

*A Light  
in the Darkness*

2024 Advent Devotionals

By Sugar Land Students

Edited by

Miriam Aragon and Jordan Gibson

*Thanks for checking out A Light in the Darkness! I pray it is a wonderful tool for you and your family during this Advent season. The Scripture in this book is quoted from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible.*

*I'm so grateful for each student that wrote a devotion in this book. They have some really good things to say. This has been a challenging season for our youth group, and yet these students continue to amaze me with their hearts and persistence towards community and consistency. They are truly a gift to the Church. Thank you for entrusting Sugar Land Students to be your spiritual leaders for the next four weeks.*

*We're blessed at Sugar Land Baptist Church to have a team of staff members working hard to disciple the youth at SLBC and keep things running smoothly during this season. The investments that all our staff and our youth Sunday school teachers make into teenagers and God's Kingdom every week is humbling, and I am fortunate to be on a team with them.*

*I also want to make mention of our Student Leadership Team, who have been persistently working hard to be leaders and reach out to their fellow students to share Christ'. Their devotionals here will give you a glimpse into their hearts for Jesus. I'm thankful for these friends who contributed to this book. And I'm thankful for you, a church family who would use it and celebrate it.*

*The Creator has come to visit Creation, and His light has been made manifest to us! May we worship in celebration and sincerity this Advent!*

- Miriam Aragon



# *Week 1: Hope*

Sunday, December 1

# The Spirit's Rest

*Miriam Aragon*

*Student Ministry Associate*

**Scripture:** *A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.*

*The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—  
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and of might,  
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—  
and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.*

**Isaiah 11:1-3a**

Isaiah is a book of prophecies filled with colorful images and poetic expressions. Isaiah 11:1-3 points to Jesus—not just to His birth, but also to the promised Holy Spirit that will manifest over and through Him. I often think of Acts 2 and the tongues of fire when I think of the Spirit, and so I love that this passage takes the word “Spirit”—in Hebrew, Ru-ach (רוּחַ) or “breath/wind”—and explains how it will interact with Jesus’ coming... that the Spirit will *rest* on Him.

Rest means so many things. It means to *Sabbath* (cease and dwell in peace), to settle, to bring peace and tranquility, and to be placed upon something. This concept

of Sabbath was integral to the life of a Jew. They built their lives around taking a weekly Sabbath (a whole day off) and so this metaphor of the Spirit coming to Sabbath with Jesus held profound weight.

The idea of Sabbathing with the Spirit sheds so much light on Jesus' lifestyle and ministry. This Resting Spirit that dwelt with Him was *one of wisdom and one of understanding*. It brought Him *counsel and might*, and so importantly, it not only brought *knowledge and fear of the Lord*, but through these, it brought *delight in the fear of the Lord*.

We are given a profound promise in John 14:16 that we will be given this Spirit; that it will come and rest on us as well. Jesus makes this promise as a parting gift to his disciples, and the promised Spirit comes in Acts 2, making us likewise partakers in this beautiful and divine filling and resting. This brings us hope!

In this Advent season and in our calling to be imitators of Christ, I encourage you to lean into that rest. December can be a busy time for us in so many stages of life, and even if we are not in a hurry, we are perhaps distracted by those around us, or by those who are missing from this time. Lean into this idea of Sabbath Rest—this idea

of ceasing, of waiting, of resting and delighting in God's perfect design for the world, and for you! Just as Jesus' whole life and ministry was thoroughly intertwined with the Spirit's resting upon Him, so let us, as image bearers, lean into that same promised Spirit, which comes to rest on us.

***Spiritual Practice:** One of the ten commandments is to remember and observe the sabbath day, by keeping it holy (Ex. 20:8-11 & Deut. 5:12-15). To keep it holy means to set it apart for Christ. This advent season, take a weekly sabbath: a time with no buying and selling, no work, a time where worry and hurry can relent, and spend time delighting in God, recharging by doing things that you love, and investing in community. Move through your sabbath with the slow and sincere awareness of God's rest and experience the peace of resting in the Holy Spirit as He rests upon you.*

Monday, December 2

# Finding Hope Through Life's Changes

*John Curtis Sandlin*  
*Senior, George Ranch High School*

**Scripture:** *For you have been my hope,  
Sovereign LORD,  
my confidence since my youth.  
From birth I have relied on you;  
you brought me forth from my mother's womb.  
I will ever praise you.  
I have become a sign to many;  
You are my strong refuge.  
My mouth is filled with your praise,  
declaring your splendor all day long.*  
**Psalms 71:5-8**

When my family moved to a new town, I felt overwhelmed by uncertainty. I worried about making new friends, fitting into a different community, and finding my place. Everything familiar was changing, and the future felt unclear. But as I prayed, I remembered how God had helped me through past challenges. That gave me the confidence to trust Him with this new situation, knowing that

He was guiding me, even when I couldn't see the full picture.

This kind of hope is what Psalm 71 speaks to—a steady confidence that God is always at work, even in the most uncertain moments. Hope isn't just wishing for things to improve; it's trusting in God's unchanging character. We know He has been faithful in the past, and that gives us confidence He will be faithful in the future. When we reflect on His goodness, our hope is strengthened, even in life's biggest transitions.

Rather than worrying about the unknown or trying to control what comes next, we can find peace in knowing that God holds our future. His plans are far greater than we can imagine, and when we place our hope in Him, we are reassured, even when the path ahead feels uncertain.

***Spiritual Practice:** Take a moment to think about a time when life felt uncertain, but God provided for you in unexpected ways. **Write down** one or two of those moments, then say a prayer, thanking God for being your source of hope. Ask Him to help you trust Him with your future.*

Tuesday, December 3

# The Hope of the Holy Spirit

*Carrington Calloway*  
*Freshman, St. Agnes Academy*

***Scripture:*** *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

***Romans 15:13***

The Advent season allows us to remember our Savior, Jesus Christ. Throughout the Old Testament, there was talk about a Savior who was going to show himself on earth as the Son of God. People were counting the days until the Savior would come. Every day, they wished for His coming, but every time they thought that He was going to come, He did not. Then, when they least expected it, He came! These people showed the hope that they had in God through their faithful waiting. The hope they had was that even while they were waiting for something that had yet to occur, God would show them the path that he had for them.

Hope is a very hard thing for me to grasp. I have just started high school at a school where I know nobody... All I know about it really is that my mom went there, and that the

school is very selective of the people it takes. It chose me. Moving here was never the plan I thought God had for me, but here I am! God has shown me hope in ways that I never thought were possible. God has taken me through being at a school where I do not know anyone to meeting people I now have strong relationships with, and He has also led me to Sugar Land Baptist. God has shown me reason for hope in my life every day!

***Prayer:*** *Dear Heavenly Father, I pray to you for this reader. May they faithfully follow you as you lead them to do amazing things. God, I pray that you give them endless hope. Life can be very hard sometimes but knowing that you are walking beside us gives us a reason for hope. Your grace has given us all that we need. Help us live out your praise publicly and proudly every single day. Amen.*

***Question to ponder:*** *When was a time when you thought God had given up on you, but he was preparing you for the biggest challenge, and you would succeed?*

Wednesday, December 4

# Hope In the Lord

*Emilie Au*

*Freshman, Homeschool*

***Scripture:*** *Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.*

*They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*

***Isaiah 40:30-31***

Have you ever read *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis? It is an epistolary novel of satire that gives unusual insights into the ongoing battle between good and evil. It is comprised of a set of letters, written by the demon Screwtape to his nephew Wormwood on tactics for Wormwood to use to lead his human towards destruction. In chapter 8, Screwtape describes The Law of Undulation.

The Law of Undulation shows that human life is on a pendulum, swinging back and forth from mountain peaks to valley pits. When we reach our peaks in life, we are apt to forget God's goodness and love, pushing Him aside as we seek other things, things of this world. It is when we fall back into the troughs that we remember His grace and mercy; and

God will use our valleys and our tough times to remind us that we are not alone, and that we can lean on Him for guidance and hope.

Don't wait for the valleys in your life to turn to God for help. Let Him be with you in your highs as well as your lows and have a posture of running forward and grasping for Christ, rooting yourself in Him. Don't let the undulation in your life sway you away from a stable faith. Human strength will fail us in the long run, and only the promise of God can sustain human perseverance. Our Heavenly Father will provide you with endless supplies of fresh strength, so put your hope in the Lord.

***Praying Through the Scripture:** Take a few moments to reflect on Isaiah 40:30-31. Then, pray through this passage, pausing every few lines, and use God's Word to shape and inspire your prayer to *Him* today.*

Thursday, December 5

# Eagerly Awaiting Hope: Embracing the Glory Ahead

*Anna Perez*

*Senior, George Ranch High School*

**Scripture:** *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

**Romans 8:18-25**

As we journey through Advent, we reflect on the profound theme of hope. Paul reminds us that our present sufferings are insignificant compared to the glory that awaits us. He paints a vivid picture of creation itself longing for redemption, echoing our own deep desire for liberation

from the burdens we carry. This hope isn't merely wishful thinking; it's a confident expectation grounded in God's unwavering promises. Waiting for God to act isn't a passive endeavor; it calls us to engage actively with our faith, trusting in His perfect timing.

During this sacred season, let us embody hope by reaching out to those who are struggling, offering support, compassion, and encouragement. In our interactions, we can create spaces of comfort and understanding, reminding one another that we are not alone in our challenges. Together, we can inspire hope in those around us, reflecting the light of Christ in a world that often feels dark and uncertain.

As we anticipate the celebration of Christ's birth, may we also recognize that glory awaits us, even amidst our trials. Let us carry this message of hope into our communities, fostering connections that uplift and strengthen our collective faith. By drawing closer to God's heart and to each other, we become vessels of His love, demonstrating that hope is not just a distant promise but a present reality we can share. In this way, we participate in the joyful expectation of redemption, both for ourselves and for the world around us.

***Prayer:*** *Lord, our hope is in you. Help us to continue to live in eager anticipation of your coming glory! Strengthen our faith as we pursue you! We love you. Amen.*

Friday, December 6

# Living Hope

*Addie Portier*

*7th grade, Baines Middle School*

**Scripture:** *Praise be to the God and father of our lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

**1 Peter 1:3**

When reading this verse, I thought of my own baptism story, which is quite the story. I was baptized in 2020 during the pandemic in a horse trough in the back of Pastor Jeff's white pickup truck on the Church lawn. The fact that I didn't get a white baptismal robe, or heated water, or any other perks of being baptized the "regular Sugar Land Baptist way" didn't matter to me because I wanted to declare to the world the living hope that was inside of me.

What am I talking about when I say a living hope? I'm not just hoping for something that is temporary like a toy or gift that I've requested for Christmas. Those things break, or we outgrow them, we lose one of the pieces or after a few months it will mean nothing and just sit on a shelf. Eventually we may even donate it to Goodwill because we

no longer value it. When I say living hope, I am talking about my hope that comes from the living Son of God who rose from the dead! His spirit lives inside us and gives us a peace that passes all understanding. As we wait for Christ this Advent season, let us remember our living hope in Christ that doesn't spoil or fade as time goes on, but becomes stronger and more beautiful. That hope will never go away.

In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 it says, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

*Listen to the song "Living Hope" by Phil Wickham and think about how we can find hope, even in the darkest moments.*

Saturday, December 7

# The Promise of Hope

*Dena Batarseh*

*Senior, Logos Preparatory Academy*

**Scripture:** *Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.*

**Luke 2:25-35 25**

As we delve into the verses from Luke 2:25-35, we encounter Simeon, a righteous and devout man, who had been waiting for the consolation of Israel. The Holy Spirit

had revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon went into the temple courts where he met Mary and Joseph with the baby Jesus. Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God, recognizing that this baby was the salvation prepared for all people—a revelatory light to the Gentiles and Israel's glory.

This passage beautifully ties into the theme of Hope. Simeon's life exemplifies the essence of hope and waiting. Despite the long years and the challenges, Simeon held on to the promise given to him by the Holy Spirit. His hope was not in vain; it was ultimately fulfilled when he saw the Christ child. This teaches us a profound lesson about the nature of hope in our own lives. Just as Simeon waited with faith and expectation, we too are called to wait with hope for Christ's coming.

In our modern context, hope can often feel elusive. We face uncertainties, and the world around us can sometimes seem dark and chaotic. Yet, the story of Simeon reminds us that hope is not about immediate gratification but about trusting in God's promises and His perfect timing. The Advent season is a time for us to rekindle this hope, to remember that God is faithful, and His promises are true.

As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, let us reflect on the hope that Simeon held. Let us be inspired by his unwavering faith and trust in God's word. May we, too, find joy and peace in the assurance that God's promises will come to pass. Let this Advent be a time of renewed hope as we await the celebration of Jesus' birth and look forward to His return.

In the words of Simeon, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation" (Luke 2:29-30, NIV). This is the hope we hold onto—the hope of salvation and the fulfillment of God's promises.

***Prayer:** God, you are so good. We recognize that you are at work, even when we may not be able to see it. Help us always to trust in you, knowing that your promises are true and that we can place our hope and confidence in you. Amen.*

# *Week 2: Peace*

Sunday, December 8

# Prince of Peace

*Katelyn Croft*

*Junior, Logos Preparatory Academy*

**Scripture:** *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
though you are small among the clans of Judah,  
out of you will come for me  
one who will be ruler over Israel,  
whose origins are from of old,  
from ancient times.”*

*Therefore Israel will be abandoned  
until the time when she who is in labor bears a son,  
and the rest of his brothers return  
to join the Israelites.*

*He will stand and shepherd his flock  
in the strength of the LORD,  
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.  
And they will live securely, for then his greatness  
will reach to the ends of the earth.*

*And he will be our peace  
when the Assyrians invade our land  
and march through our fortresses.*

*We will raise against them seven shepherds,  
even eight commanders,”*

***Micah 5:2-5***

Last week, my friends shared about Hope. This week our devotionals will focus on the topic of Peace. When I think of Peace, I think of places in nature where I have

experienced peace, such as my Grandma's backyard and garden, George Ranch, and the place I stayed while attending the National History Academy. I loved these places because they were quiet and pretty. They afforded a temporary place to get away from people. However, true peace is so much more than the absence of noise.

Micah 5: 2-5 prophecies both about the birth of Jesus and his second coming. It talks about Assyria's invasion of Israel. Our land is not being taken by foreign armies, but our world and personal lives seem as unpeaceful as they can get. People are constantly angry with one another or stressed about what happens next. Every time things are about to go well; more life problems often happen. There is good news. Isaiah 54:10 says, "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken, nor my covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord who has compassion on you," and John 16:33 says, "I have told you these things that you might have peace. In this world you will have trouble but take heart! I have overcome the world." Sadness, pain, fear, and chaos do not have the final say!

The ruler or shepherd, prophesied about in Micah, was born! He is coming back to make everything right and

give us ultimate peace. Look forward to the day when, as Micah reads, “He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in all the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, and we will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.”

***Prayer:** God, help us to feel your peace. We know that there will be troubles in this world, but we also know the great truth that you have overcome this world. Help us to internalize this truth during this advent season. **Amen.***

Monday, December 9

# Peace

*Abby Keasler*

*Freshman, Foster High School*

***Scripture:*** *The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.*

***Numbers 6:24-26***

Peace can be very difficult to find and have in our daily life sometimes. With so many disturbances and conflicts that appear in our community and world, it can feel like it's impossible to have peace. Just because we feel like it's hard to feel safe and comforted, doesn't mean it actually is. God is our peace and shepherd in times where we feel our lives are being shaken with trouble.

This verse starts every sentence with "The Lord." God is the one who blesses us and keeps us safe and protected. God is the one who has mercy on us and helps lead us in the right direction when we are led astray. God keeps His gaze on us when we turn away from Him and we feel it's too hard to turn back. Through the Christmas season, there seems to be so much cheer and so many

exciting things going on around us, meanwhile others can be deeply struggling with events in their life that we aren't aware of.

God's peace can help us when we feel we are being tossed around by the harshest waters. As we look to Jesus, we find stability and comfort, like a rock to hold onto amidst life's chaos. We can have a sense of peace knowing we serve a perfect Savior who can and will deliver us from anything and will be a stronghold for us.

***Practice:** Next time you go outside—whether that's this moment, later today, or another time—look around at the world God so beautifully created and perfected for us. If God can care that deeply about plants and objects that “aren't that important,” why wouldn't He care so incredibly deeply about us, his creation who he made in His own image? We can have peace through the Christmas season knowing that God is always beside us, leading us, caring for us, and always being there to lean on when we have a disturbance that causes our peace to be shaken.*

Tuesday, December 10

# Peace in Power

*Lee Hamblet*

*Senior, Logos Preparatory Academy*

**Scripture:** *The LORD gives strength to his people;  
the LORD blesses his people with peace.*

**Psalm 29:11**

The beginning of Psalm 29 emphasizes the power of the Lord, which is vital to understanding verse 11. It says that the Lord gives us strength. This passage was written to comfort God's people. It assures us that God is powerful by reminding us of his past works and capabilities. All of that is meant to put that one phrase in perspective. It shows how if God gives us power, then that power isn't insignificant. It is the same power that shakes deserts and splits cedars. While this power doesn't grant us protection from suffering, it allows us to weather the world's suffering. It allows God's people to feel peace that God's power will enable them to endure today's pain until his mercy saves us. Despite the chapter's focus on power, it is really all about peace. It reminds us to be peaceful and content *because* we know that

*our current suffering is temporary and cannot even lift a candle to God's ultimate, powerful plan.*

So, over the next week, I challenge you to *take time at the beginning and end of each day to recognize this fact.* First, acknowledge your struggles and challenges. Second, focus on God's power to put them in perspective and let God's power overwhelm your fears and anxieties. By doing this, you can cultivate a deeper trust in God's providence and strength. Remember, every small step in faith can lead to greater resilience in the face of life's trials. As you embrace this journey, invite others to join you in prayer and reflection, creating a community of support and encouragement. Together, you can share the transformative impact of recognizing God's mighty presence in your lives.

Wednesday, December 11

# Peace for the Future

*Alex Carlo*

*Freshman, Logos Preparatory Academy*

***Scripture:*** *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*

***John 16:33***

Do you remember your first day of school? Most people don't, but to jog your memory, it may have gone a little like this. You're five years old, walking with your parents across a parking lot packed with cars and yellow buses towards a brick building. It's small but increases in size as you get closer to it. You squeeze your mom's hand as you finally step inside. Once you enter the classroom, you look around only to find those stereotypical, inspirational posters plastered against the walls. You sit down at the desk with your name on it and glance at the first piece of paper on top of the small stack in front of you. It reads, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Without hesitation, you jot down the first thing that comes to mind.

As children, you most likely had at least one idea regarding your future careers. Whether it be a firefighter, lawyer, doctor, or teacher, your younger self may have known what you wanted to do. However, when you grew up, it became harder to choose just one thing or maybe your skill set changed from your former one. Personally, my greatest fear is the future, because of how unpredictable it is. Despite this, God wants us to know that He holds our future in His majestic hands.

In John 16:33, God says that He has told us “these things” and wants us to remember that life has its challenges. He goes on to say that He has overcome the world and to worry not because He is in control.

***Prayer:** Lord, I forget sometimes that you are in control. I know that the future can be scary, but you promise me that you have overcome the world. Help me to know that you are faithful and in You I have peace. Allow me to take heart and know that you have a plan for my life. **Amen.***

Thursday, December 12

# Prince of Peace

*Jordan Tosch*  
*Senior, Foster High School*

**Scripture:** *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

**Isaiah 9:6**

In today's world, life often feels like a whirlwind. Our calendars are packed with meetings, errands, and responsibilities, leaving us little time to rest or reflect. Amidst this constant busyness, it's easy to feel overwhelmed, anxious, and even disconnected from God. But Isaiah 9:6 offers a powerful reminder: in Jesus, we find peace, even when life feels chaotic.

In these verses, Jesus is called Prince of Peace, which means that peace is not just something He gives, but something He is. His very presence brings calm and restoration. When we surrender our busy schedules and chaotic lives to Him, we find that His peace surpasses the busyness of our days. He offers us stillness that goes beyond

mere time management or control over our circumstances—it is a deep, abiding peace that exists even in the midst of life’s demands.

When we look at the life of Jesus, we see a model of how to live in peace despite having much to do. Jesus had a ministry that often seemed urgent, with crowds constantly seeking His help, and yet He made time for rest and prayer. He regularly withdrew from the demands of His ministry to spend quiet moments with His Father. In doing so, He showed us the importance of retreating from the hustle to find our center in God.

As we learn to rest in Jesus, the Prince of Peace, we will find that His peace guards our hearts and minds, even when life is hectic. In Him, the business of the world loses its power to steal our joy, and we are reminded that true peace comes from resting in the One who holds all things together.

***Prayer:** Prince of Peace, in the middle of my busy life, I come to You for rest. Teach me to trust You more deeply, and to release my anxieties and overwhelming schedules into Your Hands. Help me to seek you first, knowing when I do, You will provide the peace I need to navigate each day. Thank you for being my source of calm in every storm, my refuge in the midst of life’s demands. **Amen.***



Friday, December 13

# The Blessed Peacemakers

*Trent Smith*

*Senior, Logos Preparatory Academy*

**Scripture:** *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.*

**Matthew 5:9**

In this verse, Jesus is preaching one of his most famous sermons: the Sermon on the Mount. This verse is from a list of statements he makes called the Beatitudes—also called the “Be-Attitudes” (get it?). These statements serve the purpose of showing characteristics of good and faithful living, and Jesus pronounces blessing over those who model these characteristics. In this specific verse he states that those who make peace are blessed.

There is not a lot of peace in our world today, rather there is a constant stress about national security, economics, and world leaders. All this stress causes chaos and confusion in our world, which causes people to divide and separate. Peace is in low supply, yet in very high demand.

Jesus calls us out to help us live better and improve everybody else's lives around us. Peace is very hard to

obtain, though. I believe that we are naturally God's children, He loves us and He made us. If we are naturally the children of God, we are naturally peacemakers, and I believe that sin corrupts our natural peace. We must consistently turn to God to live out peace in our lives, and one way we can do this is to pray to God and ask for peace in our lives and world. St. Francis of Assisi has a prayer about peace which I would like for us to close with.

***Prayer:** Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

Saturday, December 14

# Rejoice Always

*Savannah Garner*  
*Junior, Homeschool*

***Scripture:*** *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

***Philippians 4:4-7***

Paul's letter to all the saints in Philippi is one of my favorite parts of scripture. As a child, I loved Paul's exuberant message: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" I visualized in my imagination Paul standing on a mountain top singing praises to our Lord, kind of like he was singing in the choir. As I continued my study of the Bible, I learned Paul was in prison while he was writing the letter to the church at Philippi. This fact changed my perspective on what Paul was calling us to do. In Chapter 4, Paul teaches us about being content in every circumstance. This is not always easy, but when we choose to trust God with our whole being, then we can find peace like what Paul

found in prison! Paul's message encourages us to change our focus away from our worries and instead focus on prayer and being thankful.

When we submit to following Paul's advice we will receive the most wonderful gift—peace from God. Paul tells us that God's peace, a peace which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds. It is easy to focus on our long to-do list; to focus on everything that is going wrong; and to focus on everything we have not accomplished yet, but if we put Philippians 4:4-7 into practice in our lives we have peace.

***Spiritual Practice:** For the remainder of the advent season, journal the things that cause you to feel anxious, and then journal the things you are thankful for. Ask God to give you his perspective on these things as you seek to choose thanksgiving in all circumstances.*



*Week 3: Joy*

Sunday, December 15

# Joy in the Waiting

*Ivonna Lloyd*

*Senior, Episcopal High School*

**Scripture:** *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,*

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven,*

*and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."*

**Luke 2:8-15**

In Luke 2:8-15, we read of an extraordinary moment when angels appeared to shepherds in the fields, announcing the birth of Jesus. "But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people'" (v. 10). This joy wasn't ordinary; it was the long-

awaited fulfillment of God's promise. For centuries, God's people had been waiting for the Messiah, clinging to hope in the midst of uncertainty, darkness, and oppression. And in that field, with the news of Jesus' birth, their joy was finally realized.

Advent is a season of waiting, much like the shepherds and people of Israel waited for the coming of Christ. As we wait today, we might also experience times of longing or uncertainty in our lives. But just as the angels brought a message of joy to the shepherds, God brings joy to us in our waiting. The joy of Advent isn't dependent on our circumstances, but on the truth that Christ has come and will come again. During our waiting—whether it's for healing, clarity, or answers—we can embrace the deep joy that comes from knowing Jesus.

As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, let's remember that joy is not found in the absence of waiting, but in the presence of Christ who meets us in our waiting. The joy we have in Him surpasses any momentary challenges, reminding us that our Savior is with us and that He is coming again.

***Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank You for the joy that comes from knowing Jesus. In this season of Advent, help us to find*

*joy in the waiting. Even when we face uncertainty or hardship, remind us that our hope is secure in You. May the good news of Jesus' birth fill our hearts with joy, and may we share that joy with others as we look forward to His coming again. In Jesus' name, **Amen.***

Monday, December 16

# Finding Joy When You Face Trials

*Clara Croft*

*Freshman, Logos Preparatory Academy*

**Scripture:** *Consider it pure joy my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of our faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

**James 1:2-4**

Everyone faces trials in their life, whether we like it or not. What do you choose when you go through a hard time? I am sure that you don't choose joy every time you face a challenge. The Bible tells us that whenever we face trials, we should choose joy and perseverance even though we are going through a difficult time. So how can we do that?

A good way we can always choose joy is by looking for what good things can come out of the situation. A trial that I faced was when my grandma's tree had to be cut down. This tree was a huge maple tree in her backyard. It had two swings that I had played on since I was born. It was

very old and the inside was decayed. When I heard that it was being cut down, I cried because it felt like losing a family member. I started questioning my faith and asking God, “Why are you doing this to me?” God helped me to persevere and still go into that backyard once the tree was gone. As I went into the backyard, I found a hole that had been covered up with turf. I stood there crying. Even though it was difficult, God reminded me of all the good memories my family and I had with that tree. Even though it was hard, the good thing that I thought of was that the tree didn’t fall on my grandma’s house, and they were able to take it down safely.

You will face hard trials and you may not know it then, but something good will always come out of it. Choosing joy during this trial will help you overcome and persevere in what will come ahead.

***Prayer:** Lord, help me to know your joy. Give me the assurance of knowing that you are there no matter what storm or trial may come my way! Father, your will be done in every circumstance. Help me to trust in you. **Amen.***

Tuesday, December 17

# Sunshine on a Cloudy Day

*Katin Moore*

*Sophomore, Homeschool*

**Scripture:** *A cheerful disposition is good for your health; gloom and doom leave you bone-tired.*

**Proverbs 17:22**

This verse reminds us that a cheerful heart brings us well-being, not just for our soul but for our whole body. On the other hand, if we let our downtrodden circumstances, our stress, or our worries control us, then we will have our strength snapped away from us.

So how do we live a cheerful life? Well, we choose joy as the emotion to lead our life. Joy is more than a fleeting emotion: it is a powerful gift from God influencing our entire well-being. We should remember the times of and reasons for joy, and that remembrance can help us not to worry. In the way we live our lives, God must be the source of our joy—a rich and full joy, like when we are children playing on a playground with not a care in the world... Just having fun! Whether it be on a swing or at our jobs—be joyful! This joy will keep us optimistic and prepare us for whatever is next.

But what about the impending doom that we feel sometimes? Well, these doomsday emotions are often rooted in anxiety, fear, pain, and depression. These emotions may last a long time. They may be caused by losing a loved one or big tests coming up. The reality is that the longer we let these emotions rule us, the farther God often feels from us. It is in the negative times that we most need to turn toward the light and the eternal promise of God.

But what if I feel both joy and pain at times? To lead a completely joyful life or a complete gloom and doom life would be impossible. We are not perfect creatures, and we live in a world broken by sin, so sometimes, we will feel gloom and doom. Focusing on God through our pain will help us as we journey through the ups and downs of life, and it is through remaining in God that we hold onto our joy.

So, get into the spirit of the season with a cheerful heart, and partake in the joy meant for us in Christ by remembering Christ's ultimate gift for us!

***Spiritual Practice:** One of the biggest foundations for joy—especially eternal, long-standing joy—is to be grateful. Find ways to say thank you to those who do something nice for you. Find ways to tell God how thankful you are for all the blessings in your life. Visualize those blessings and meditate*

*upon them in God's presence giving thanks for the gift He gave.*

Wednesday, December 18

# Joy Through Trials

*Paxton Hughes*  
*8th grade, BHSC*

**Scripture:** *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

**1 Peter 1:8-9**

Peter writes, in this verse, to the believers among the Roman provinces during the reign of King Nero. Nero was a cruel ruler who despised the Christians and persecuted them ruthlessly. Can you imagine being a follower of Christ at that time and watching your neighbor burning upon a stake or seeing a family member consumed by a wild animal for the king's entertainment? It would seem almost impossible to experience joy in those dire circumstances. Yet, Peter encourages those believers to be filled with an "inexpressible" joy.

While the struggles we face today pale in comparison to the physical persecution of the early church, even now, the reality of joy is that it can often feel elusive. Perhaps you

have received some difficult news, lost someone you care about, or maybe you are just exhausted by the monotony of daily living. These things can make it very hard to feel joy. 1 Peter 1:8-9 doesn't say that we should be joyful because our lives are perfect, or because we made the football team, or even because we got 100 on a hard test. It says as believers, we are to be filled with "inexpressible and glorious joy" because we have received the salvation of our souls.

This joy is not something that is only found amidst our circumstances, but rather it is rooted in who God is and what he has done for us, his children. How amazing is that! This kind of joy that we have is not something that can be taken from us. It is ours the moment we put our faith in the son of God, Jesus Christ.

As we go into this holiday season and are surrounded by songs declaring "Joy to the World" or "Joyful, all ye nations rise...", let us remember the joy that is being proclaimed is an eternal joy rooted, not in our life's fleeting circumstances, but in the unchangeable nature of who God is and what he has lovingly done for us, his beloved children. So, if you struggle to feel joyful this

holiday season, remember the eternal inheritance you have through salvation and let that bring you joy.

***Prayer:** Lord, we thank you for your gift of salvation through your son. Help us to remain joyful through our trials and to remember that you are always with us. Amen.*

***Act:** As you go through your week, rather than focusing on your physical circumstances, turn your attention on the spiritual gift of joy that we, as believers, have because of our salvation through Jesus.*

Thursday, December 19

# Heart of Joy

*Gabriel Cole*

*Senior, Logos Preparatory Academy*

***Scripture:*** *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*

***Romans 12:12***

It's easy for a lot of us to associate Christmas time with joyful memories of gifts and family traditions. While the Christmas story itself is very joyful, people often forget that right after Jesus was born, King Herod sent a decree to murder every child under the age of two. Even at the most joyful times, turbulent seasons may be right around the corner.

I have this friend at school—we are going to call him Jace. Jace has been playing sports all of his life. He never took a day off and was even being looked at by some college scouts. He had been training all summer to prepare for senior year. On the first day of school, he passed out in the middle of the school day! A few days later he passed out again right after driving home from school. Long story short, the doctors found out that he had a heart condition and was

not able to play his senior football season. What's really crazy is that now, he's the happiest he's ever been and recently he even gave a testimony at a school fellowship about how he re-found Christ.

What I find most interesting about Romans 12:12 is how it is broken up into three commands: *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.* It's not always easy to open the Bible and find the answer to exactly what you're looking for. Jace's testimony addressed all three of these points. He told us how even though he was mad at God, his family and friends were praying for him. He told us how he had to anxiously wait for the doctors to tell him what was wrong and how hopeless he was. He told us that since he didn't know where to put his hope, he eventually found God. He told us of the joy he found through the hope that God was going to restore glory to him and his situation.

***Practice:** Today, take a moment to pray for what you are going through... big or small. Pray for God to show you his glory and the joy that is found in it. If you are struggling, I highly recommend Romans 8:18 to get you started.*

Friday, December 20

# In Jesus' Name

*Faith Gardoni*

*Senior, Fort Bend Christian Academy*

**Scripture:** *Until now you have not asked me for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.*

**John 16:24**

In this passage Jesus is teaching the disciples how to pray to God. They didn't know that they should ask God for things in Jesus' name because He hasn't died on the cross yet.

Jesus is telling them that He will be the bridge for us to enter into God's presence and ask for our desires. The cool part is when we ask for our desires in Jesus' name, they should line up with His will. When our will lines up with God's will, our prayers will be answered, and we can experience "complete joy."

The definition of joy in the dictionary is the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires, but the Bible says that joy is the natural reaction to the work of God, whether

promised or fulfilled. That is a kind of joy we cannot understand unless we experience it through a prayerful relationship with Jesus.

What an amazing gift Jesus gave us to have the ability to pray in His name and receive a type of joy that can only come from God!

I sometimes fall into the habit of praying for my own selfish wants and needs, then I get annoyed when I don't get an answer right away. When this happens, I can always remember this passage and ask if what I'm praying for is something that I SHOULD be praying for. Is it in "Jesus' name"?

***Prayer:*** *Jesus, please help me to pray in your name and for the things in your will. I want to be more like you every day. I want the things that matter to you to matter to me. Thank you for the complete joy that can only be found in you.*  
***Amen.***

Saturday, December 21

# Do Not Be Afraid!

*Cade Doherty*

*Senior, Foster High School*

**Scripture:** *This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

*But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).*

*When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

**Matthew 1:18-25**

As the holiday season hangs right around the corner, the joy that traditionally comes with it seems to linger out of

reach to many people in our community, including those that sit next to us in the pews each Sunday morning. Whether it is our neighbor mourning a lost loved one or just struggling to seek joy, challenges are prevalent everywhere around us. As we rally together as a family in Christ during this season, we need to be reminded of the message God has given us in this time.

In Matthew 1:18-25, God comes to Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, in his darkest hour and utters these words: **DO NOT BE AFRAID**. He tells Joseph that he doesn't need to worry about the problems and struggles placed before him, because **GOD HAS A PLAN**. It may not be crystal clear right now, and it certainly wasn't for Joseph, but we must trust that God has a plan for us and. Through following in his footsteps, God's plan will lead us to a season of Joy. We have struggled for too long with understanding the "reason for the season" when the season is so filled with pain and grief, but our God has had it right in front of us. Just as Joseph's "problem" was suddenly conceived by the Holy Spirit, ours is conceived just the same. What we see as the root of our problems, or what hurts us the most, could be the Holy Spirit fighting to keep us together, paving the way for a wave of Joy to come upon us.

So, as the holiday season comes and goes, keep the message of God in front of you. Do not be afraid of what is to come but keep your faith in the Lord and let the Holy Spirit guide you through the storm and into a new season of Joy. As we continue through this time of Joy, remember to pray for those around you. Everyone's situation is different, and we should assume everyone is struggling with something in their own way.

***Practice:** As you take a seat this Sunday, say a quick prayer for the person sitting next to you, that they may receive the same joy that the Lord promised each and every one of us.*

# Week 4: Love

Sunday, December 22

# Pie Crust vs. Cement Poured Promises

*Luke Keasler*

*Senior, Foster High School*

***Scripture:** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

***John 3:16***

When thinking of famous movies that forever stick with us from our childhood, we tend to give obvious answers like “The Wizard of Oz,” “Star Wars,” and “Titanic,” which most definitely will stand the test of time. But one film I feel encapsulates the curious imagination of a child is the 1964 smash hit, “Mary Poppins”.

“Mary Poppins” tells the story of the Banks family—an uptight father, a hairbrained mother, and two precocious children, Jane and Michael, who seem to run off every nanny hired. Yet to the surprise of their family, a magical character named Mary Poppins arrives and takes the children on a series of fantastical adventures with herself and her cockney friend, Bert. This beautiful story of love and

family has brought joy to families for decades, and it will continue to be one of the most loved pieces of film of all time. But in the middle of the laughter, there is a poignant insight to human nature in one of the quotes from the flick.

While at the Banks household, Mary Poppins utters the famous line, “Oh that's a pie crust promise! Easily made, easily broken!” In short, she describes a “pie crust promise” as a flimsy and easily broken promise similar to that of a pie crust found on a holiday dessert.

Often in our world, we make pie crust-like promises that we either don't plan to hold up or don't even try to keep. Because of this lack of integrity, we often associate promises with the idea that they can be broken and will eventually dwindle over time.

But God does not make pie crust promises. On the contrary, he sets cement-poured promises that cannot crumble or crack.

In John 3:16, God makes a powerful promise—eternal life for us one day if we put our faith in him. And this isn't a hope that one day if we believe in him, we'll go to heaven, but a fact that if we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, then there is a prepared place for us in God's Kingdom.

God's love for us is so unending that he made an everlasting promise to have us join his eternal kingdom when our time here on earth has finished. I would argue that this is proof that nothing can take away God's love from us, no matter how unlovable we are. Unlike how Mary Poppins describes "Pie Crust Promises," God's words to us are forever and his love for us, his children, will never perish.

Life can be challenging, and people in our world can cloud how we perceive God's promises to us. But unlike promises that humans make to each other, God cannot and will not fall back on his promises. He remains true and challenges us to show the same care to everyone else we come across in our daily lives.

***Prayer:** God, I thank you for your promise to us and for your never-ending love that we do not deserve. Thank you for your grace and patience, even when we turn away from you.*

Monday, December 23

# All of It

*Cullen Portier*

*Freshman, Ridge Point High School*

***Scripture:*** “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*”

***Deuteronomy 6:5***

“All of it.” You hear that line a lot in your life... The coach saying, “Give me ***all*** you’ve got!” ... That teacher who constantly gets onto you to give her your ***full*** attention, or the band director who is always saying use ***all*** your air to blow even when you have been outside for three hours doing the same thing repeatedly! We really do hear it a lot, but that does not mean we should always strive to give these people “all of it.” That ***is*** what God wants from us, though.

At the end of Deuteronomy, Moses gives his final speech to the Israelites about the commands that God has given to them before he passes away. The Israelites were difficult to lead because they would always try to do things

their own way rather than God's way, and then they would grumble and complain when things went poorly for them. We tend to fall into the same cycle of complaining about everything that is going on in our life and then we turn grumbling to God, saying, "Why are you doing this now?" to the point that we will lose focus on God's blessings. It is easy to forget to thank God for all He provides for us because we can get caught up in the negative.

Even when life is hectic, we need to remember that God has provided for us in many ways. It isn't easy, but part of being a Christian is facing trials and becoming stronger from each one of them. God is in control, and He has an ultimate plan even despite the curve balls that we experience.

In my first year of high school, I had many curve balls thrown my way. It is hard to catch them, but when I look to the Lord, I know He is pleased as I navigate through freshman year. I know there have been times when I have been distracted from God entirely. The distractions of life must be dealt with by redirecting focus to God. He has provided so much, and we take it for granted so often. The verse in Deuteronomy reminds us that God wants us to give all our attention—all our strength, heart, and soul. We strive

to give our coaches and teachers our *all*, so why wouldn't we give God the same?

I know that God is in control of my plan throughout high school, and I love that He is right there with me. God loves you so much and is always going to be right there with you through your life as well. As we wrap up this Advent season, try to focus on thanking God for everything that He has done both through the highs and lows.

*Prayer: God, I thank you for everything that you have done throughout my life—how you provided for me through my highest times and my lowest times. You are there with me and help me to give you all of my strength even when I feel like I have none. Help me to realize that you are the person I should be giving my all to. Amen.*

Tuesday, December 24

# Mary's Song of Love

*Will Gibson*

*Sophomore, Foster High School*

**Scripture:** *And Mary said:*

*“My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.*

*From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.*

*His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.*

*He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost  
thoughts.*

*He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.*

*He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.*

*He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful  
to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he promised our ancestors.”*

**Luke 1:46-55**

When we think of love, we think of how it makes us feel. We might think about how we express it, whether we

buy a gift to show our loved ones how we feel, or maybe we plan a special day together for some much-needed quality time. During the Christmas season, so much of our time and effort and money goes toward finding the perfect gift for those we love. Mary, however, chose to express her love for God the Father and His great plan for the redemption of the world in a simple song of praise.

The Magnificat, or more commonly known as Mary's Song, is a song of celebration and excitement. It is her worshiping God for the blessing she has been given in bearing the Messiah. She speaks of how her soul glorifies and praises the Lord, and her spirit rejoices in God. Now, back in Mary's day, worship was often done in a temple with a Levitical priest. Yet here, Mary, a lowly teenage girl, sings this love song from the home of an old, ordinary priest. She focuses on how the hungry and the poor have been filled with goodness by His grace. She praises God not only for the blessings He has poured out on her personally, but also the blessings He has planned for the whole world through the birth of Jesus.

While Mary's song may seem like pure excitement and celebration, it teaches us a valuable lesson in love too. Like Mary's song, love can't be silenced. God's love is

unstoppable and unchanging. He loves all of us individually more than we can ever know, and all through the New Testament, he instructs us to go and spread his love. So, I encourage you today, amid the Christmas excitement and busy moments, to prepare for the holiday tomorrow, stop and go show God's love to someone. It could be your parents or a stranger at the store, but show God's love to someone who needs it.

***Prayer:** Father God, thank you for the gift of Your son, Jesus. What a wonderful, glorious gift You've given to us! Let me learn from Mary, and praise You for Your wonderful plan. You love each and everyone of us so completely. Please help me be Your hands and feet today, to show love to those around me. Open my eyes to someone who needs to feel Your love today. **Amen.***

Wednesday, December 25

# It's Only the Beginning

*Davey Gibson*

*Discipleship & Education Pastor*

***Scripture:** This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*

*1 John 4:9-12*

**Merry Christmas!! Christ has come!!**

I hope you'll read the entire chapter of 1 John today, maybe before your family is up and starting to tear into the presents or at the end of the day as you reflect on a day filled with time together, the joy of giving, and I hope—love. To write on love would drain the ocean dry, and rightfully so as John tells us that love is the very nature of who God is. Scot McKnight writes that if God is not known by His love, then God is not really known at all. This love is one that originates with God—but like Mary and Joseph with their first-born son—this love is just the beginning.

John has been writing monumental truths about seeing God and God revealing Himself as love-incarnate—Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of John 1:18 we find John reminding us that no one has seen God. In his first letter, John completes this by asserting when the community has love as its badge of honor, we not only define who we are as a church, we are a visible representation of our Holy God. We can know the very nature of God when His love is manifested through His people - the church.

Like the little town of Bethlehem where Jesus entered the world, so each of our lives have the opportunity to have doors open to allow God’s love to rush in and rush out. John tells us plainly; if we don’t freely love our fellow believers then we are just fooling ourselves when we say we love God. As N.T. Wright put it, “The same door that opens to let out your love to God is the door that opens to let out love to your neighbor. It’s as simple—and as devastating—as that.”

May the gift of God’s love be an open present for all through your life as we share the common life of love that God has called us to as His Church.

***Prayer:** Lord, it sounds so easy to follow You at times because you only call us to love. But often that call to love is*

*too much for us! Overwhelm us with Your love so that our carols of praise this Christmas might continue in patient kindness and generous support of our neighbors throughout the Christmas season and coming year. **Amen.***