



# Child of Hope

ADVENT 2024

tulip grove

BAPTIST CHURCH





## **Advent: A Season of Expectation**

This year marks the seventeenth year we as a church have published an Advent devotional guide. Next year, Tulip Grove will celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> year as a church. I'm looking forward to us celebrating how God has worked in and through us to make a kingdom impact in our community and around the world. In the spirit of celebrating this milestone, I decided to go back and gather Advent devotions that our church members have written over the years.

I wrote the following introduction to our first collection in 2008:

*In our home, we began celebrating Advent nearly ten years ago when we received an Advent devotional book as a gift. Our boys were very young, but even still, they enjoyed listening to us read stories that pointed our hearts to the birth of the infant Christ. Over the years, some of our favorite books have included Christmas carols, and we have enjoyed singing them together as a part of our nightly family devotional time. Perhaps the greatest treasure has been found in using these devotions to help our boys see that our focus should be on the Babe in the manger and not the presents under the tree. Reading and praying together has given us a sense of anticipation of the greatest gift ever given. Our family has also connected this devotional time to our Advent celebrations at church. What a joy it is to see the four purple candles lit one at a time as we grow closer to Christmas, culminating with the lighting of the center, white candle in our Christmas Eve service! This sense of anticipation is the blessing of celebrating Advent.*

*This Advent devotional book is a first for us here at Tulip Grove. The writers are church members of all ages, ranging from high school and college students to senior adults. I believe that as you look into the life experiences and perspectives of these writers in our faith family, you will more clearly see the hope, love, joy, and peace that Christ's advent brings to us who know Him as Lord and Savior.*

*Use this devotional guide to help your family experience the true meaning of Christmas. If you have children, allow them to read portions of the book. Sing some familiar Christmas carols or listen to a Christmas CD and take time to thank God for His most precious Gift. In the final pages of this book, you will find some space to record your family's Advent devotional memories. Start a tradition this year. I promise your experience of Christmas will be more meaningful and Christ-centered.*

Pastor Phil

### **YOU CAN SEE THIS ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOK ONLINE!**

Read and share this Advent devotional book with family and friends all over the world. Go to <http://www.tgbc.org> and click the link on the home page.

**Sunday, December 1, 2024**  
**Simeon's Hope**

*Rest in God alone, my soul, for my hope comes from him. (Psalm 62:5, CSB)*

After Jesus was circumcised and Mary's purification was complete, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to dedicate Him to God. This was the custom for first-born sons. A man named Simeon lived in Jerusalem. He was upright and dedicated to God, looking forward to Israel's consolation, filled with the Holy Spirit. He had been promised by the Spirit that he would live to see Israel's Messiah. He was guided by the Spirit to enter the temple on the same day that Mary and Joseph came.

When Simeon saw Mary and Joseph with the baby, he took Jesus in his arms and said: "Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace, as you promised. For my eyes have seen your salvation. You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples—a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:29-32, CSB)

Mary and Joseph were astounded by the words of Simeon. Simeon blessed the family and said to Mary: "Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed—and a sword will pierce your own soul—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." (Luke 2:34-35, CSB)

What a faith Simeon had! He trusted the promise God gave and kept that hope alive. The words spoken about Jesus when He was a baby can give us hope at Christmas. Remember that Jesus was born as a sacrifice so we can live with God forever. Let us remember the great gift of hope given at Christmas.

**Cindy Wiley—2019**

**Monday, December 2, 2024**  
**A Thrill of Hope**

Imagine that you find yourself stranded on a deserted island with no contact to the outside world. You are forced to do things that you have only read about in history books: hunt and grow your own food, make your own clothes, and build a shelter from the elements. Every night you go to bed wondering if you will ever be rescued. You are mentally and physically exhausted from all that you have to endure, but you hold on to the hope that one day you might be saved. While lying in your make-shift shelter one night, you hear the whirling of helicopter blades. Suddenly you see a spotlight shining its light among the large palm trees covering the sandy shores of the island. Your heart leaps and you experience a thrill of hope and think to yourself “my rescuer has come.”

This is similar to what happens in the heart of every person that surrenders his or her life to Christ as Savior and Lord. They recognize that Jesus stepped in to rescue them from sin and death before they even realized they were in need of rescue. It is best summed up in the lyrics to my favorite Christmas hymn, *O Holy Night*, when it proclaims “a thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices.” We often feel weary as we experience the effects of living in a dark and broken world. However, Christ came to bring light and hope. His birth was a sign of hope, and His life and death were a testament to the power of that hope.

We often use the word *hope* to express our longing for something to happen. We hope to have a happy marriage, get an amazing job, and have the perfect family. In all these things, there is uncertainty on whether or not they will come to fruition. However, hope in Christ is different. The hope we find in Christ is a promise. It is the gospel, God’s plan to redeem man from the curse of sin through Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.

This is my prayer for you this Christmas season: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Romans 15:13 (ESV)

**Eric Boswell—2023**

**Tuesday, December 3, 2024**  
**Hope for the Hopeless**

As we drove toward Cumberland, Kentucky, a small coal town deep in the heart of the Appalachians, I was struck both by the abject poverty and the sheer beauty of the area. We were taking a busload of students to serve in a ministry that works with at-risk children. During our time we saw such hopelessness in the eyes of the people there. We prayed that God would use us to show the love of Christ in a special way. Our second day there, one of the missionaries told us the story of Ben. He was 8 years old and had been taken from his parents' custody during a drug arrest. Ben was taken to his grandmother's home with nothing but the clothes on his back, and he was wearing shoes that were 3 sizes too big. Would we be willing to help?

We called our students together that evening over dinner, and asked if they wanted to help Ben. Those teenagers immediately pulled out their wallets and gave from their spending money. After dinner, we piled everyone into the bus and made the 30-mile trek to the nearest Walmart, where we bought clothes, toiletry items, and new shoes.

The next day, a few of us went to Ben's grandmother's apartment to deliver the gifts. The missionary brought a new baseball glove, as Ben had left his behind. The look on his face was priceless, as tears streamed down the grandmother's face. We were able to pray with her as we shared the good news of Jesus with that little family.

My mind was taken back to a night all those years ago when a baby was born in a stable, because there was no room in the inn. Jesus knows what it is to have nothing, and He loves His children. While we may not live in deep physical poverty, we are spiritually poor. When we admit our need and come to Him, He gives us so many gifts. Not only does He give us eternal life, but He also puts new clothes on our backs—the robes of righteousness. He feeds us with His Word and satisfies our thirst with the pure water of the Holy Spirit. And He gives us everything we need to live godly lives in Him.

This year as we celebrate His coming, let us give thanks for the many gifts that Jesus Christ gives to His children, and may we be His hands and feet to a world without hope.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3, NASB)*

**Nancy Andrews—2015**

**Wednesday, December 4, 2024**  
**Time for Hope**

Time is a difficult concept to grasp. We don't really have a good working definition of what it truly is. For such a vague concept, our lives seem to be completely immersed in it. We quickly find that it becomes a painful process to endure. As children, the clock won't tick fast enough. As adults, we marvel at how fast our children have grown up. We see the years of wear in the hands of our grandparents. We catch a glance of ourselves in the mirror. We struggle to accept that all things come to an end.

Why is there time? It is easy to think that God could have left this out. Life is hard enough without the constant haunting of lives, events and opportunities that have passed into the rearview mirror. Couldn't there have been a world without time?

One of the themes in Scripture is God asking us to trust Him. In the garden He said, "Trust me, you can have anything you want, just not that tree." In the wilderness, "I know this is the long way, but trust me. I'll get you to the Promised Land." Through Isaiah, "Trust me. I'll send you a Savior." To Peter, "Trust me. It has to be this way." On the mountain top, "I am going away for a bit. Trust me. I'll come back for you." He has made us a promise and we are to wait on Him to fulfill it.

This notion of making promises and delivering results would not be possible without the element of time. There would be no "past" and no "future." We would be stuck in a perpetual "now." Without the passing of time, we could never know that He is true to His Word. Nor could we wait in hopeful, reverent expectation for Him to deliver us. We would never get the chance to trust Him as the days creep into years.

When we look at time as it relates to the things of this world, we find restlessness, regret and pain. As our eyes glimpse the Heavens, we see it as a promise. "Trust in me for all of these days, and I will take care of you." It is here where our Hope rests.

This season, see the newborn Christ as the revealing of God's promise. As time passes, our Hope grows stronger as we wait for His return.

**Scott Gables—2013**

**Thursday, December 5, 2024**  
**Our True Hope**

*The presence of hope in the invincible sovereignty of God drives out fear.*  
(John Piper)

When I was in elementary school and hoped for something, my friends and I would sometimes cross our fingers, squint our eyes closed and hope for good luck. We might be taking our chances on what candy we pulled out of the teacher's treat bag or hoping we could get all the way across the monkey bars before falling down. Our hopes were simple. The world's definition of hope, a feeling that what is wanted will happen, was the only one we knew at the time.

I often place my hopes in the wrong things. I am not unique. In the Old Testament, psalmists and prophets warned the people of the futility in vesting their hopes in wealth (Psalm 49:6-12), houses (Isaiah 32:17-18), princes (Psalm 146:3), or empires and armies (Isaiah 31:1-3). Beyond the warnings, they also modeled a right response: *Remember Your word to Your servant, for You have given me hope. My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life* (Psalm 119:49-50, NIV). Isaiah wrote *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 40:31, NIV).

During the roughly four hundred years of the intertestamental period, Jews hoped for a messiah, an anointed ruler from the line of David. By the time of Roman rule, they hoped for a political champion who would save them from oppression. Simeon, whom Luke described as "a man in Jerusalem...who was righteous and devout" waited for the "consolation of Israel." He lived to see the fulfillment of prophecy, the birth of the child Jesus.

Under God's guidance, we anticipate and hope for favorable outcomes. We desire things that may not be in His sovereign plan. We experience suffering, we lose precious loved ones, and we experience many disappointments. But like Simeon, we must hold on and place our trust in the One whose birth, death, resurrection and second coming is our true hope.

**Mitzi Lundy—2013**



**Friday, December 6, 2024**  
**God Is Our Source of Hope**

Webster defines the word *hope* as “a desire with an expectation of obtainment; to expect with confidence.” Webster’s definition is a good one, but a Christian’s understanding of the word *hope* is far superior. I’ve lived long enough to form two conclusions: 1) We cannot put hope in mankind to solve the social, political, and economic problems of this world, and 2) We cannot put hope in ourselves to solve our own sin sickness and need for an eternal remedy. God has permitted mankind 5,000+ years to prove that my first conclusion is true. As for the other, God allows each of us over the course of a lifetime to reach that understanding and to turn to Him for a remedy.

God will one day permanently solve the ills of this world by creating a new Earth. A new Earth without war, terrorism, murder, hatred, racism, dishonesty, hunger, abuse, disregard for God ... one without Satan and without sin! Regarding my second conclusion and one that is much more personal, my hope rests in the confidence that God will one day deliver me from this body of sin. Life, at best, is a struggle and the battle with sin can sometimes be a source of great disappointment and internal despair. If I didn’t have hope that God will one day make ALL things right, despair would rule the day and joy would cease to exist. Hope and Joy are inseparable companions! Hope is the food that feeds Joy as mentioned in Romans 15:13, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy.....” (NASB)

I’m in agreement with the hymn that says, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness,” because I’m fully convinced that my personal righteousness is worthless and non-existent. So, if you’re needing a little hope today, know that God will one day make good on all of His promises as we’re reminded in Numbers 23:19, “God is not human, that He should lie, ... Does He speak and then not act? Does He promise and not fulfill?” (NIV) My hope-filled response to the rhetorical questions found in this verse is an emphatic, “No—NEVER!” Thus, God is our ultimate source of HOPE in this life and an existence without HOPE in Him would be a most miserable one indeed.

**Melvin Hagar—2015**

**Saturday, December 7, 2024**  
**Christ, Our Living Hope**

As we approach the Christmas season, many look forward to celebrating Christ's birth and will take great delight in celebrating with family and friends. For others, the holidays bring angst, depression, and feelings of hopelessness. We live in a fallen world and sometimes deal with situations that can cause grief or pain and drain all joy from life.

But there is HOPE!! And that hope is found in Jesus Christ and the truth of His word. No matter what "season" of life you are in, God has not abandoned you. If He has allowed a painful or difficult situation in your life, be assured His presence is with you.

The hope we have through Christ Jesus is living; eternal; an anchor for our soul; sure and steadfast; and will never disappoint. Christ in us is our hope of glory.

" . . . by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil." (Hebrews 6:18-19, NASB)

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3, NASB)

"And we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Romans 5:2b-5, NASB)

If you are experiencing a season of hopelessness, be encouraged by Romans 15:13 (NASB) "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

**Hallie Gipson—2017**

**Sunday, December 8, 2024**  
**Peace Surpassing Understanding**

In Philippians 4:7, after urging us to bring everything to the Lord in prayer, Paul tells us of the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. This peace is incomprehensible to the unbeliever and even taken for granted by the faithful. It is a precious gift that flows when we pray to our Father in all circumstances in the name of Christ, whether that be in times of thankfulness or great sorrow. The book of Habakkuk is a wonderful illustration of this *peace that surpasses all understanding*.

In parallel with Paul's command in Philippians 4:6 to bring everything to God in prayer, the book opens with Habakkuk crying out to God in anguish. In chapter 1, Habakkuk mournfully prays to God with two questions; some translations refer to these as complaints. In his first complaint, Habakkuk cries out for the ongoing injustices in Judah. His complaint could be summarized as "God, why aren't you doing anything here?" God responds that He was doing a work that Habakkuk would not believe. God was going to use the Chaldeans, a wicked nation, to judge Judah. In his second complaint, Habakkuk cries out to ask how could God use a wicked nation like the Chaldeans to judge His people? God responds with a command and promise that would later be quoted in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews: "...the righteous shall live by faith." Habakkuk 2:4b (ESV)

Habakkuk cried out to God in sincerity and received answers to his complaints. Neither answer would seem reassuring at a worldly level, but we can see an example of living by faith in Habakkuk's response: "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places." Habakkuk 3:17-19 (ESV)

Just like Paul's command in Philippians, Habakkuk brought everything to God in prayer. And when God answered, Habakkuk's response demonstrated the peace that surpasses understanding. Paul and Habakkuk both recognized that God is sovereign over all things. We don't always understand why things happen, why we go through trials. But in all circumstances, we bring our concerns, our praises, even our complaints to God, humbly and sincerely. Habakkuk's complaints didn't change the plan God had for His people, but his prayers did change Habakkuk's heart. He was filled with that indescribable peace that only comes when living by faith.

During this advent season, bring everything to God in prayer and thank Him that we have been justified by faith only through the blood of Christ, that we can rest in Jesus' completed works, that His day of peace will come someday soon, and that we can live each day with an inexpressible peace regardless of the circumstances.

**Drew Johnson—2023**

**Monday, December 9, 2024**  
**Sleep in Heavenly Peace**

My, how time flies! As I was rocking my new granddaughter, Chandler, yesterday, thoughts began to flood my soul...

I remember watching as my children were born. I remember standing at the kindergarten door, watching as they walked in for the first time, leaving me behind. I remember them standing at their dorm room door, watching them as it was my turn to walk away. I remember them standing at the altar, watching them promise themselves to their beloveds. Now I hold a new generation in my arms and watch her as I sing my lullaby to her, one I wrote just for her. She smiles and coos. Her eyes twinkle. For this one particular moment in time, she is in perfect peace. She instinctively knows that all her needs will be met, even with all my inadequacies. She has complete trust in me, and all her cries can be soothed with milk, a dry diaper and a loving, swaddling embrace.

I know, though, that Chandler's nights will not always be calm, nor always be bright. I will have to watch her experience times of sickness, struggle and sorrow. God did the same as He sent His only Son to our world on that silent night 2000 years ago. As He placed Jesus into a young mother's arms, He knew what awaited His Son. Even so, God perfectly provided Jesus everything He needed for His earthly life. Jesus' unwavering peace came from complete trust and faith in His Heavenly Father. Indeed, it is a peace that surpasses understanding and a peace that I yearn to embrace as I "grow up" in His love.

Jesus offers His perfect peace to us all, as we come to Him in faith as little children. He has given me a wonderful gift through my tiny granddaughter—a gentle reminder of what total faith and trust is all about. I can abide in His peace as I come to Him in faith and fully trust Him with my life.

*Jesus, swaddle us in Your arms of love. Tonight, may we all sleep in Your heavenly peace.*

**Linda Scholes—2011**

**Tuesday, December 10, 2024**  
**Peace in the Midst of the Masses**

*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, NIV).*

As principal of an elementary school of almost 700 students and 80 adults, peace is not a word that often comes to mind during the school day. The elementary school setting is like a small city, never lacking for excitement, adventure, and structured chaos. "I miss my mommy" tears, "she's looking at me" complaints, and the never-ending car-rider line can easily overwhelm both children and adults. As the world continues its assault on Christianity, the public school system is often a spiritual battleground. Believe me, prayer has not been removed from public schools.

Christmastime in schools continues to be special as art projects, music programs, and parties fill the days while students anticipate their upcoming break. However, as the time approaches for Christmas break to begin, many of our students are distraught with worry and fear of the unknown. For some, their safe place is school. For these children, Christmas break is a time that normalcy is taken from them for a couple of weeks. Again, peace is not a word that comes to mind.

As I sit in meetings and hear the often horrible things adults do to children, and realize the daily nightmare many of my students live in, my thoughts turn to their one true hope, their one true love, their one true joy, Christ Jesus—the Child of Peace. I am reminded of the song "You're the Only Jesus" as I pray Jesus will use me to reach each child. Jesus proclaimed in Luke 10:2 that the harvest is plentiful and our schools are definitely the field white for harvest. My prayer this Advent season is the peace that passes all understanding will sweep through our schools as we anticipate our coming Lord, the Prince of Peace.

**Mike Westveer—2014**

**Wednesday, December 11, 2024**  
**Peace—God’s Gracious Gift**

“Ganna, what is peace?” Even though my grandson has not asked that particular one, I am certain he will, given his propensity for questions. Maybe I can be prepared ahead of time for this one.

Peace. Just the sound of the word elicits a calming effect. Philippians 4:7 states: *“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus”* (NIV). The note in my study Bible gives this comment about the peace of God: *“Inner calm or tranquility is promised to the believer who has a thankful attitude based on unwavering confidence that God is able and willing to do what is best for His children.”*<sup>1</sup>

Peace is looking into the eyes of my 91-year-old mother with Alzheimer’s Disease and believing God has a plan for her. Peace is listening to the unending chatter of my 4-year-old grandson and believing God has a plan for him. Peace is meeting a homeless man who has just accepted Christ and believing God has a plan for his life. Peace is believing that in every circumstance—good or bad, happy or sad—God has a plan for His children.

On that blessed night so long ago as Mary looked into the face of not only her baby, but also her Savior, she must have experienced peace. Peace—God’s gracious gift to believers who are the object of His pleasure.

Peace. God’s plan, and only His plan, will bring peace to mankind.

**Jean Gant—2010**

<sup>1</sup> The MacArthur Study Bible, Copyright 2006, Thomas Nelson, Inc.

**Thursday, December 12, 2024**  
**Prevailing Peace**

Today I am standing in the middle of large nursery inside a medical center. All of the babies are clean and comfortable, being watched over and held by caring nurses. What a different scene it is than the one of the first Christmas in Bethlehem. Our sanitized version of the Nativity doesn't come close to the stark reality of that holy night.

New mother Mary must have been completely exhausted after her long journey. She was forced to deliver her baby away from home in a cold, dirty, noisy stable. New earthly father Joseph must have felt helpless, unable to secure a warm, clean, quiet place for his wife to give birth.

Jesus, the Christ child, was born into humiliating circumstances. As an infant, He was totally dependent on others to provide food, shelter and clothing. Lying in a manger is anything but peaceful. Animals are constantly shuffling their feet, making noise and smelling up the place. Shepherds later arrive, but they don't smell much better than the livestock. Silent night—doubtful, Holy night—absolutely! The peace that prevailed that night is the same peace that is available to us at this very moment: peace that shelters the soul, peace that never grows old or obsolete, and peace that doesn't lose power or punctuality.

Oh, the peace of God. It's here when you are exhausted after a long journey, when you are far away from home, when you are cold, dirty and surrounded by chaos. It's here when you are helpless, watching the ones you love struggle. It's here when all of your effort and resources are not enough to mend the situation. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, knows what you are experiencing. He grew to be *despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering* (Isaiah 53:3, NIV 1984). His peace is not dependent on your circumstances.

If you have made peace with God, experience the peace of God this Christmas. Don't look down. Don't look around. Look up!

**Dan French--2011**

**Friday, December 13, 2024**

**Peace Like a Sleeping Child**

Have you ever watched a sleeping child? There is something about looking at the curve of the head, the sighing of the breath and the fluttering of eyelashes that is soothing and relaxing.

During the week, there are so many things that need my attention. Dishes, laundry, meal preparation, curriculum, cleaning and child rearing—these items can become cumbersome. So often I allow these day-to-day responsibilities to become burdens instead of rewards. The stress that accompanies deadlines of preparing reports for our business and the responsibility of teaching children to be functional members of society create an anxiety that is only soothed by God. There are days that I long for that feeling of peace, like a sleeping child.

Calling on Christ is always rewarding! When I can't envision the peace that fills my soul and allow daily events to crush my spirit, I need to stop and pray. Frequently throughout the day, I will retreat to the sunroom where I can see the green that God created and talk with Him. Some days I call on Him more often than others! Although the world defines peace as a time without war, I define peace as a time where my heart is full.

This struggle of finding peace is not unique to me. I do not believe that it can be found without Jesus Christ. The hymn, *It Is Well with My Soul*, by Horatio G. Spafford, reminds me that even in great tragedy, God can provide us with infinite comfort.

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

Only when we unload our heart into His hands can we find great comfort in unloading the sin, unloading the fears and believing that Christ is our Savior.

*My sin-oh, the bliss of this glorious thought:  
My sin not in part, but the whole  
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

**Jennifer Gables—2010**



**Saturday, December 14, 2024**  
**God's Provision of Peace**

Peace. Quiet. Calm. None of these words have ever described me. When I was asked to write about peace, I was a little worried. "What do I know about Peace?" As I sat at my desk, looking at the papers that I desperately needed to grade, it dawned on me that I actually have a very good idea of what Real Peace is—the kind that only Jesus can bring. Let me tell you a story.

I have always wanted to be a teacher. When I was a kid I used to pretend that I was grading papers. I was a teacher's pet and proud of it. I got a job teaching Spanish, which had been my minor in college and honestly not something I had ever thought I was going to have to use. Though I was licensed in History, I was not licensed for Spanish. I was given a waiver to teach Spanish. Think of it like a permit to drive—not a real license, but close.

I spent three years in a constant state of stress. I was up all night grading, planning and doing homework for a college class. My free time was spent studying for an oral exam that I had to take with a woman who hated my pronunciation. By the end of my third year, my waiver was almost up and I still had the oral exam to complete. I was afraid that I was going to lose my job. I loved my job.

One night I got so overwhelmed that I remember falling to my knees in my bedroom and crying out to Jesus to help me.

He did.

I remember this feeling, like everything was going to be okay. It's hard to explain if you've never felt it. It's an awesome feeling—peace. And that peace allowed me to look at my situation with a whole new light. I realized that He had been in control all along, opening doors when one closed. I've been a teacher for eight years now, and I get to see His hand at work every day. I still remember that feeling when I realized I was exactly where He wanted me to be.

**Mary Kay Kelton—2011**

**Sunday, December 15, 2024**  
**Joy Together**

Let the whole earth shout to the Lord; be jubilant, shout for joy and sing. (Psalm 98:4, CSB)

I love music. I enjoy listening to it. I enjoy being a part of making it when I can. One of my favorite joys is playing in the church handbell choir. That is even more joyful at Christmastime. There's something about bells at Christmas that just seems right. Hearing them, seeing them, and playing them are all Christmas joys for me.

Linda, our wonderful director, often reminds us that handbells are the only instrument that is played by multiple people at the same time. That's one thing I love about it. We have to work together as a team and listen to what's happening to create the music. We must blend with the other bells, making sure each part supports the melody or rings out if it is the melody.

Just like the bell choir, our church must work together to glorify God and share His joy with others. The church (like the bell choir) helps us each be more than we could alone. Corporately we can bring joy to one another and to the community around us. A true body of Christ is one entity of many people working together for a common goal. That common goal is praise and glory to God.

You can praise God alone. But you can multiply your joy when you praise God with your brothers and sisters in Christ. As one body, glorifying Him and His Son.

**Scott Wiley—2019**

**Monday, December 16, 2024**  
**The Joy of Salvation**

“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” (1 Peter 1:8-9, ESV)

How can we have joy in a broken world where, at times, we are both the victim and perpetrator of sin? Whether we’ve experienced a life-altering event or have tried to support someone who has, there are moments when life’s circumstances can cloud our understanding of the Gospel. We tend to ebb and flow in our capacity to know, with certainty, where we are positioned as Christians. I know I do. In the book of John, Jesus reminds us that “we will have tribulation,” and James, in his letter, mentions facing “trials of various kinds.” It’s not a question of if, but when.

How can our faith remain strong and joyful in the midst of trials? Hebrews 12:2 states that Jesus is the “founder and protector of our faith.” Our faith is sustained because God sustains us. Rejoice in the reality of our salvation—the Good News. Although we’ll face different challenges that may bring sorrow, the authenticity of our faith can lead to lasting joy. We can be assured that, while experiencing the destruction of sin, maintaining our belief in the goodness, sovereignty, and justice of God is possible. We’re not proving our faith to Him, but rather, God assures this gift of faith to us.

Even though we don’t see God, we love Him and believe in Him. Although we may not love or believe perfectly, we possess an earnest desire to do so. To have joy, we must believe that we belong to Christ. That He loves us and cares for us. We can have assurance because “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6, ESV) In the end, all we have is Jesus, and that’s all we’ll ever need.

J. Gresham Machen wrote: “What I need first of all is not exhortation, but a gospel, not directions for saving myself but knowledge of how God has saved me.”

Meditate and rejoice on these truths: that we belong to Christ, the revelation of God’s redemptive plan, His word, His mercy, and our inheritance. That’s a reason to rejoice! Glory to God!

**Tommy Allen—2023**

**Tuesday, December 17, 2024**  
**Joy!**

It has been said that joy is peace dancing, and peace is joy at repose. Now who would not want inner joy and peace doing a little jig in our hearts and minds? Yet joy eludes our longing hearts. Nehemiah 8:10 declares, “. . . the joy of the LORD is your strength.” Is it any wonder that we find ourselves tired and anemic in facing the daily grind of living and interacting with a sinful world, when joy is in short supply in our lives?

Joy comes in unexpected places. Seeking joy directly confounds us. Joy surprises us, often coming as a by-product of something seemingly unrelated. This Advent season, consider and pray about giving a gift that often results in joy, sometimes to both the giver and receiver. Consider giving the gift of forgiveness.

Consider forgiving someone who has wronged you . . .

let go of bitterness . . .

drop the heavy burden of carrying a grudge . . .

loose the stranglehold of the tight jaw and set mouth . . .

free the offender of demanding they make it up to you somehow.

In the process you may free yourself also.

No, it's not saying that the offense doesn't matter. When God forgives us, He never says our sin doesn't matter. In fact, He says the sin matters so much, someone has to pay. And Someone has. Jesus Christ paid with His life. Have you agonized over how deeply your sin has offended God? Have you grasped on a deep, painful level how much God has forgiven you? Then go and do likewise for that person who has wronged you . . .

slighted you . . .

spoken unfairly or untruthfully to you, or about you . . .

sinned against you in any number of ways.

Who does God bring to mind that you need to forgive? In the power of His Holy Spirit you can begin to forgive them. O Beloved, why do you wait? Forgive! Discover a taste of joy that long outlasts this Advent season. And isn't that what true joy is all about?

**Kay Bontrager—2009**

**Wednesday, December 18, 2024**  
**Learning to Count It All Joy**

Every parent knows there is no more joyful moment than that of a baby being born. Surely Mary and Joseph felt it as they held baby Jesus close for the first time. I can imagine them gazing at his face in wonder and counting his tiny fingers and toes.

I, too, felt this overwhelming love when my son Beau was born. It was one of the most wonderful days of my life. And then, about two weeks later, he started screaming.

He was not a happy, and certainly not very joyful, infant. Though he slept well at night, he cried all day. I took him to the doctor. I cut dairy out of my diet. I Googled. I learned about “high need babies.” Nothing seemed to help.

During those first few months, most days all I could focus on was survival. Life was hard, and tears were often shed. But, as He so often does, the Lord was using this time of trial to draw me to Himself.

James 1:2-3 (ESV) says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.”

Now, I cannot say that I counted those difficult days as joy. Mostly all I thought about was escaping my trial and wishing life were different. Nevertheless, the Lord used my pain to produce a steadfastness in me that would not have been there otherwise. My prayer is that whenever the next time of testing arrives, I will be more prepared to face that hardship with the joy of the Lord, knowing that He will use it for my good and His glory.

Thanks be to God, Beau is now a much happier baby boy. Though I know the years of motherhood that lie ahead will be filled with highs and lows, I take comfort in the fact that the Lord will forever be my source of joy, no matter my circumstances.

**Hannah Mathis—2023**

**Thursday, December 19, 2024**  
**Miraculous Birth**

In Nehemiah 8:10 (NASB) we read, “Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” This verse along with many other promises found in God’s Word provided the strength my dad desperately needed on Christmas Day 1942. Without warning my mother, a little over seven months pregnant with me, collapsed and experienced convulsions and other severe complications, taking her to the very brink of death. Needless to say, Christmas plans that day were unexpectedly altered for our family, the small-town doctor, and many others who gave up their Christmas dinner to come to our church to pray for my mother and me. Due to the severity of the situation, and as things worsened hour by hour, my dad was told that it appeared neither of us would survive. It would take a miracle. His deep faith, the power of prayer, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit were the only things he could hold on to. These were his only hope.

After many long and intense hours, with praise to God, a miracle did take place that day, December 25, 1942, as both my mother and I overcame death because of His almighty hand! Romans 12:12 tells us to rejoice in hope, to be patient in affliction, and be devoted to prayer. Because of my Godly parents and with the reminder of the miracle that took place at my birth, I was taught at a very early age that there was another miracle birth that was so much greater. In fact, it was the greatest miracle the world has ever seen; the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, the “good news of great JOY.” Although it is special for me to say I was born on Christmas Day, my greatest joy is to see others experience the new birth that only comes through Christ.

As each of us struggles with many things throughout life, we are reminded, especially at this time of year, His name is Immanuel, which means “GOD WITH US.” (Matthew 1:23, NASB) There can be no greater JOY!

**Gary Dunsford—2017**

**Friday, December 20, 2024**  
**His Joy = My Strength**

*... for the joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10, NIV).*

How can joy equal strength? Have you ever had a stressful, emotional day and found yourself exhausted at the end of it? Have you ever noticed how much easier it is to get up early when you are doing something fun instead of going to work or school? Have you ever noticed how doing mundane chores really isn't that bad in the company of good friends? All are evidence that joy results in strength.

Have you noticed how quickly joy often disappears? Have you ever noticed that the "thing" that you wanted for what seemed like forever is not that great after you have it for a few days? What about that event that you have looked forward to for months but after it has passed, you feel rather disappointed? What about that person who made you so happy but now you see them warts and all?

What is different about the joy that comes from the Lord? The joy derived from earthly things is temporal. His joy is never-ending and never changes. It never leaves and is not affected by the situations that surround us.

How does the Lord's joy become my strength? True joy comes from a relationship with Him. By knowing Him and spending time with Him, I am filled with an inexplicable feeling of peace and happiness that no earthly circumstance can change. This joy will enable me to endure things that I thought impossible, all with a peace in my heart that comes only from Him.

Thank you sweet baby Jesus for bringing into this dark world a distinctive ray of unstoppable joy! May its rays shine through us to light the way for others to You!

**Lisa McIntosh—2010**

**Saturday, December 21, 2024**  
**Jesus, the Source of Our Joy**

This past year has been an important one for me, full of life-changing decisions and experiences, but with those decisions came many difficulties. Some of the questions that have been constantly on my mind are: “What am I going to be doing next year? Where am I going to be? Will I be doing the right thing? Will I be following God’s plan for my life?” I feel as if I’ve been struggling to stay afloat in all of the college applications, senior responsibilities, and decisions that have been flooding me. It’s overwhelming.

One thought that has come up numerous times as I think of the future is, “What if I’m not happy?” Whenever this question comes up to the forefront of my mind, I have to take a mental step backwards. When has “happiness” become a goal I feel I should strive to reach? Does God’s plan come with the assurance of happiness? No! Then why do I want to plan my life around being “happy”? The only answer I can think of is comfort, specifically material comfort. I crave a life of comfort, financially, relationally, and spiritually. I want an easy life.

However, God has not put me in this world to be “comfortable” or “happy.” He has not promised that I will never face challenges or hardships. Instead, He has made me to glorify Him in everything that I do, through the good times and the bad. By trusting God’s plan for my life, I will be assured of one thing: joy. No, joy and happiness are not one in the same. Happiness is a temporary feeling we get from temporary things, maybe an A on a test, a bonus check, or a mug of hot chocolate on a cold night. Joy, however, is an eternal feeling.

Where does this eternal joy come from? We experience it only through the promised King, our Savior, the Messiah, a babe born in Bethlehem, One Who was sent to be the propitiation for us, for our sins: the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Joy to the world! The Lord is come!”

**Lillian Wallace—2017**



**Sunday, December 22, 2024**  
**Sacrificial Love**

*Love is a willing self-sacrifice for the good of another that doesn't demand reciprocation or that the person being loved is deserving – Paul Tripp*

In high school, I remember going to youth group most Wednesday nights. My only reasons for going were to be with my friends and participate in the hour-long kickball game that followed church. I don't know if my youth minister saw past my intentions, but I do know his intentions were not as mine.

Our group was by no means the easiest to love. We moaned when we had to go to the nursing home, and we would do anything for a laugh, even if that meant interrupting the message. Regardless of what we did or said, our pastor loved us. He sacrificed for us and later on in life (after being saved) I realized his actions were pointing us towards Christ. A small sacrifice to care for his kids pointed to the ultimate sacrifice and a greater love.

The Son of God paid the ultimate sacrifice for undeserving sinners. It was the love Jesus had for us that kept him suspended on the cross. "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." (John 10:18, ESV)

As I think back on my days in the youth group, I am thankful for the ways my youth minister displayed Christ's endless pursuit for us. This Christmas, may our hearts be reminded of the never-ending, never-failing love our Savior displayed for us on the cross. While we were dead in our sin, He loved us, He pursued us, and He called us His own.

**Chris Redmond—2014**

**Monday, December 23, 2024**  
**Love That Is Enough**

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16, NIV1984).*

It all started with a wide-eyed ultrasound tech holding up three fingers and telling us we were expecting triplets. I had so many feelings: happiness, excitement, disbelief, fear. I began to doubt myself and wonder how it would be possible to love three more babies along with Ryker. After all, I am just one woman.

I found myself wondering about Mary and how she must have felt when she was told she would carry Jesus. Mary was an ordinary woman. I imagine she had some doubts, too. She probably wondered if she would be good enough to raise the Savior of the entire world or if she would have enough love in her heart for the King of Kings. She had some disbelief and fear, I am sure.

When I delivered the boys and I heard all three cry their first cries, I realized my worries had been silly. I could feel my heart bursting with so much love I couldn't stand it. I'm sure Mary felt the same way. I can't imagine how special it was for her to carry Jesus and feel Him kicking. It assured her He was real. Then, she brought Him into this world and heard Him cry for the first time. I'm sure God melted away all her doubts and fears just as He did mine. God does not make mistakes. He knew exactly what He was doing when He chose Mary to be Jesus' mother. He also chose me to mother my boys and He equipped me with a mother's heart and enough love to reach all my boys.

God has so much love for us that He sent his only Son to a sinful world as a baby. He gave Him up to die for sinners so we could live forever with Him in eternity. Now that is a whole lot of love. It says in 1 John 4:7 (NIV), "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God." When you have God in your heart he gives you the ability to love with your whole heart.

**Tara Hayes—2014**

**Tuesday, December 24**  
**The Love of a Father**

“I keep up, Daddy. I keep up.” My three year old son, Joshua, ran beside me on the soccer field at the local park, his little legs chugging along to keep up with my stride. I came home from my own run and he asked me why he couldn’t go running with me. I tried to explain that he couldn’t keep up, but upon seeing his crushed expression I told him we could go to the park and “run.” He beamed and kept up. And I loved him. My heart was full of this boy.

I remember that afternoon like it was yesterday, along with so many other memories of my little boy. Today he is a married man living across the country in Seattle.

I think of another father, one named Joseph, who also had a son. He first saw his child in a stable in Bethlehem. I think of Joseph teaching young Jesus about carpentry. I think of Joseph with a knot in his stomach searching for 12-year-old Jesus in Jerusalem only to find Him in the temple amazing the religious leaders with His understanding of His Heavenly Father.

The scriptures do not tell us a great deal about Joseph. We don’t know when he died or what kind of grief that brought to the family, including Jesus. We know Joseph was a man who followed God’s will, even when it may have hurt and dismayed him marrying the pregnant Mary knowing the child in her womb wasn’t biologically his. But I believe from day one he loved and cared for Jesus.

I am thankful for the love of the father who raised this boy, fully God, fully human, despite himself. But I am even more thankful for my Heavenly Father’s love. We know “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” so we could have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Our Father in heaven loves us beyond our understanding, having demonstrated that love in the gift of His one and only Son, Jesus.

**Daniel Wilson—2014**

**Wednesday, December 25, 2024**  
**Good News of Great Joy**

One of the great pleasures of a child on Christmas morning is the met expectation of discovering what lies under the tree. Children are not concerned with other things but are completely fixed on what they have been waiting for all year long. Through the counting down of days, they have been preparing their hearts for this moment. And so, when Christmas Day finally arrives, their eyes behold what their hearts have been eagerly waiting for.

In the same way, we too must become like little children preparing our hearts for the Advent of Christ, when our faith will become sight. Like Simeon of old, we're to long for the *consolation of Israel and to see the Lord's Christ* (Luke 2:25-26). We're to anticipate the coming of Jesus when he will finally crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15), wipe away every tear (Isaiah 25:8), and the knowledge of his glory fills the earth as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

It is this *good news of great joy* that was born 2,000 years ago. As the angel of the Lord announced to shepherds "*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.*" (Luke 2:11–12, ESV)

Today, we remember that God has indeed come to dwell with us by becoming one of us. As John Chrysostom profoundly wrote, "This day He who is, is born; and He who is becomes what He was not." It is this glorious reality of the incarnation that drives us to join the chorus of angels praising God and saying: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*" (Luke 2:14, ESV)

So, let this *good news of great joy* fill your heart with anticipation for when He comes again. For He is the joy of the world, and He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found!

**Pastor Chase Sears—2023**

