



GOD WITH US

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL
2025

This devotional was created by members of our church family, ordinary people offering personal glimpses of God's extraordinary love. Each entry has been written with prayer, reflection, and a sincere desire to draw closer to the truth at the center of our faith: God is with us.

As you move through these pages, take time with each scripture. Read the stories slowly. Pray the prayers as if they were your own. Allow the words to settle into your heart and notice where they meet your life, whether in memories, in moments of stillness, or in the places where joy and longing come together.

The story of God's presence did not end in Bethlehem. It continues in us, in the ordinary days where His nearness becomes our strength, our peace, and our hope. My prayer is that this devotional helps you find your place in that ongoing story. May you recognize His light in your waiting, His peace in your challenges, and His love woven throughout the pages of your everyday life. God is with us today, tomorrow, and always.

This year, our devotional begins one week before Advent. Starting early gives us room to quiet our hearts and turn our attention toward the themes that shape this season, Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love, long before the candle is lit.

As we prepare for the coming of Christ, may these reflections help us slow down, look upward, and remember that God is with us in every moment of the journey.



Sunday, November 23

*“Three things that will last forever—faith, hope and love—
and the greatest of these is love.”
— 1 Corinthians 13:13*

LOVE IS THE GREATEST GIFT

Becky Lang

On a cool winter morning several years ago, I found myself sitting in a large overstuffed rocking chair. I was in my daughter’s master bedroom along with 3 of my grandchildren. Sitting next to me on the padded armrest was my 2-year-old granddaughter. On the armrest on the other side of the chair was my 4-year-old granddaughter. I was sitting between these two precious granddaughters, eagerly waiting for what was to happen. I was to hold my newest, one-day-old grandson, their brother, for the first time. I was about to be handed one of God’s greatest gifts—the gift and love of a new baby.

My daughter handed me my grandson. He was tightly swaddled in a receiving blanket with only his head appearing. As I reached up for him, I securely took him and held him on my lap. It was then that our eyes met for the very first time. Our eyes were locked in with each other. It was though time stood still. I felt we were both looking at each other, realizing there was an unspoken connection, unconditional love available for us at that moment, and all the days ahead. There are no words to describe the overwhelming feeling of love when you and your grandchild’s eyes meet for the very first time. The love that I felt for my grandson at that moment can only be explained by the power of God and how He first loved us.

And yet even with this immeasurable sense of joy and love, it does not compare to the love God has for each of us. And the gift He gave us, the birth of Jesus. God so loved the world that He gave us His one and only Son. (John 3:16).

During this season, when much of our focus is on the details of Christmas, including decorations, gifts, and food, may we focus more on God’s perfect gift this season: the birth of a baby—baby Jesus.



Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the greatest gift, the gift of baby Jesus. Help me to focus on Jesus and the love that can only come from You during this season of Advent. Remind me during this busy season of preparing for Christmas to prepare my heart to receive the gift of Jesus. Give me calm in the chaos, hope in the hurry, and may I feel Your love today and in the days ahead. May my heart and actions reflect Your greatest gift, unconditional Love. And with each day during this Advent season, may I bring love, joy, and encouragement to someone who needs to know Your love today.

In your precious Name we pray.

Amen

Week 1

HOPE

GOD IS WITH US IN THE WAITING

Hope is the quiet strength that steadies our faith, lighting the path even when the way ahead feels uncertain.

As we enter this week of reflection, we remember that Christ, God with us, is the Light who breaks through every shadow.

His presence reminds us that no matter how heavy or difficult our circumstances become, His promises hold, His faithfulness endures, and His hope is never out of reach.

Monday, November 24

*"But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength.
They will soar high on wings like eagles.
They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint."
— Isaiah 40:31*

SOARING WITH GOD

Roberta Johnson

It was September 2020, and the world was six months into a global pandemic. While my spouse and I understood the need to keep ourselves and others safe from the COVID-19 virus, we were weary of social distancing, mask-wearing, endless Zoom meetings, and the extreme caution necessary to visit our newborn grandson or my (then) eighty-eight-year-old mother-in-law, who both live in town. One day, we received an email from Door County, Wisconsin, a favorite family vacation spot and one we regularly visit when we feel the need to restore ourselves with a low-key getaway. The safety protocols seemed more than adequate, and we decided this might be the respite we needed.

Our trip entailed driving through northeast Iowa, the area of the state where I had grown up and where long-ago glaciers had neglected to flatten rugged hills, leaving breathtaking vistas throughout the entire region. On an afternoon break from driving, we stopped at Effigy Mounds National Monument, hiking around ancient Indian burial sites on our way to Hanging Rock. We were rewarded with stunning views of the Mississippi River, leaves just beginning to change from lush green to hues of gold and red, and a single bald eagle soaring high above the river. Periodically, it would flap its gigantic wings to propel its motion, but mostly it would ride an air current, gliding from one altitude to another effortlessly. We watched in awe for minutes as he floated high above the earth without seemingly a care.

It reminded us of this verse from Isaiah. Though the challenges of an altered life due to COVID-19 were real and we knew that life would hold other difficulties in the future, the strength to walk, run, or soar through every situation would come from placing our trust in God. Like the eagle, we could be carried along on a current, on the invisible arms of a Savior who loves us, holds us, and will renew our strength through His almighty power.



God,

*Thank you for caring so much for us that you hold us and renew
us through all of life's twists and turns. Help us to always place our
trust in you and never doubt your love for us. Bless others with this
same certainty, that whatever may come, you will be with them
always and will renew them through your incredible power.*

Amen.

Tuesday, November 25

*The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease.
Great is his faithfulness; His mercies begin afresh each morning.
I say to myself, 'The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!'*
— Lamentations 3:22–24

GOD RESETS US

Teresa Simpson

It was Thanksgiving Day 2007; I was holding his hand in his last minutes of his life. I felt terrified and heartbroken. I had prayed for a cure, a miracle, but one year later, there I was praying for his suffering to end and seeking strength for myself and our family.

As I closed my eyes and held his hand tighter, I continued to pray. In a profound moment of awareness, I found myself walking beside my loved one, our hands clasped together, our bodies were shadows. We were surrounded by an unimaginable beauty that transcended the mundane. The colors of blue around us were vivid and alive, more radiant than I have ever seen, or have ever seen since. We walked in silence through what appeared to be a tunnel illuminated by the most magnificent light. The peace that enveloped us was sublime, a sense of tranquility that surpassed any I had ever known. As we approached the end of our journey, he released my hand and continued forward. I watched as he disappeared into its radiance, my heart filled with an indescribable sense of peace. In that instant, I felt a cardio shock to my body, although not painful, it jolted me back to my body. I was awakened to the sound of the alarms, signaling the end of his suffering. I felt a profound sense of serenity. I kissed his cheek and said my final words to him.

His suffering had ended, and with God's Mercy, this transformative experience ignited an unshakable faith in me, reassuring that God's divine love and peace will forever illuminate our path. Yes, indeed, I am certain I was given a glimpse of Heaven!



Dear God,

*Thank you for the profound affirmation of the boundless
love that you provide to us. In our darkest hours your mercy
revives and resets us. I pray that by sharing my journey my
words will offer hope and peace to others.*

Amen

Wednesday, November 26

*"I am counting on the Lord; yes, I am counting on him.
I have put my hope in his word."
— Psalm 130:5*

CONFIDENT IN THE WAITING

Angela Tharp

As I sat on my deck in the unusually warm November afternoon, I quieted my thoughts, focused on this verse, and invited the Holy Spirit to provide wisdom and understanding specifically for me.

There was a peace, a joy, and a wonder that filled my heart and mind in that ask. My eyes noticed the magnificent colors of the autumn leaves. My ears eagerly listened to nature's songs: leaves gently rustling, the birds, a squirrel chattering at my dogs, and the melodic tones of the wind chimes swaying in the tree branches.

In verse five, there are the words "I am," "I am," and "I have." Action is on my part. Actively believing that the Lord is dependable. Actively believing and then confidently moving forward in life despite ALL worldly situations.

Oh, how this has been true throughout my life. Can you recognize when you actively counted on Him despite life's present situation?

- Leaving home as a young adult: Lord, direct my path and prosper my life with hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)
- The difficult exam or job interview: Lord, keep me in perfect peace. (Isaiah 26:3)
- Living paycheck to paycheck or fired from a job: Lord, sustain me and never let me be shaken. (Psalm 55:22)
- The challenges of caregiving for children, a sick loved one, addiction, or an aging parent: Lord, provide strength when I am weary and increase your power when I am weak. (Isaiah 40:29)
- Depression, anxiety, PTSD, bipolar, schizophrenia, personality disorder, anorexia, bulimia, suicidal thoughts: Lord, use my struggles and my story to help others because I believe you can turn this for good. (Romans 8:28)
- Broken relationships, death of loved ones, and the Holidays: Lord, direct my steps to the places I can change, manage what I cannot control, and allow me to be content as you move in ways no human can imagine. (Psalm 138:3)



Lord,

Life. Our life on this side of heaven is full of challenges, stressors, and at times deepest tragedy and grief. Despite my circumstances, Lord, I actively go to You. I actively count on you. I actively put my hope in You. I am actively reminded of your loving promises as I open and read your word. I actively wait with peace that has no human understanding because you, Lord, are faithful.

*All glory to you,
Amen*

Thursday, November 27

"I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit."

— Romans 15:13

MY GOD – MY HOPE

Kathy Cordes

If we put our trust in the Lord, it allows us to be filled with joy and peace. Do you find yourself trusting in God to keep you filled with joy and peace even under the most trying and difficult times?

God seems to have a lesson or a blessing for us in each of life's situations. A good friend was diagnosed with ALS, a terrible, debilitating, and fatal neurodegenerative disease that affects the motor neurons in the brain and spinal cord. It was a devastating diagnosis for her family and friends. We watched as her body slowly gave out on her, but her mind, positive attitude and faith in God remained strong.

Because of her strong relationship with God, she had a certain peace about her, revealing that God was with her throughout it all and she never wavered. When visiting with her, the joy she expressed for everyone and how things were going in their families and lives was contagious and admirable. We realized that she was always trying to help us navigate her illness. She taught us a valuable lesson on what it truly looks like to overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.



We thank you God for being able to put our trust in you. Things may not always be as we would wish them to be, but help us to continue to look to you and know that you are always with us. Knowing that you are here for us no matter what the circumstances, helps to fill us with hope, joy and peace. God, help us to share this wonderful love so that others may also know the hope, joy and peace that comes from putting our trust in you!

Amen

Friday, November 28

*“As for me, I look to the Lord for help. I wait confidently for God to save me,
and my God will certainly hear me.”*

— Micah 7:7

THREE FRIDAYS

Rhonda Giebelstein

Every other Friday, I visited my mom in a care center. She had Alzheimer's, so I usually stayed 2-3 hours before she got sleepy. On Friday, April 25, 2025, my siblings and I decided to surprise Mom for a spur-of-the-moment visit. What a great afternoon of JOY that was. In past visits when we were all there at the same time, mom would get confused with all of us laughing and talking as we filled her in on our lives. But not that day. She sat there smiling and laughing with us. We had the absolute best day of JOY with mom. Four days later, she was hospitalized.

Friday, May 2, 2025 – PEACE. Mom's final victory. We were by her side when a local pastor was called. He was a gift from God because I knew him when he lived near Ames and he now lived 100 miles away. He prayed over mom the most beautiful words. He gently reached out and touched her shoulder and shuddered. He began to cry. He said, “I believe I just felt the Holy Spirit come and take your mom home.” She was at PEACE. As we were all processing our beloved mom's departure, the pastor looked at an app on his phone, which recorded his heart rate from his Oura ring. The exact moment the Holy Spirit came for mom, his heart rate had registered a very noticeable spike. In her death, the Holy Spirit also touched the pastor who had shared that he had been struggling and praying about his own path as a pastor. That day, God's message was clear.

Friday, May 9, 2025 – LOVE. Mom's Celebration of Life. Overwhelming love was all around my family. From the pastor's message as he shared the Good News, to several people telling stories of Mom. At the end of the service, my siblings and I each stepped forward, took a rose, and gave one to each of our children as Mom's legacy of LOVE was passed on to her grandchildren.

Three Fridays in a row that I looked to the Lord for help. God heard me even in the uncertainty of the days ahead. What's ahead of you is greater than what's behind you.



*Thank you for the Joy, Peace and Love you show me every day.
Help me to be aware of all you are doing in my life, even on the hard days.
Amen*

Saturday, November 29

"All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation."

— 1 Peter 1:3

A GENTLE NUDGE

Susan Hoshor

My early life was centered around our small-town church, just a block from our home. I was active in everything from Sunday School to youth group to choir, and my belief in God was always there. Yet, as an adult, anxiety began to hinder me. While attending another local Lutheran church, I was often peppered with questions about my husband's absence, which made it difficult to connect and eventually led me to stop attending church altogether.

Decades passed, filled with life's demands. We were healthy and happy, but I sometimes worried we were taking it all for granted. The 'other shoe' eventually dropped with force: my mother fell ill, my beloved mother-in-law and stepmother passed away within a year, and other major stressors hit simultaneously. I was overwhelmed and anxious, replaying every stressor each night.

During this time, a dear friend offered a gentle nudge back to faith by inviting me to her church. Though hesitant after such a long absence, I agreed to go. Sitting in the service, the anxiety slowly faded. As we sang the final hymn during that first service, a profound sense of calm washed over me. I began to cry, and my friend linked her arm in mine. In that moment, I felt God welcoming me home. I thank Him every day for that experience, made possible by my friend's love and support. And to this day, my two closest friends and I still attend church together.



Dear God,

As our lives become busy, overwhelming and trying, please help us keep our hearts open so we can receive a gentle nudge from You or from someone reaching out to us through You. Remind us that our needs are known and met at the right moment.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 7 Reflection



BLESSING OF HOPE

Pete Smith

God,

As we enter this Advent season, we come to you with hopeful hearts. We read about this hope for humanity in Isaiah, where a promise of a great light is given to those walking in the darkness. We know this hope to be Jesus, who is the light of the world and promised us that because of that light, we no longer need to walk in darkness. As we prepare our hearts this Advent season, help us see this light of Christ and help us be this light of Christ. Use us to bring your love and light to this dark world. As we prepare our homes for Christmas, prepare our hearts as well. Holy Spirit, come and fill our lives this holiday season, focusing us on the true reason we are celebrating: the hope of salvation through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen

Week 2

PEACE

GOD IS WITH US IN THE UNKNOWN

Faith is choosing to trust God's heart even when His timing feels unfamiliar or His plans stretch us beyond what we imagined. This week, we reflect on what it means to surrender our fears, release our need for control, and rest in the assurance that when God is with us, His guidance is steady, His promises are sure, and His way is always good.

Monday, December 1

*"For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders.
And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."
— Isaiah 9:6*

HE IS PEACE

Kim Mosiman

The drive through Monument Valley is something I'll never forget. The road stretched endlessly before me... ribbons of asphalt winding through red cliffs that seemed carved by the very hands of God. I drove alone that day, my only companions the hum of the tires, the warmth of the sun, and the quiet that settled deep into my bones.

I wasn't listening to music. No podcasts, no noise—just silence. The kind that, at first, feels awkward, but then begins to feel like an invitation. Somewhere between the sandstone towers and the endless blue sky, I realized I was being met by peace, not because life was calm or everything was in order, but because Jesus was near.

The prophet Isaiah called Him the Prince of Peace, not because He merely delivers calm, but because peace is His very nature. He doesn't sprinkle it into our circumstances; He embodies it. That day, I sensed His peace wrapping around me like the horizon itself. Vast, sure, and steady.

I've carried that memory with me into seasons of noise and uncertainty. When my mind races or my spirit feels restless, I picture that drive through Monument Valley... the stillness, the beauty, the sense that I was held in something larger than myself. Peace isn't something I have to chase—it's Someone who finds me again and again.



*Prince of Peace,
Meet me in the quiet places and in the chaos alike. When I forget what stillness feels
like, whisper Your presence over my fear. Teach me to trust that Your peace is not
dependent on my circumstances but rooted in Your unchanging nature. Thank You
for being the calm within my storms, the strength beneath my surrender, and the peace
that holds me together when I cannot hold myself. Amen.*

Tuesday, December 2

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”

— Philippians 4:6–7

HOPE IN THE DARKNESS

Elizabeth Sullivan

Lying in bed and wondering where God is amidst the chaos: this is a hard space to be in when life feels out of control and God feels far away. We are supposed to turn to God when we are worried or things weigh heavy on us. And that sounds perfect. But how do we do that when words won’t come? When things feel too heavy to even speak.

Steve Simpson was a pillar in our church family and, more importantly, to our family in Ignition and Vacation Bible School. When we received news of his passing, I was filled with immense anxiety. How was I going to tell our children that we would no longer have Safety Steve at Vacation Bible School? Or Grandpa Steve, the mentor that our older daughter had. Words could not be spoken about how my heart was broken, and my spirit felt empty.

And then the nudge came. “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need...” The hope that verse brought when I sat and thought about how God had my worry handled. He gave me words to express my deep sadness and grief to my children. Things that weigh on our hearts and we can’t bring words to, God knows. He has taken that worry from us and gives peace when we open our hearts to Him. God wants us to tell Him exactly what we are feeling and the concerns we have. He has big shoulders.

At Steve’s funeral, my youngest drew the sweetest picture of Steve and wrote, “I will always love Steve. I love you so much Steve.” And when I asked her about what she remembered of Steve she said, “How he always made me laugh and made fun of my McDonald’s every day at VBS!” God showed up to me in that moment and reminded me that my anxiety was turned into assurance of His love and presence with us every moment of every day.

My prayer for you today is that you talk to God and tell him what is worrying you. He can handle anything that you are feeling and will walk beside you as you travel that path. Each step you take, God is matching that step.



Heavenly Father,

We thank you for the peace that you bring into our lives when we are full of anxiety and worry. You know the worries that come to our minds, and I ask that you bring a divine sense of peace right now. Walk through the difficult moments with us and give us immense joy that only you can provide to us.

Amen.

Wednesday, December 3

*"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace
I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."*

— John 14:27

GIFT FOR A SICK BOY

Laani Hill

I was asked if I would tutor a 5th-grade boy who was missing school due to prolonged hospitalization. In addition to missing friendships, he was becoming so tired of endless medical tests. He was becoming very anxious and frustrated, knowing that he was missing so much school work. In the beginning of my visits, I created a learning chart for him. His attention perked up! I reassured him that we would work together in steps so he could catch up with the school assignments. When he was too tired to complete any school work, we just talked and shared about our experiences. I told him that I had prayed to Jesus and asked for guidance in helping him, my new 5th-grade friend.

When the boy could see our plan on paper, his agitation lessened. After building his trust, I asked if he would like me to pray for his health and learning. After he agreed heartily, I knew in my heart that the Lord would give this boy comfort and strength despite future unknowns in his medical treatment. We grew in our friendship! During many visits, he became receptive to adding his requests to my prayer! I had been assuring him that he is never alone. Jesus is with him through every injection and test by doctors to help him. I explained that our Lord Jesus knew how difficult it was for this boy in the hospital.



Jesus,

*We are so blessed that you fill our hearts with the Holy
Spirit to guide us and to use us. A trusting heart gives
us hope, and where there is hope, there is peace.*

In Christ we pray,

Amen

Thursday, December 4

“Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.’”

— Luke 2:13–14

BLESSED PEACE & LOVE

Kathy Cordes

We give glory to God in the highest heaven and he returns peace to those of us here on earth. How has his love returned peace to you?

It was a tumultuous holiday season after going through a bitter divorce and finding myself navigating the season as a single parent with very limited resources. I found myself at Christmas Eve service as I had many times before, listening to all of God’s love and promise as he sent his son into the world. His love for me at that moment suddenly felt so real and vivid. I had heard the stories many times, but this time a calm and peace came across my heart telling me all was going to be okay. All was well because I had the gift of God’s immense love and the gift of his son, Jesus Christ.



Heavenly Father:

Thank you for calming our hearts and helping us find peace through the story and celebration of Jesus’ birth. Even when the world is sending distractions and turmoil our way Lord, we can rest assured that you are with us. Your grace and love will follow us everywhere through everything life throws our way. Help us to remember this and to share with others the peace that passes all understanding.

Amen.

Friday, December 5

*"You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you,
all whose thoughts are fixed on you!"*
— Isaiah 26:3

PEACE FOR EVERY DAY

Brian Schaeffer

When I retired from my position as a school business manager after 28 years there, I thought I would have the peace of no work each day. After taking a celebratory cruise, I was left to my new lifestyle. I thought the new lifestyle would include whatever I wanted to do, including travel, hobbies, and outdoor activities.

However, the pull of seeing people each day and connecting with them was too great. After 28 years of being in one workplace and 40 years of working outside of home, I realized that I missed regular human contact. I thought that there would be some magic part-time accounting position that I could work at which would allow me to use my skills but adjust to the hours I wanted. This did not happen.

I went back to the school where I was to work as a bus driver. It went well for a while but then I took students on a trip to a site in a major city on a windy day. I was very tough driving due to the wind and the traffic.

I was frayed after driving this trip and doubted I would continue with this. I prayed to God for direction. It took some time and a week away from bus driving, but my heart became peaceful, knowing that God was with me and was directing my thoughts and future actions.



*Heavenly Father,
Thank you for being with us, even in times when we don't
seek your help. Thank you for your comfort and assistance.
In Jesus' name, in whom we believe.
Amen*

Saturday, December 6

“And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.”

— Colossians 3:15

THE PACE OF PEACE

Christy Franco

I specifically remember taking a photo and bidding an audible goodbye to my houseplants a summer about eight years ago. I had never left home for such a continuous stretch of weeks, and I wasn't confident my plant companions would manage in my absence. My youngest daughter and I were venturing to spend an entire month in Maine. It felt not only daring, but a bit out-of-character to leave my other daughters, husband, and regular obligations for this respite in the Maine woods.

Not so long after we exited our “normal life”, we found ourselves fully immersed in the goodness of quiet, relaxed days in a cozy cabin. We were tucked between pine trees on an expansive and peaceful lake in the mountains, and our initial misgivings about the poor cell connection and sporadic human contact were already forgotten. We spent our hours with no specific agenda, moving from leisurely board and card games on the screened porch to exploration of foot paths dappled with fir saplings. We padded around the natural cushion of moss and evergreen needles underfoot, discovering a pure spring babbling brook, spotting red and indigo berries reaching for the sun, and foraging handfuls of wildflowers for our empty blueberry soda bottle bouquets.

The call of the loons and the breeze ruffling the tree leaves provided a sense of calm we hadn't had the chance to indulge in so completely before. We paid no attention to time, set no alarms, and let the natural daylight or darkness dictate our waking and sleeping. One night, however, we did set an alarm. We wanted to see a predicted meteor shower, so with lanterns in hand, pajamas and all, we let the porch door creak behind us and made our way through the pitch darkness, teetering over tree roots and uneven ground to the dock at the water. Once there, we turned off the lanterns and laid our bodies down on the wooden boards of the dock, gazing up at the sky. The only sounds were of the water lapping the shore and the mysteries of nightlife around us. Stars illuminated the night sky in a spectacular celestial show unbothered by light pollution, satellites or airplane tail lights. We whispered our pure awe between us, the stillness of the night enveloping our senses. I don't believe we actually saw the predicted meteor shower, but that didn't matter. That night's adventure was an exclamation point on a beautiful journey to peace. Peace that can only be found without worrying about keeping pace.

As Paul wrote in Colossians 3:15 while imprisoned in Rome, the peace of Christ has an urgency we can only find when we fully surrender our agendas for His. When we let the nagging details of life fall away, confidently trusting that God's details matter most, we rediscover ourselves. We notice facets of existence that God has had right in front of us all along, but we've been too distracted to see. This peace-seeking allows us to live with a sense of thankfulness punctuated by God's goodness all around us.



God, our giver of life,

We praise you for your steadfast presence in our days and nights. You've created a world of wonder and awe just for us to notice and immerse ourselves in. Help each of us to slow down our schedules, lighten our burdens, and center ourselves on what you've put in front of us. As we approach each new day, help us make time with you our life-giving priority. Be with all those that need to feel your promises, knowing that you set our heart rhythm in sync with yours. Help us to follow your pace to peace.

Amen.

Day 14 Reflection



BLESSING OF PEACE

Sarah Bradley

Last year for Christmas, my husband, Gene, gave me a pair of noise-canceling headphones. I'll never forget the first time I put them on. A gentle "whoosh" sound came and then silence enveloped me. For someone that is used to a lot of clamor both in my home and in my mind, this was a welcome respite.

While my original intention was to use my headphones for work, it became my habit to also use them during dinner prep—a normal time for my active family to be busily playing, asking for snacks and, perhaps more than occasionally, arguing over a toy. My headphones continued to serve as a momentary break from the volume in my home and in my heart. Every night however, once dinner was prepared, I'd call out to my family to announce dinner and then my headphones would come off, reminding me that the noisy reality of life hadn't changed, I'd just found a way to temporarily turn the volume down.

Don't we all sometimes wish the many stressors, noises, and aches of life could be quieted with a simple pair of headphones? Something we could easily slip on and force the world to become peacefully quiet?

I'm reminded of a story in Mark 4:35–41 when Jesus is with his disciples on a boat, crossing the sea of Galilee at night. While Jesus is resting after a full day of ministry, the disciples are nearly overcome by a massive storm that is tossing their boat through the tumultuous sea. When they cry out to Jesus, he rebukes the wind and the waves by calling out, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm."

The creator of the sky and sea demonstrated his ultimate authority over every storm in life, but here's something we can at times easily overlook. . .

Jesus was in the boat.

The humble boat which carried a scrappy lot of fisherman, political activists and a tax collector also carried God himself. And even as their boat began to sink from the waves, God was with them. He experienced every drop of rain, every crack of thunder, every flash of lightning, and every wave with them. And despite in their reasonable terror, they were safe. Because Jesus was there.

Advent is a time where we hold ourselves in the waiting—the space between the start of the storm caused by sin and death, and the rebuke of God to the wind and the waves through the birth of his Son Jesus. Even when we might find ourselves looking for a respite from the storms of loneliness, anxiety, broken relationships, or addiction, we are reminded in Advent, that true peace isn't the absence of trouble or pain. It's not the temporary respite we find in numbing out. True peace is the presence of God—the God who enters fully into all of the brokenness of our world. And like Jesus in the boat with his disciples, he joins us fully in our storms to offer us himself—because nothing else will do.

I wonder where you might be needing peace today. Do you need peace in relationships? In your mind? Or in your body? As attractive as it might sound to have noise-canceling headphones that could numb us to the noise of pain, loneliness, sickness and doubt, Jesus offers us something better. Himself. The one who has calmed all our storms through his resurrection and the one who never leaves our boat.

Week 3

JOY

GOD IS WITH US IN EVERY MOMENT

Joy is the deep, steady gladness that grows from knowing God is with us. In this third week of Advent, we turn our hearts toward the joy that isn't dependent on circumstances, emotions, or outcomes, but on His nearness. When we remember that God walks with us, strengthens us, and delights in us, joy naturally rises. May this week invite you to rest in His presence and rediscover the joy that comes from Emmanuel, "God with us."

Monday, December 8

*"But the angel reassured them. 'Don't be afraid!' he said.
'I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.'"*
— Luke 2:10

JOY THAT SIMPLY IS

Kim Mosiman

I sat across from a client recently as we discussed her book—about life, loss, and the deep ache that sometimes lingers even in seasons of blessing. Somewhere between her sentences, she paused and said, "I'm trying so hard to find joy again."

I nodded, because I understood. For years, I chased joy as if it were something I could earn or manufacture through productivity, gratitude lists, or even perfect mornings. But as we talked, I found myself saying what I've had to learn the long way: Joy isn't something you make. It just is.

Happiness depends on what happens. It rises and falls with circumstances, like waves that crest when life goes well and crash when it doesn't. Joy runs deeper. It isn't reactive; it's rooted. It comes from abiding in the One who is joy itself. You don't have to stir it up... it flows from the source.

As we sat in that quiet moment, I saw her shoulders relax. Tears welled, not from sadness, but from recognition. The pressure to find joy lifted, replaced by a peace that whispered, *it's already here.*

That's the mystery of God's joy: it can exist right beside sorrow, uncertainty, or loss. It doesn't wait for things to be right; it rests in the truth that He is.



Lord,

*Thank You for joy that isn't dependent on me. Thank you for
joy that flows steady, even when life doesn't. When I'm tempted
to chase happiness or measure my worth by what I can control,
remind me that joy isn't earned, but received. Anchor me in Your
presence, where true joy quietly abides and never runs dry.*

Amen.

Tuesday, December 9

*“You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence
and the pleasures of living with you forever.”*

— Psalm 16:11

MANIFESTING JOY

Christy Franco

It was New Year’s Day, 2017, and a small but mighty group of Hope Local Ames faithful had gathered on a wintry January morning to worship together, sharing the livestream from West Des Moines. In what we now know as The Link, Zeke’s was our Sunday morning spot, and we were just over eight months into our official “Hope Local” status. We had encouraged attendees to wear flannel or pajamas, as some may have been ringing in the new year just hours before, and we were taking “come as you are” to a new level. The coffee was brewed and the usual chairs were set. Audio and video volunteers were preparing to connect us to worship, while others shared holiday welcomes and New Year’s cheer as we settled in our familiar rows. Many of us were still riding the high of the candlelight Christmas Eve service of the week before, when we hit a whopping 100 attendees. We sensed it was the beginning of big things to come. It’s also safe to say that everyone pretty much knew everyone who walked through the door.

So on this particular holiday morning, it was fairly difficult for one Danny Housholder to enter incognito and slip in a back row. Sure, he could’ve easily passed for an ISU student, but Ames had pretty much been vacated by students over the holidays. And if someone hadn’t known the Lutheran Church of Hope backstory, he may have been welcomed as simply a new face. However, a few “Locals” had seen videos of dancing pre-Pastor Danny in Hope VBS videos, or attended Hope West Des Moines in-person long enough ago to see him as a teenager. There was a palpable sense that there was something special about this Sunday morning visitor. Whether we were simply a case study for his seminary courses or he was sent on a spy mission, the feeling that God was definitely on the move in Ames was becoming even clearer. A certain magnetic joy was growing in this place and among these people because God was there in our infancy. Pastor Danny may not have imagined on that day that six months later he’d be relocating to Ames and launching what we call Hope Ames, yet there was joy in that room, an unstoppable joy that God’s still shaping for all of us today.

Psalm 16:11 invites us to recognize our God as a guide we can trust and follow, because he is always at work for our good. Our footsteps can fall in the steady guidance of a God who provides a fullness of joy that we cannot know on our own. The inexplicable feeling of being in God’s presence and the sense that He is at work, creating something incredible is the freedom to let Him lead the way and watch his masterpiece unfold.



Father God,

*We thank you for the path of life you’ve set before us. You give us direction when we need your guidance
and an eternal compass only you can provide. We look for joy in so many places, but true fullness of joy
can only be completely discovered when we trust and follow you. Continue to show us the way to you,
that we may experience supreme joy in your presence. Be with us God, today and every day.*

Amen.

Wednesday, December 10

*"Mary responded, 'Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.
How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!'"*
— Luke 1:46–47

UNEXPECTED BLESSINGS

Julie Bisher

Many years ago, in late January, the unexpected happened, and I experienced several months of great challenge. My father had been in a car accident, which resulted in a severe brain injury. His wounds healed, but he never regained his capacity to function without a feeding tube. Twelve weeks later, after a long hospital stay, a brief move to a nursing home, consultations, visits, prayers, good-byes, and honoring his living will, my loving father died, and through our grief, we celebrated his life.

Four days before my father's accident, my husband and I had to make the decision to put our sixteen-year-old English Setter to sleep. It was time, and while sharing the news with my parents that evening, my dad had responded, "Well, we will all die sometime." I vividly remember responding with a sigh of impatience, "Oh, Dad, can I talk to Mom?" I didn't want to think about the death of the people I loved, not at that moment. His answer seemed so nonchalant and pragmatic. However, dad was 80 years old. He had his living will in order and had given death more thought than I had at the time. I realized later that his comment was more about reminding me that the reality of living is dying. My father knew death was victory in Jesus. He knew whose he was. He had the hope of heaven in his heart and he was prepared. Was this foreshadowing for my benefit? Was this the work of the Holy Spirit within me, minimizing the loss of our dog, for a much more difficult trial to come? I think so.

After the Angel Gabriel visited young Mary with the news that she would bear the Son of God, she too was surprised and wondered in her heart how this could be. That she, a virgin, could bear a child? After the angel's explanation, Mary humbly accepted what God had done for her, and with praise she worshipped the God she knew and loved. Mary had the unexpected gift of our Lord Jesus Christ as her earthly Son and the hope of heaven because of her Savior, the Son of God.



*Gracious God and Father,
We praise and thank you for the blessing of Mary's
unexpected son, Jesus. We ask that you prepare us for his
birthday by humbly walking with you in daily devotion
and prayer, reminding us that we belong to you!
Amen*

Thursday, December 11

*"I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy.
Yes, your joy will overflow!"
— John 15:11*

JOY IN THE STILLNESS

Kim Mosiman

The air was cool that morning as I stood at the ocean's edge, toes sinking into damp sand. The sun had not yet climbed above the horizon, but the first light was already stretching across the water, soft and pink and full of promise. The waves whispered in a rhythm that seemed older than time itself. I did not feel the need to pray out loud or make the moment productive. I simply was.

For someone who has spent years striving, checking boxes, managing plans, and reaching for more, stillness has never come naturally. Yet there, watching the tide rise and fall, I felt something holy settle over me... joy. Not the giddy and fleeting kind that depends on what is going right, but the quiet kind that seeps in when you stop striving and simply abide.

Jesus said that His joy comes from abiding, not from achieving. It is born in connection, not accomplishment. I realized that morning how often I confuse motion with meaning, believing God needs my effort when all He really wants is my presence.

The ocean did not need me to make it beautiful. The sunrise did not need my help to arrive. They both simply were, and so was I.

As I watched light spill across the water, I felt joy rise, not because I had earned it, but because I was resting in the One who gives it.



Dear Jesus,

Teach me to abide in You more than I strive for You. When my heart begins to chase approval or accomplishment, remind me that Your joy is not found in what I do, but in who I am with. Help me find contentment in the quiet, confidence in connection, and delight in simply belonging to You.

Amen.

Friday, December 12

“And Nehemiah continued, ‘Go and celebrate with a feast of rich foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don’t be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!’”

— Nehemiah 8:10

LAUGHTER DURING THE STORM

Susan Hoshor

My mom loved shopping, Christmas, buying nice things for herself, and all things green, but most of all, she loved to spoil her children and grandchildren. She would get so excited watching our excitement as we opened a gift we’d secretly had our eye on. Unfortunately, about 9 years ago, financial struggles eventually led her to move in with us. We created a comfortable, independent space for her, and she went about her days volunteering at Reiman Gardens & the Iowa Arboretum. This was supposed to be the solution for many years to come.

Not quite 2 years in, her life—and ours—changed in an instant. After multiple trips to the emergency room, escaping from the house in the middle of the night, talking to the television and confusion, she was diagnosed with Lewy Body Dementia. This illness brought on intense anger, fear, paranoia, and hallucinations, making it impossible to leave her alone.

Heartbreakingly, we moved her to a care center, where she has resided for almost eight years. I had never experienced the depth of anger and hate she initially had toward me. Early on, Mom lost her laugh; she couldn’t cope with change and still refuses all medication, fearing she will be poisoned. I visit her every week, keep her stocked up on her favorite snacks and I’ve learned to live in her world. If she is hallucinating that she’s on the phone with her doctor, I go with the flow, grab a notepad and write the date and time of her ‘appointment’. There are visits where I leave and cry the whole way home. Yet, just as often, we’re laughing so hard we’re crying while trying to assemble a fan or set up her new TV. We spend a lot of time reminiscing about the good days, and I often drive away wondering, ‘Was she right about that memory, or am I losing my mind?’

Every day, I thank God for her safety and for the blessing of hearing her say, ‘Susan Hoshor, my beautiful daughter, how did you know I wanted to see you today?’ Laughter truly is the best medicine.



Dear God,

Continue to care for all who suffer from disease or illness. Ease their pain, suffering, and fear of the unknown. Strengthen those who care for them and remind them that you hear their worries and walk beside them. Help us to find moments of laughter, even in difficult times, and to cherish the memories of good days.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Saturday, December 13

“Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying.”
— Romans 12:12

FOG

Rhonda Giebelstein

I like to pray as I walk my dog in the early morning. This particular morning it was before sunrise, and a peaceful and heavy fog had settled down on my path. My view was obscured and I could only see a few steps in front of me. I could barely make out something up ahead, just off my path, and it moved. I knew it was something that normally wasn't there.

As I got closer, I could see that it was a beautiful two-point buck. It looked up at me and we stared at each other. Then it turned and slowly pranced away. I took that as a message from God saying, “I am with you even in your fog.” It made me think that the fog was a protection from God to remind me to focus on him as he guides me forward on the path of life ahead, one step at a time.

It's easy to become impatient with the circumstances surrounding us and we tend to focus on things ahead, such as plans for the day, a shopping list or what's going on with family. We lose what God has in store for us right now. I've learned that it doesn't pay to look too far ahead because you never know when the fog will settle onto your path. But when it does, I feel it is a protection from God, calling me back into the present moment and to focus on Him guiding me as I move forward on the unknown path ahead.

I rejoice in God's reminders to me when I start to veer off the path of joy with Him as my guide. Someone once told me, “Today is the Tomorrow we focused on Yesterday.” How true.



Dear Lord,

*Thank you for loving me enough to protect me from things ahead.
Guide me as I walk on this path of life and receive lasting joy in my life.
Amen*

Day 21 Reflection



BLESSING OF JOY

Nicole Embree

God,

I come before you in this moment with my whole heart. Remind my heart today that I do not have to muster up my own joy. Thank you for freely giving me joy as a gift. No matter what circumstances I encounter today, I pray that your joy holds a deep presence in my heart, an overwhelming feeling of calm delight.

Let my heart rejoice today just as the shepherds' hearts rejoiced in the fields the day the angels appeared to them to tell them the good news that would bring great joy to all people. Let my heart experience the fullness of joy as I reflect on this good news that you have sent a Savior into the world for me.

God, I need a Savior. I admit I can't cultivate this joy on my own. I need you and I ask that as I sit in your presence, you fill my heart with your joy.

Let that joy overflow from my heart onto the people I encounter today.

I will rejoice in you forever and ever, Amen.

Week 4

LOVE

GOD IS WITH US, ALWAYS

God's love is the foundation of everything we celebrate at Christmas. In this final week of Advent, we turn our hearts toward the wonder of a love so deep that God chose to be with us... to enter our world, walk our roads, and draw us close through the birth of Jesus. His love invites us to live differently, to extend compassion, kindness, and grace, and to let His presence shape the way we love others.

Monday, December 15

*"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."*

— John 3:16

LOVE THAT BEGAN IT ALL

Kim Mosiman

I've read this verse more times than I can count. I've quoted it, taught it, and written about it. But one morning, it hit me in a way I wasn't ready for.

If this is how God loved the world... then that includes me.

I sat with that for a long time, realizing how easily I can talk about God's love and still live like I have to earn it. I know He loves me. I believe it. But sometimes I act like He's disappointed, like I need to prove I'm worth the cost of that kind of love.

And then it hit me: if I'm made in His image, and He loves me that much, I must break His heart when I don't show myself any love at all. When I talk down to myself. When I push too hard. When I act like rest is weakness and grace is for everyone but me.

That morning, I felt a deep sadness, and then, peace. Because even when I forget how to love myself, He never forgets how to love me. He gave His Son so I'd stop living like I'm unworthy of being loved.

Love began the story of Christmas. And maybe that's the part I needed to remember most.



Father,

*Help me believe I'm loved, even on the days I can't feel it. Teach
me to treat myself the way You see me: beloved, forgiven, and
enough. When I start to slip into striving or self criticism, pull me
back to Your heart, where love began and still remains.*

Amen.

Tuesday, December 16

*“But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die
for us while we were still sinners.”*

— Romans 5:8

LOVE AND GRACE FOR ALL SEASONS

Brian Schaeffer

I’ve always known love and grace—in my family, when I was growing up, Christmas was the season of love and grace.

My brother and I had one aunt in our family who was extra-special: she lived about 25 miles from us in a neighboring city. She worked as a waitress and struggled to make ends meet. However, she felt it necessary to give us the gifts we requested—probably more than we really deserved or needed. She did not drive, so our family went and got her each Christmas, and she stayed with us over the Christmas holiday. I remember that my brother and I both got up earlier and earlier each Christmas to see what was under the tree. She put up with all our little Christmas-related tricks such as this and put up with us.

Despite all the material items we received, we knew that this aunt loved us by the way she looked at us and enjoyed us and our activities. She died suddenly in 1986 of a heart attack. We all missed her terribly. Her heart failed on her, but her heart and love were big enough for all of us.

God gave us love like this through Christ by sending Christ to us to die for our sins. I did not know grace like this until I became an adult and understood that God’s grace is for all the mistakes and sins I have done. This undeserved grace was via Christ.



*Heavenly father, thank you for the blessings of family, present and past, and
thank you for your grace and love via sending Christ to us to die for our sins.
In Jesus’ name, in whom we believe. Amen*

Wednesday, December 17

“God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.”

— 1 John 4:9–11

HOPE IS LOVE

Laani Hill

My parents wed in 1941. In those days, their union was such a leap of faith and hope due to my Chinese father and Swedish mother. My father was born in California, one of 13 children. His father was born in Canton, China. His mother was raised by Methodist missionaries out west. My mother was born in Minneapolis to native Swedish parents. At that time, society viewed mixed marriages as very negative.

During their dating, they decided to take a year apart to be sure if their marriage was strong enough to exist in the world at that time. They had been standing under a lamp post at a park. If they wished to reunite in a year, they would return to the same lamp post. Exactly a year later, both of them found each other under that lamp post! They knew it was true love!

How did my parents remain strong? They relied on their Christian faith, radical hope, and fellowship with other believers. How did their living in God’s love mold my growing years? It shined through their lives of joy and courage! I always loved all of my cousins of varying races. Our family reunions looked like the United Nations. My parents taught me about being a child of God and that goodness leads to goodness.

I was blessed to have true friends with faithful hearts for supporting each other no matter what happened in our lives. The husband of my closest and life long friend had asked me to speak at her funeral a couple of years ago. God gave me strength to give her a blessed tribute of her caring spirit and heart full of faith in Jesus.



*God, our Heavenly Father,
We are so blessed that your promise is eternal.
The seed of love is hope always through Jesus Christ!
Amen*

Thursday, December 18

"Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God."

— Ephesians 3:17–19

A LOVE SO BIG

Jill Wagner

When I was young, our extended family always got together during the holidays. I had a very special aunt who used to call me sweet little names like, "Dear One" and "Twinkle Toes."

To this day, when I want to make someone feel my love, I hedge my phrases with "Dear One."

My aunt was of Norwegian lineage and had the kind of frame that towered over me as a child. She would scoop me up in her arms and make me feel so safe and loved. While other adults were spending time with each other, she would invite me onto her lap to read books to me and talk to me as if I, a small child, really mattered.

I had a beautiful childhood where I felt loved by many, but my Aunt's love was special because she made me feel special. She made me feel chosen and worthy. I imagine that this is the kind of love mentioned in this verse: a love rooted in God's love. It is wide and long and deep. I can imagine God calling me "Dear One" and making me feel so chosen and loved.

Maybe you didn't have an Aunt like mine. Maybe your family looked different than mine. Even so, maybe you can still imagine feeling loved wide and long and deep, because you are.



*God of the universe,
Your love for us is wide and long and high and deep. Thank you for loving us
enough to send your son into the world. You chose us and call us your own.
Help us to root our love in you and love others in the same way.
Amen*

Friday, December 19

*“Understand, therefore, that the Lord your God is indeed God.
He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes
his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.”*
— Deuteronomy 7:9

FAITHFUL THROUGH GENERATIONS

Roberta Johnson

The capstone project for my Freshman Studies class at Luther College required everyone to write a research paper of our choosing related to the settling of the United States. While some students' interests lay with a more global perspective, my curiosity was piqued by how my ancestors had come to America. But I had no interest in genealogy. After all, the genealogies of the Bible with all those difficult-to-pronounce names were dry and boring—who wanted that? But since my paternal grandmother, who died three months prior to my birth, was named Roberta Baskerville Smith, and I'd been enamored by Sherlock Holmes mysteries, including “The Hound of the Baskervilles,” I decided to become a sleuth of my own past.

My research led me to spend an afternoon with my grandmother's older brother Wendell, a vivid storyteller who brought tales of my family heritage to life all the way back to shepherds living in the Basque region of France. As this region was not known to have good agricultural opportunities, many moved to northern France and settled together in an area that became known as Basque-ville (thus their surname). During the Reformation, they became Huguenots (Protestant followers of John Calvin) but later fled to the Netherlands to escape religious persecution from the Catholic Church of France. In 1688, some accompanied William of Orange from the Dutch Republic to England when he deposed King James, a Catholic. Under William's rule, many stayed in England and mostly became farmers, although some became teachers and ministers. Many generations later, some of these farmers were lured to America in search of better opportunities. Even though those who arrived here didn't struggle with language barriers, life was not easy. Stories of sickness, poverty, mental illness, and untimely death are woven throughout the generations in America that grew from my earliest Baskerville immigrant in 1847.

Although I was captivated by the stories of the people who are part of my DNA and Uncle Wendell's stories which helped me write over ten pages for my required paper, it dawned on me that had I only had the names of my ancestors, I would have been as bored as I was when reading the genealogies of the Bible. But knowing their stories made them seem real and allowed me to see how they had trusted in God through so many critical points in their lives.

Sometimes it is easy to think that God was only faithful to the Biblical “heroes” like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David, but he was also faithful to all those for whom we have only a name. He has been faithful throughout generations of my family history. He has been faithful to those who know nothing of their biological families but were blessed through adoption into a different family. The point is that regardless of our past, God continues to lavish his love on us even today and it will never fail.



God,

*Thank you for being with humankind through all the generations. You are so faithful
and love us completely, even when we sometimes feel that you are far away. Help us to
seek you always and trust that you are with us in the good times, the tough times, and the
“everyday” times because you are a God who loves to love and to bless us.*

Amen.

Saturday, December 20

*“And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love...
Indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love
of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
— Romans 8:38–39

EMMANUEL IS FOREVER

Kim Mosiman

I have always loved the word Emmanuel, “God with us.” But lately, it is the forever part that keeps settling into my heart. Because God with us was never meant to be a single moment in history. It was not confined to a night in Bethlehem, and it did not fade after the cross or the resurrection. Emmanuel is still happening, right here in the middle of ordinary life, in the middle of our routines and questions and quiet aches.

There have been seasons when I felt far from God, not because He moved, but because I did. Times when prayer felt heavy, when my mind was scattered, when I wondered if He had grown silent or if I had simply stopped listening. And yet, even in those stretches of distance, His love found me. Sometimes through a sunrise that stopped me in my tracks, sometimes through a lyric I needed to hear, sometimes through the steady voice of a friend who spoke truth without knowing why. His presence has a way of showing up again and again, not because I have done anything to deserve it, but because He promised to be near.

Paul said that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Not fear, not failure, not wandering away for a while. That truth reshapes how I walk into a new year. I do not have to carry the pressure to fix myself or get everything right. I simply need to remember that I am already held. The love that came to us in Bethlehem never left. Emmanuel was not only born. He remains.



Emmanuel,

*Thank You for staying close not only at Christmas but always. When I wander,
when I worry, when I try to do life on my own, remind me that Your love does
not leave. As I step into a new year, help me rest in the truth that You are already
there, holding me, guiding me, and loving me every step of the way.*
Amen.

Day 28 Reflection



BLESSING OF LOVE

Danny Housholder

God of love,

From the very beginning, your story has been one of love—not a love earned, but a love given. You moved first, before we could reach for you, and you gave your Son so we might know what love looks like with skin on, arms outstretched, and a heart wide open.

Teach us to remember that love began the story of Christmas. When we see manger straw, let us also see mercy. When we see the cross, let us remember compassion that would not quit. May your love take root deep within us—wider than our worry, higher than our fear, longer than our regrets, and deeper than our understanding.

Let that love flow through us: from the people who tax our patience, to the ones who need forgiveness before they ask for it, to the world that's forgotten what grace feels like. Because love that stops with us is a gift unopened, and a story unfinished.

Thank you for being faithful through every generation, for keeping every promise, and for never withholding the love that remakes us. This Advent, may faith steady us. May hope lift us. May your love become the thread that ties it all together.

In the name of Jesus, true love made flesh,

Amen.

Monday, December 22

“Joseph... was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly...”
— Matthew 1:19

JOSEPH'S STORY

Kim Mosiman

“All my strength felt useless that night. I was supposed to provide, to protect. Yet every door I knocked on closed in my face.

I had trusted the dreams, believed the angel's words, but faith felt thin when Mary's labor began in a stable. I gathered hay, steadied her hand, prayed under my breath. When the baby came, the room felt different—heavier, holier... hopeful.

I looked at him, red and helpless. This is the one I've been told to name Jesus. The name felt too big for a newborn. Too sacred for my lips.

When the shepherds arrived, faces bright with wonder, I listened as they told of angels and songs of glory. I wanted to believe every word, yet all my heart could hold was this: the God of Israel had entrusted us with a child.

So I held them both close, mother and son, and whispered a prayer I barely understood: *Lord, help me believe what I've seen.*”



*Lord,
Joseph's story reminds me how often faith feels fragile. He trusted You through
uncertainty, fear, and closed doors... and You were with him in every step.*

Do the same in me.

Quiet my fears.

Strengthen my trust.

Help me see Your presence in the ordinary places of my life.

*Like Joseph, I simply pray:
Lord, help me believe what You've shown me, and trust what I cannot yet see.*

Amen.

Tuesday, December 23

“But Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often.”

— Luke 2:16–19

MARY'S STORY

Kim Mosiman

“I had tried to stay strong, whispering the angel’s words over and over, ‘He will be great; He will be called the Son of the Most High.’

But that was months ago, and now the pain and weariness pressed against my faith. When Joseph couldn’t find a place for us, I wanted to cry out, *Lord, was this really Your plan?* Yet, in the dark corner of that stable, with the air thick and the ground rough beneath me, the child came.

He was small, ordinary, perfect. I held Him close, my heart racing between awe and fear. Could this really be the promise? Could God truly dwell here, in my arms, in this smell of straw and sweat?

I didn’t know for sure. But as I pressed my cheek against His tiny face, I was filled with a peace, quiet and certain. I would learn to believe, one breath at a time.”



Lord,

As I sit with Mary’s story, I feel the ache of her questions and the beauty of her trust. She carried both uncertainty and obedience, both fear and faith, and You met her right in the middle of it all.

Do the same for me.

When I cannot see how Your promises will unfold, steady my heart.

When I feel small or unprepared, remind me that You choose ordinary places to reveal extraordinary grace.

When the path feels rough or unexpected, fill me with the same quiet peace that held Mary in that stable.

Teach me to believe, one breath at a time, that You are truly with me.

Amen.

Wednesday, December 24

*“Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth
to those with whom God is pleased.”*

— Luke 2:14

HEAVEN'S STORY

Kim Mosiman

Before the world existed, I saw this night.
I knew the rough wood of the manger, the hush of animals drawing near,
the trembling hands of a young couple caught between fear and obedience.
I watched Joseph wrestle with doubt and feel the weight of responsibility.
I saw Mary carry both promise and pain in her small, steady frame.
I knew every question in their hearts long before they whispered them.

And still, I chose them.
I chose a stable over a palace, a manger over a throne, poverty over pageantry,
so the world would know that I am the God who comes close.
When my son drew his first breath, heaven held its own.
The angels sang not to announce my distance, but my nearness.
Not a king hidden behind gates, but a Savior wrapped in cloth, reachable to all.
I watched the shepherds run, their hearts blazing with glory.
I saw Joseph gather his courage and Mary cradle peace in her tired arms.
And I delighted in the wonder that spilled into the night.

For this is who I am.
Emmanuel.
God with them.
God with you.

I came into your world not to overwhelm it, but to redeem it,
to walk the roads you walk, to carry the burdens you carry,
to bring light that no darkness can extinguish.

On that night in Bethlehem, I wrote my love into human history.
Not with power, but with presence.
Not from afar, but from within a family,
beneath a roof of rough beams and starlit sky.
This is my story.
This is my heart.
I am here.

December 25



GOD WITH US

Lord,

*On this sacred day, we rest in the wonder of Your nearness.
You chose to come close, not distant or unreachable, but here
with us in flesh and light and love.*

*Thank You for Jesus,
our Emmanuel,
the Hope that strengthens us,
the Peace that steadies us,
the Joy that rises within us,
the Love that never lets go.*

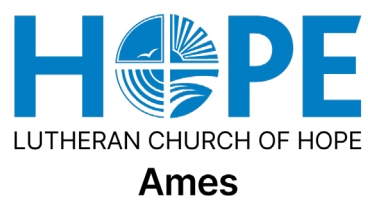
*As we remember His birth, open our eyes to the places You are still with us:
in our homes and relationships,
in our questions and our quiet,
in our waiting and our worship.*

*Let the truth of God with us shape our days,
guide our steps,
and transform the way we see every moment.*

*May Your presence dwell in us and shine through us
to a world longing for Your light.*

*Emmanuel,
stay near, stay present,
and write Your story through our lives.*

Amen.



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Scripture quotations are from the New Living Translation (NLT)