt God when He hears my prayers, when I was born, and whenever something good happens to me.



**Bazel Sheppard**

Monday, December 14

### TIES THAT BIND

It is with great joy and thanksgiving to God that I share about three very special high school seniors. The friendship between Cameron Frye, Rachel Clyburn and Christie Huss is a huge part of my heart. These girls met in church. They were strategically placed by God right here in this church together as babies (Christie came along in the first grade after Rachel and Cameron had been bonding for years in the nursery....they welcomed her with outstretched arms!). These three girls have laughed more than a million giggles, shared their secrets, shared life's losses, they have prayed together, cried together, celebrated each other's victories, and supported each other always. They have gone to Sunday School, PYC, youth outing, Mission trips, Montreat, Mexico, and Cameron refers to every summer as "my time with Rachel and Christie". When they were little girls, they affectionately started calling themselves the "Frye-burn-husses". They are part of each other's families and they walk into each other's homes as if they were truly at HOME. And they are.

Rachel, Cameron and Christie don't go to school together, but it is by the grace of God that they "found" each other here at JIPC. I think so often about my own church friends and what those relationships mean to me. We go our separate ways during the week, but we are so happy to be brought together again on Wednesday and Sunday. These friendships are deeply rooted in Christian love. I find such comfort in these relationships as we live life together! So I offer praise for these incredible gifts of friendship and ties that truly bind us together.

Girls, you are getting ready to venture into the world and start chasing those big dreams and plans you have for yourselves. And you are going to do GREAT. You are going to be blessed beyond measure, as you already have been over and over again. Your church home and your "Frye-burn-huss" family will always be here as a foundation for you.

Father, thank you for these truly special girls and for the friendships will all experience at James Island Presbyterian.

**Julie Frye**

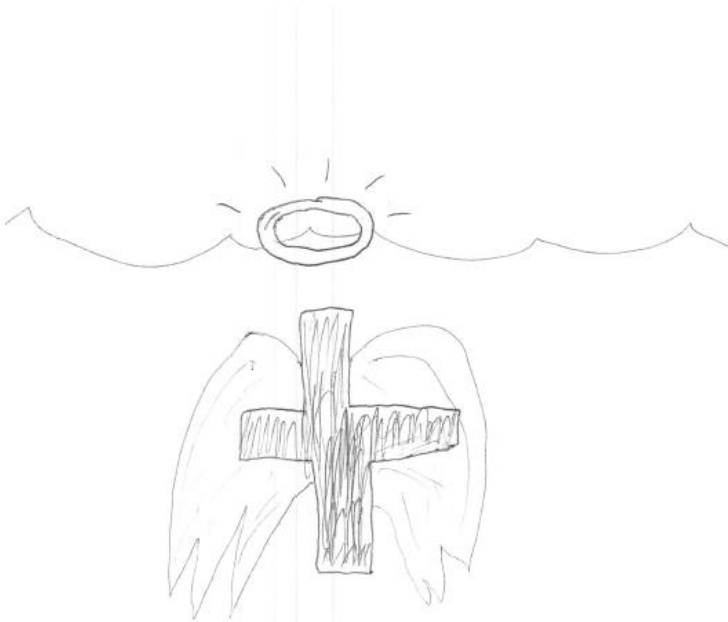
Tuesday, December 15

Jesus has blessed me with a great family, a wonderful house, great friends and just all around great life. There is no way to thank Jesus, all he asks for is your love. So, some days it is good to talk to Jesus. Just put down your phone and talk to Jesus. Jesus has helped me and he can help anyone.

**Rhett Tuemler**

I am blessed because I was born into a good family. I am lucky that I can choose what I want to eat and drink, but some people in Africa don't get to know they get to get another meal. So, I am thankful that God loves me.

**Grant Morrow**

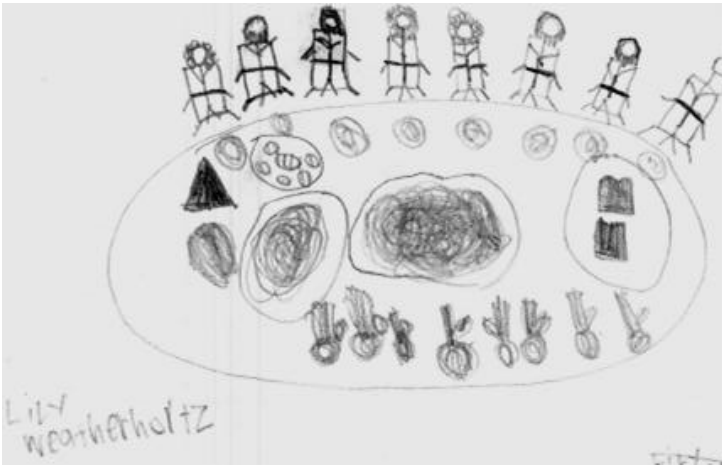


by: Alden Morrow

Wednesday, December 16

I love the season of Advent at my church. My favorite advent activity is making wreaths. My whole family is always there and sometimes I get to wrap up the wreaths ring before we decorate it. I also like to go see all my friend's wreaths that they have made with their families. It is a special day! I will always be grateful for my church and God and this time of year that we get to make special memories.

**Margaret Anne Clum**



At Christmas I always look forward to my mom's special Christmas dinner. It is so good! Everybody brings a dish and we gather around the table. My dad always says a special Christmas prayer. Then we eat our special Christmas dinner, and it give me a good feeling in my heart to be spending time with my family. I try to always be thankful for all my family's blessings and the gift of Jesus, our Savior.

**Lily Weatherholtz**

## Thursday, December 17

Leading up to March 17<sup>th</sup> 2012 Lauren and I felt called to visit my Family in Virginia and accompany my Father to a Cardiology Visit. Though it came in a very busy time Lauren and I along with my sister, brother in law and mother felt that it may ease my father's nerves to have me with him during his appointments. Lauren and I traveled to Virginia expecting to visit the doctor and then have a relaxing & fun weekend with my parents. My brother in law and I had actually purchased a 4 wheeler for him to help get around his property so we were excited about giving that to him. That Friday March 16<sup>th</sup> my mother and I visited the doctor with my father and left feeling very happy with the potential small procedure that was planned for his heart. The doctor shared that much of his energy would return and daily life would seemingly go back to normal. Given that information my father and I decided that we would be fine to build a much needed fence along his property the following day.

March 17<sup>th</sup> 2012 came and I woke up never expecting to be a tool of God's grace. That morning we met my childhood friend Tommy and his 4 year old son Cole about 20 minutes outside of town. Tommy and I worked hard building a fence while my father tried and tried to get the 4 wheeler running but for some reason it wouldn't. How embarrassed I was that I had brought my father an already broken 4 wheeler. Little did I know that was one of the many key parts of Gods Plan. Upon finishing the fence I began to clean up as Tommy was getting Cole ready to go. Just as Tommy made it to his car I noticed that my father had collapsed. He was hunched over on his side seizing and not able to breathe. I ran to him and looked him dead in the eye just before he fell lifeless. This is the time where God gave me peace and took complete control of the situation. I immediately began to go through the motions of CPR and mouth to mouth. While doing CPR, I somehow remained calm knowing that my cell phone did not get service. I called to Tommy. He quickly called 911 and was able to give rough direction to the dispatch. We were out on a piece of property that did not have an address and was on a very rural back road. Somehow Tommy was able to stay on the line to talk them through. As the seconds turned to minutes and the minutes went by I found myself still remaining calm and beginning to question how and why I was so calm. I had heard his sternum crack, I had experienced the rattle in his last

breathe and witnessed the passing of his final fluids. These to me were all signs of the ultimate loss, however I remained calm. Continuing on as if I was not in control, never a thought of stopping, never a moment of fatigue nor a thought that he wasn't going to make it. As God directed the EMS down the winding roads I will never forget Cole....this 4 year old little boy walked over to me and said "it's ok you will see your daddy soon". God spoke directly to me through Cole and knew his words would give me Hope. Well over 20 minutes has passed at this point and just as HOPE was beginning to fade God gave me the Joy of hearing the ambulance. Tommy with God leading directed the crew to where we were. I now could breathe. As the EMS workers took over, I immediately felt my emotional and physical state change. I began to cry and nearly hyperventilate. While the rescuers continued to work to save my father's life, I found myself next to him asking God to continue to bless his life and bring him back to the family that loves him. It didn't take long before God showed his Love for my father and his family. After over 25 minutes of being unconscious and not breathing my father began to speak. Signs of Peace, Joy, Love and Hope filled the ambulance. God proved to ultimately be in complete control and place all hands where they needed to be and when they needed to be.

Today, 3 years later, I still look back at that day trying to understand and question what happen, but remind myself that the only answer is that God shared his grace on my family. My father is still alive and back to doing everything that he was prior to the event. He wakes up every morning thanking God for his blessings, just as we all should. During advent please take the time to thank God for all the blessings in your life. Often times they are not nearly as evident or impactful as this story but they are all very important and should not be taken for granted. As you go home today open up and allow God to lead you calmly through the uncertainty sharing peace, love hope and joy along the way.

**Billy Richardson**

# Love





Friday, December 18

Over the past few years I have been tested and scared. Trying to raise kids on a limited budget and secretly panicking every day. For some time I felt as though I were slipping through the cracks and there was just not a lot of hope.

Insert my James Island Presbyterian family.

I have been told in the past that if God can bring me to it, he will bring me through it. So I was saying "God I'm ready to be brought though it!"

But what I failed to recognize is that God's timing is SOOOO much better than mine.

My church family through God's work has brought me through these tough times and I am eternally grateful. I can't say over and over how many times I have learned more from teaching three to five year olds on Wednesday nights about excitement for God's work and what hope and faith mean.

There are living saints walking the halls of this place who have blessed me and my family without even knowing it was perfect timing.

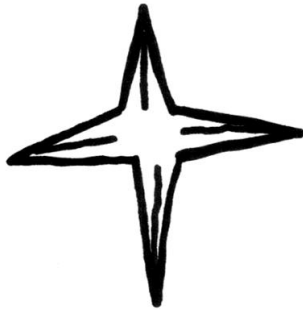
Some would gather to say that the church is their second home. I say the church is my home because family takes care of you and this is where my family resides.

**Sharon Steffan**

Saturday, December 19

Christmas is such a magical time of year. All the beautiful decorations, time with friends and family, and all the yummy treats you wait for all year! It is so easy to get caught up in the glitz and gift-giving, especially with a little one at home who is learning about Santa. While we will still have our decorations up and eat Christmas cookies, we want to focus our love on God and the wonderful gift of His Son and our Savior! My family is so thankful for our wonderful church family and this beautiful devotional that help us focus on Christ every Christmas!

**Allison Hubbard**



# *Fourth Sunday of Advent*

December 20

***“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!” ~Ecclesiastes 4:9-10***

Katie is my older sister. She is just 21 months older than me, and we have always been very close. We always wanted to wear matching clothes and did everything together when we were growing up. Katie is a sweet, loving sister and is very talented. She is also very smart. Katie is more serious and I am more silly. We have different personalities, but have always gone together like peanut butter and jelly. However, as she is getting to be a teenager and is in middle school we don't wear matching clothes anymore and don't do much together. She is at the School of the Arts and I am doing online school with Cyber Academy of South Carolina. Katie is very busy with her schoolwork, church and her friends at dance and cheer. When she is home, she wants to be by herself most of the time to work on her computer or text her friends. When I try to even go into her room, she says, “Get out, Emma. I need my space!” It makes me feel sad, and I miss all the things we used to do together.

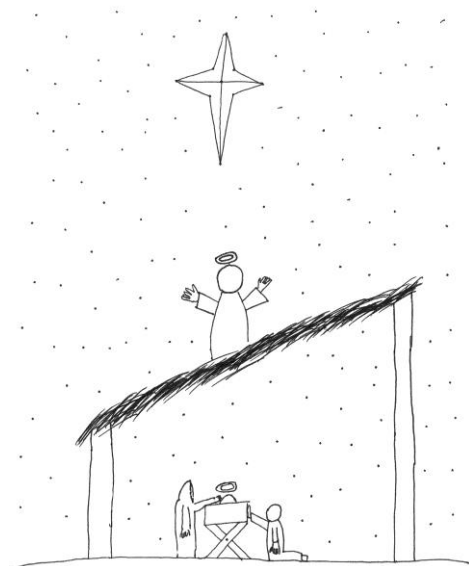
One Sunday after church, we were doing our own things separately like we always do now. Katie was texting her friends and listening to music in her room. I was relaxing watching TV and getting ready to paint. All the sudden, I saw Katie standing in the doorway. I thought she was going to say something like “Emma, did you take my shoes? Go find them!” in her usual bossy, sassy tone. But, I was so surprised when she said calmly, “Hey, Emma, can I come sit by you and watch TV with you?” My heart smiled and so did my face. We watched the show and we even talked some about the show. When it was over, I told her I was going to paint. I asked if she wanted to paint with me too, but I didn't expect her to since she had already spent time with me watching TV. I asked anyway. “Sure, do you want me to help you get the supplies out?” she asked. I was happier than a kid getting a lollipop! Katie and I got out all the brushes together, chose our colors, helped each other get set up and painted for almost an hour. We didn't say much

to each other, but being together was all that mattered. I'm so glad God made us sisters. Our paintings didn't turn out like we wanted, but our time together was a masterpiece.

I was expecting it to be just another same old Sunday, but instead it ended up being a super, surprising Sunday. Spending time with Katie watching TV and painting was better than being by myself, even if we weren't going anywhere or doing anything big. This unexpected surprise taught me to never underestimate the bond that sisters have even when they grow up and apart. God gives us others so that we can find love and joy. I hope Katie realized how special it was to me and how her kindness counts. We are always better together than alone.

***Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the love and joy you give us through our bonds with others. Help us to cherish those moments and to enjoy the gift of being together even when they aren't frequent encounters and even when we aren't doing anything or saying anything much. Help us to realize the treasure of being with others and help us to show kindness to one another. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.***

***Emma Oswald***



Monday, December 21

My favorite part of Christmas is spending time with my family. When we gather together every Christmas morning is a special time. I also like coming to church on Wednesday nights during Advent. I love making jewelry for my friends and family. I also like the other crafts and cards that we make for others we do not know. It makes me happy! I am thankful for all the gifts I get at Christmas time but I always remember that Jesus is the best gift I have ever received.

**Elaina Erickson**

At Christmas time, I like to hang ornaments and hangout with my family. We travel for Christmas and I like to see all my family. I love all the things my family does together at Christmas time because I love my family!

**Anonymous**



**Tuesday, December 22**

**Praise the Lord! Happy are those who fear the Lord, who greatly delight in his commandments.**

**Psalms 112:1**

**Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'**

**Mark 12:29-31**

I find that Jesus gave me commandments that I can fulfill more easily than the original ten. Perhaps that is because I don't like details, but perhaps that is the way God meant it to be when He sent Jesus to save me. I may want (covet) what a neighbor or friend has, but I still love that person.

I ask God to help me obey all of the commandments and to delight in each one.

**Dottie Coleman**

When people say "love", other people (particularly kids) think about romance and kissing and all of that stuff. But, in the Bible, love isn't just for romance. The Bible says to love your neighbor as yourself. That doesn't mean you have to be willing to date and kiss your neighbor. It means to be friendly and kind as if you loved them, but leave out the romance and kissing

**Austin Smith**

Wednesday, December 23

In my house, we go to bed early. We could be farmers, with the schedule we keep. If we're up past 9:00, something pretty special must be happening. But, Wednesday, June 17th, was just a regular night for our family. So, by 9:15, as they say in the Christmas poem, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.

Conversely, a mere seven miles from our sleepy neighborhood, an historic church was exploding with gunfire and the screams of the injured and dying. While we lay quietly in peace, twelve beautiful souls cried out in anguish, nine of them took their last breaths.

We would come to discover the next morning, not only that this atrocity had occurred, but that our nephew was the perpetrator. Our 21 year old, introverted nephew. My heart had never been so broken; my shame had never run so deep. How could he do this?

In the moment when I received that news, news that changed my family forever; I felt hopeless, lost, heartbroken, ashamed, guilty. But, I would discover, in such a dark moment, that when I couldn't find hope on my own, others would be there to help me. Pastor Sam spent the day with us, quietly (which I've learned now is unusual for Sam) being a safe presence and guide. Back at the church, Henry and Cameron, calming and kind, warm hugs and gentle words.

On that same day, the day after, I shed tears with a beloved co-worker, who called Emmanuel AME her home, her church family. She hadn't been there the night before, but people she loved had been. How could she love me the same, knowing it was someone in my family who did this? But, without hesitation, she offered me peace, forgiveness, love. There are truly beautiful souls being nurtured at that church. I hold her, and the entire congregation of Emmanuel, up as my spiritual role models.

And, in the days and weeks that followed, our own church family took our hands and, with kindness, led us back to the path and showed us hope again. Every little gesture was like salve on our raging wounds. Every hug, every card, every text, every prayer began to close that wound. The meals nourished

not only our bodies but our souls. Flowers reminded us of God's beauty. You held us up when we could not stand on our own. You restored hope when we thought hope was lost.

**Karin Roof**





# Christmas Eve

Thursday, December 24

**"But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.'"**

**Luke 1:30-31**

I am married to and live with a mother. But I haven't always been married to a mother. In a deep and dark place, I wondered if I would ever be married to a mother. Hope was gone for her and for me.

"Don't forget to bring your VHS tape as today we will record the ultra-sound of your son," Dr. Dingfelder exclaimed. He'd been through our first two miscarriages with us and was as excited as we were now that we were two days from the "danger zone" of completing that first important trimester. As he performed the ultra-sound, VHS rolling, a strange silence and stillness came from his person as he sat in the corner. Walking towards him, my eyes trained on the ultra-sound, there were no moving organs. "Dr. Ding", I said, "I don't see a heartbeat." In a confirmed moment, hopes, dreams, first abats, birthdays and graduations fell into the abyss of the third miscarriage. How to describe the total loss of hope? We moved from exam room 1 two doors down where we participated in the funeral of a DNC procedure. Hope? There was no more.

In a deeply moving act of love and care our church presented Amy and I, my Mary, with a check to send us to the Holy land to help us work through an extremely difficult time. We were watching the over-sea flight "Rudy" and did not hear the announcement to sign up to read Scripture at various stops on the tours. Suffice it to say, on day two in Mary and Joseph's grotto, Dr. Tom Collins asked Amy to read from Luke chapter 1. After reading the above verses, she looked at me and I looked at her. There was peace. There was healing. There was an unmistakable sense of all-is-welledness. Twenty-seven days later, my wife conceived and somehow we just knew. This would be the pregnancy that would bless us with a child. A firstborn. A son. Hope? Reborn.

May I say in no way do I compare my son, or the “mysterious” confirmation of his birth, to that of Jesus’ annunciation and birth. But as a man, once broken-hearted and disillusioned, I entered into the mystery and majesty to some degree, of what Mary surely felt with a most unexpected announcement. A burst of light in an otherwise impenetrable darkness. Just when all was lost and the world lay sleeping in a slumber of sin and darkness, love broke in. Hope—where there was none—was about to wrap himself in the skin of humanity. Hope—where there was none—re-born. The hope of Jesus Christ in me is almost forty two years old. My son, in whom that same hope resides, will be twenty-one on December 18<sup>th</sup>.

Advent is an exciting and emotional time for me. That period of waiting and expectation is a roller coaster of highs and lows. But for me, the roller coaster always come to a stop at a feeding trough. I peer over the edge into the eyes of perfect love. And I thrill all over again with that same certainty of hope—reborn. This day and forevermore. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

**Reverend Sam F. Martin, III**  
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