

Light in the Darkness

An Advent Devotional



Contributions from the Inman UMC Church family.

May these reflections draw us nearer to the Light of Christ this Advent.

November 30

Holding Space for Hope

By Rev. Whitney Hair

You are invited to light a candle on this day to be reminded of the light that shines in the darkness.

Introduction:

Today, we light a candle to hold space for Hope. In the growing darkness of this season, and of the world, we make this small act of resistance and trust.

This flame is a reminder:
That Hope is not gone.
That Hope can be kindled, even in the shadows.
That Christ, our Light, draws near.

As you light your candle, say aloud or silently:

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."
(John 1:5)

Reflection:

Holding space for hope doesn't mean pretending everything is okay. It means making room for the possibility that God is still at work – even when we can't see it. Advent invites us to trust in a God who often moves quietly, slowly, and unexpectedly. When we light this candle, we join with generations who have waited and watched for the Light.

Prayer:

God of all hope,
In this waiting season, help me to hold space for Your Light.
Kindle hope in me, even if it's just a spark.
Remind me that You are near, even when the night feels long.
I trust in Your promises, and I wait with an expectant heart.
Amen.

December 1

The Light We Carry Together

By Kailee Black

Have you ever stopped and wondered how often God's light shines through the smallest moments and the simplest people? Advent invites us to wait, but it also invites us to see. It's not just about counting the days until Christmas. It's about opening our eyes to where the light of Christ is already glowing in our lives right now.

In the Gospel of Luke, the shepherds were out in the fields one ordinary night, keeping watch over their sheep. Nothing special was happening. Then suddenly the sky filled with light, and angels appeared, announcing the birth of Jesus. Can you imagine that? These shepherds weren't famous. They weren't powerful. They were everyday workers, just doing their job. Yet God chose them to be the first to hear the good news.

I sometimes think about what it must have felt like when they looked at each other after the angels left. Maybe there was silence for a moment, and then someone said, "Let's go." They didn't hesitate. They went to find Jesus. And after they saw Him, they couldn't help but share what they had experienced. Their hearts were overflowing with joy, and that joy spread to others.

That is what Advent is about. God's light breaking into ordinary lives and transforming them with hope, peace, love, and kindness.

So I wonder, what would it look like for you to carry that same light into your week? Where could you bring peace where there has been tension? Or kindness where there has been hurt?

Maybe God is asking you to be a little like those shepherds. To see the light. To share the light. To become the light.

Prayer:

Loving God, open our hearts to the quiet ways You shine in our world. Help us to carry Your light into dark places. Fill us with joy that cannot be contained, peace that cannot be shaken, and love that changes the people around us. In this season of waiting, let us become bearers of Your light. Amen.

December 2

First Week of Advent: The Candle of Hope

By Brad Wagner

Scripture: "*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.*" – Isaiah 9:2 (NIV)

As we light the first candle of Advent, we acknowledge the darkness in the world. It is a darkness of uncertainty, loneliness, and need that we all recognize. Into this reality, the prophet Isaiah speaks a word of radical hope. He doesn't promise that the darkness will magically vanish, but that a great light will dawn within it. This is the nature of Christian hope: not a wishful thought, but a confident expectation that God is actively breaking into our world.

This single flame on our wreath is a symbol of that dawning light. It reminds us that our United Methodist mission calls us to be more than just observers of the light; we are called to be its bearers. The "people walking in darkness" are not figures from an ancient story. They are our neighbors, our colleagues, and the strangers we pass on the street who may be living in a land of deep personal darkness.

Our journey of discipleship deepens when we choose to carry this light beyond our church walls. Being Christ's hands and feet means we become a tangible sign of hope for others. Every act of service, every moment of genuine connection, is us helping the light of Christ dawn in someone else's life. This is how we participate in the transformation of the world—one hopeful act at a time.

Prayer: *Lord of all Hope, as we begin our Advent journey, we thank You for the promise of Your light. Ignite in us a passion for our community and open our eyes to see those walking in darkness. Guide our hearts and our hands, that we might share the dawning hope of Your coming. We pray for every member of our church to find their place in this holy work, that together, we may be a beacon of Your great light. Amen.*



December 3

A Reflection on "O Holy Night" By Tim Black

Picture a little boy walking in a corn field on a cold Winter night, just outside of Dayton, Ohio, in a little township called Tipp City, and just a few days away from

Christmas. When I was a kid, about the age of 7, looking up at such a bright, starry night, I could easily pick one star that stood out. I always imagined that was heaven, shining down on us like in the song 'O Holy Night.' I would start singing that song and pray at the same time, asking God to watch over me and my family.

I even fell on my knees, thinking I would hear an angel call to me. The lyric "O night, Divine" would make me have goosebumps. Even though the air was cold, I felt a warmth inside that told me I was loved and surrounded by guidance. This

song tells a story of how the world needed help as we were in sin and error pining. We all needed a thrill of hope in a weary world. The third verse is most impactful when read in conjunction with the lyrics; it evokes a joyful feeling,

knowing that he was teaching us love and peace.



1 O holy night, the stars are brightly shining;
it is the night of the dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!
Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!
O night divine! O night when Christ was born!
O night divine! O night, O night divine!

2 Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,
with glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
there came the wise men from Orient land.
The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger;
in all our trials born to be our friend.
He knows our need, to our weakness is no
stranger.
Behold your King; before Him lowly bend!
Behold your King; before Him lowly bend!

3 Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains shall He break, for the slave is our
brother,

and in His name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
let all within us praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord! O praise His name forever!
His pow'r and glory evermore proclaim!
His pow'r and glory evermore proclaim!

December 4

A Christmas Story By Rev. Whitney Hair

Among the many Christmas movies out there, there is one that will stick with me until the day I die: *A Christmas Story*.

Growing up, my grandparents always had that movie playing on Christmas Day. Because TBS ran it for a 24-hour marathon, we would watch it multiple times. While some of my family members groaned when it came on again, others of us loved it. There was something comforting about that familiar narration, Ralphie's big-eyed dreaming for "a Red Ryder Carbine Action 200- Shot Range Model Air Rifle," and the chaos of a family Christmas that never quite went according to plan.

We knew every line, every scene: the pink bunny suit, the leg lamp, the "major award," the Christmas dinner ruined by the neighbor's dogs. No matter how many times I watched it, the movie never gets old. Maybe it's because, beneath all the humor, *A Christmas Story* captures something honest about the season: joy that doesn't depend on perfection. That family's Christmas was messy, noisy, and a little ridiculous, and yet by the end, they were still together, still laughing, still wrapped in the glow of twinkling lights and love that endured every mishap.

Every year when I see that movie, I'm reminded that Christ's coming meets us right in the middle of our own imperfect celebrations. The house might be cluttered, the meal burned, the family a little frayed around the edges but that's exactly where God shows up. The light of Christ doesn't wait for our lives to be picture perfect or camera ready. It shines through cracked places, into real homes and real hearts.

May we remember that God delights to be right here, in the middle of our ordinary stories.

Prayer:

God of joy and laughter,

Thank you for meeting us in the middle of our everyday chaos.

Thank you for light that shines through broken moments and for love that endures every imperfection.

Help us find joy not just in the perfect Christmases, but in the real ones where grace is present, laughter is holy, and Christ is born again in us.

Amen.

December 5

When the Christmas Spirit Seems Far By Allie Brisbois

It was December of 2020 when I set to my computer to journal.

Does anyone remember what that first Christmas of Covid felt like?

In our house, everyone was still home. Our kids were homeschooling or virtual schooling. We had just cancelled our family gathering at Thanksgiving. We were

waiting, not so patiently on vaccines. Friendships had been lost or forever

changed. Unlike past painful seasons, this one felt like a corporate spinning, where nothing seemed settled and no future seemed clear, promising, or good. As much as I had always loved Christmas, I just could not feel the joy and wonder

that it had always brought me.

In many ways, 2025 has felt eerily similar for me. While the reasons are different, the exhaustion has been just as real, the disappointment just as deep, and the fear for the future, just as tangible. I am guessing I am not the only one. Perhaps

you are facing the first Christmas without a loved one. Perhaps you have relationships that have been fractured. Perhaps your health is a constant concern.

Maybe that Christmas spirit seems far for you as well.

The book of Malachi, the final book in the Old Testament ends with the promise of the coming of the day of the Lord: a day when evil would be crushed, "But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall" (Malachi 4:2). This last word from the prophets was spoken, this promise of a coming messiah given, and then for FOUR HUNDRED YEARS, God's people waited.

We don't know much about what happened in those centuries, but I have to expect that God's people likely often felt then, much of what we feel now. Did God really promise? When, Oh Lord? Will I ever see this day?

Like this season in biblical history, the season of Advent is about waiting expectantly for the Messiah to come. We count down those days until we can celebrate the birth of the one who has partially and will completely crush evil and bring healing in His wings. The promise to Israel through the prophet Malachi was good news because life was not easy.

Things were not good. All was not well. They saw the evil and the wicked prospering and they needed a solution that could only come from God.

As you enter this advent season, remember this: God does not care if you come to this advent with beautiful Christmas lights, delicious cookies, or a happy heart. He simply cares that you COME. Come with the hurts. Come with the questions.

Come with the fear.

But since we know the ending, come with expectation and come with hope. Most of all, come knowing and believing that Christ alone is the One with the power to overcome the impossible and to open the door of your stall so that you might leap with joy.

December 6

Into the Heart of the Community

by Brad Wagner

The season of Advent is a time of holy anticipation. In the growing darkness, we light candles, symbols of a hope that is on its way. We wait, but our United Methodist tradition teaches us that this is not a passive waiting. It is an active preparation of our hearts and our world for the coming of the King.

When we reflect on the Nativity, we remember that Christ did not enter the world within the grand walls of a temple. He came to us in the humility of a stable, accessible to lowly shepherds in the fields. His first visitors were not the powerful, but the working people, the outsiders. This beautiful truth gives us our model for discipleship. It calls us to move with a purpose, to carry the light of Christ beyond our doors and into the heart of our community.

This is how we live out our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. It begins right here, by being Christ's hands and feet to our neighbors in our local community, meeting them where they are and sharing God's love through action. This work is not for a select few; it is a calling for all of us.

As we journey through Advent, let us pray for our church and for one another. May God stir our spirits and open our eyes to the opportunities for service all around us. We pray for all who are part of this church to participate in its life and missions, growing in faith as we do His work in our community, together. May the light we wait for be the same light we carry into a world in need of its warmth and hope. Amen.



December 7

Holding Space for Peace

By Rev. Whitney Hair

You are invited to light a candle on this day to be reminded of the light that shines in the darkness.

Introduction:

Today, we light a candle to hold space for Peace. In the growing darkness of this season, and of the world, we make this small act of resistance and trust.

This flame is a reminder:

We are choosing to believe that peace is possible;
Not because we feel it, but because Christ promises it.

As you light your candle, say aloud or silently:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

-John 14:27

Reflection:

Peace is not the absence of conflict or noise; it is the presence of Christ. In Advent, we are invited to slow down and listen for that deeper peace that the world cannot give and cannot take away.

Holding space for peace doesn't mean ignoring the stress, grief, or injustice around us. It means creating room within ourselves for God to meet us there. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, comes not to sweep away all the chaos, but to speak calm into the storm.

Prayer:

Prince of Peace,
Speak calm into the crowded places of my heart.
Quiet the noise of worry, fear, and unrest.
Make me a vessel of Your peace,
in my words, in my waiting,
in the way I love others today.

Amen.

December 8

A Perfectly Broken Gift

By Scott Ballard

Some people give wonderful gifts. They seem to know what I want before I do. My mother was that way. I am learning my daughter is, too.

Melanie is 37. She has a learning disability. Our son, Paul, has autism.

When Melanie was 10 and Paul was 2, multi-colored plastic slinkies were all the rage. Melanie wanted one and after I looked everywhere, I finally found one.
It really was kind of cute.

I called Melanie to tell her. She was thrilled. I bought it, ripped open the package and began to play with it myself. Melanie was going to love this.

But then, oops! I managed to tangle the slinky into an awful knot. I tried to untangle it. Nothing worked. Finally, I had to cut it. Now I had two halves of a slinky.
It was ruined.

When I got home, Melanie rushed to the door beaming with excitement. I hung my head. "I'm so sorry," I said. "I tangled it up and now it is cut into two pieces."

Melanie's smile actually grew. "Oh boy! Now I can have one and give the other to Paul!"

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" Acts 20:35



December 9

Second Week of Advent: The Candle of Peace

By Brad Wagner

Scripture: *"A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God's salvation.'" – Luke 3:4-6 (NIV)*

The second candle of Advent, the candle of Peace, turns our hearts toward preparation. We often think of this as an internal, quiet process. But the call of John the Baptist, echoing the prophet Isaiah, was a loud, public, and demanding one. He called for a radical reordering of the landscape to "prepare the way for the Lord." This wasn't about personal meditation; it was about active, world-changing work.

Today, that call to "make straight paths" is a direct commission for our life together as a church. The Prince of Peace is coming, and we prepare the way for Him when we work to remove the obstacles that prevent people from experiencing His love.

The "valleys" of despair and loneliness need to be filled in with fellowship. The "mountains" of injustice and need must be made low through our service. The "rough ways" of a difficult life can be smoothed by a helping hand and a compassionate heart.

This is what it means to be Christ's hands and feet in our community. It is the holy roadwork of discipleship. Our mission is to clear a path so that, as the scripture promises, "all people will see God's salvation." Our acts of service are not ends in themselves; they are signposts pointing everyone toward the peace of Christ.

Prayer: *Prince of Peace, in this week of preparation, give us the vision of John the Baptist. Show us the valleys, mountains, and rough roads in our community where You are calling us to serve. Grant us the strength to move beyond our doors and prepare the way for You, not just in our church, but in the world You love. We pray for our entire congregation to join in this work, so that all people might see Your salvation. Amen.*



December 10

Yours Truly
By Judy Roehm

My grandfather taught what me Christian Faith really was.
Diddy, as we called him, was a deeply religious man.
He was a mainstay of the First Methodist Church in Brunswick, Georgia.
He was also VERY shy.

One Sunday as he attended the service, he was unexpectedly asked to come to
the pulpit and say a prayer.
Hesitantly, he calmed his mind and began.
When he finished praying he was surprised by the gales of laughter from the
congregation.

When he returned to his pew he asked my grandmother why everyone laughed.
She told him, "instead of saying amen, you said, yours truly, C.P. Dusenbury."
He was mortified.

I hope you joined the congregation in laughter.
He used to save up all the jokes he heard all week and tell them at Sunday dinner.
Sometimes he laughed so hard his upper teeth would fall out.

Yours Truly,

December 11

Peace in the Unexpected

By Rev. Whitney Hair

Peace isn't always quiet. Sometimes it arrives in the middle of life's little surprises—the moments that make us laugh, groan, or catch our breath.

I remember one church service from my teen years. We were lighting candles as part of a special Advent service. Each person brought a small flame to the altar, a symbol of light and life. Everything was going smoothly...until it wasn't.

One teenager brought her candle forward, and as the pastor leaned in to place it on the altar, the student's hair caught on fire! In what could have been a panicked moment, quick thinking and calm action from the youth pastor put out the flame immediately. Thankfully, no one was hurt, and the candle stayed lit. The room was filled with nervous laughter, relief, and a shared sense of awe at how quickly life can take unexpected turns.

That moment taught me something about peace. Peace doesn't always mean perfection or total control. Sometimes, it's the calm in the middle of the surprise. It's the steady presence of God holding us when life takes an unexpected twist, reminding us we can handle more than we think. Peace is not the absence of small fires, spilled coffee, or awkward moments—it's the trust that God is there with us through all of them.

This Advent, we can carry that kind of peace with us: a peace that steadies us in the middle of messy, chaotic, surprising, or joyful moments. God's peace allows us to laugh, breathe, and move forward, even when life doesn't go as planned.

Prayer:

God of steady calm,

Thank you for your peace that holds us in every twist and turn of life.

Help us to trust you in the unexpected, to laugh and breathe in the middle of surprises, and to carry your peace into every day this Advent season.

Amen.

December 12

Peace Through the Holy Spirit

By Caroline Creel

"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

John 14:25-27 (ESV)

As Jesus prepared His disciples for His departure, He promised a peace unlike any the world could offer. The world's peace depends on circumstances—on calm seas, quiet days, and things going our way. It's temporary, fragile, and easily stolen by fear or loss.

But Jesus' peace is different. His peace flows from His presence, not our surroundings. It is the deep assurance that, no matter what changes around us, He remains with us through the Holy Spirit. His peace is not the absence of chaos—it's the presence of God in the midst of chaos.

When our hearts are troubled, Jesus reminds us that His peace is already ours. We don't have to chase it or earn it; we only need to rest in Him. His peace anchors us when life shakes us, calms our fears when the future is uncertain, and reminds us that we are never alone.

Prayer:

Jesus, thank You for giving me peace that the world cannot offer. Help me trust Your presence when life feels uncertain and to rest in the calm that only You provide. Amen.



December 13

Emmanuel, God with Us

By Rev. Whitney Hair

Many of you know that I am a Christmas fanatic. Yes, there are six Christmas trees in my house. Yes, I started decorating on October 12 this year. Christmas brings me so much joy – the lights, the music, the sense of wonder. But honestly, it's a miracle that I still love Christmas at all.

Like all of us, I've walked through seasons of difficulty and loss. Thanksgiving and Christmas of 2013 was one of those seasons. My aunt couldn't come up for the Thanksgiving holiday because she wasn't feeling well. She lived near Cartersville, and while we were disappointed, we assumed we'd see her at Christmas. But what began as a hospital visit on Thanksgiving turned into 32 days on a ventilator. She passed away two days after Christmas.

That year, Christmas was anything but merry and bright. Our family was scattered – my mom and her other sister spent weeks at the hospital. I stayed home to care for my grandparents in TN, who were heartbroken and unable to travel to see their youngest daughter. While the rest of the world celebrated with Christmas parades, holiday parties, and reunions, we sat in waiting rooms and by silent Christmas trees, hoping and praying for a miracle. After all that waiting, I watched the phone call come in the day after Christmas that said "there's nothing left to do. She isn't going to get better."

I thought my love for Christmas would fade after that. How could I celebrate when the season felt so full of loss? How could I survive this yearly reminder of tragedy, grief, and pain. But in the midst of that darkness, something unexpected happened. I began to understand what Scripture means when it says, "*Emmanuel*" – *God with us*.

God didn't take away the pain or undo the loss, but I found Him in the stillness, in the waiting, in the quiet tears. I realized that Emmanuel isn't just a name we sing about in December – it's a truth that anchors us when everything else feels unsteady. God is with us in the hospital rooms, in the grief, in the moments when hope feels impossible to find.

And that is the heart of Advent, in the waiting for light to break through the darkness, the promise that even when we can't see it yet, God's presence is near.

So this Christmas, as you hang lights or sit quietly in the dark with just the tree glowing beside you, remember: the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

December 14

Holding Space for Joy

By Rev. Whitney Hair

You are invited to light a candle on this day to be reminded of the light that shines in the darkness.

Introduction:

Today, we light a candle to hold space for Joy.

This flame is a reminder:
Joy is both gift and defiance.

We proclaim that despair does not have the final word.
Christ has come, and we rejoice.

As you light your candle, say aloud or silently:
"The joy of the Lord is your strength." -Nehemiah 8:10b

Reflection:

Joy in Advent isn't loud or showy. It often comes quietly, slipping in through the cracks of our ordinary lives. We see it through a warm laugh, a song on the radio, a moment of kindness we didn't expect.

To hold space for joy is to make room for delight, even when life feels heavy. It's not the same as pretending everything is okay. Advent joy is deeper. It is rooted in the good news that God has come near, and nothing can separate us from His love.

Prayer:

God of Joy,
You meet me in the ordinary and the surprising.
Help me to hold space for joy today –
not by ignoring what's hard,
but by remembering You are with me in it.
Open my eyes to wonder,
and let Your joy be my strength.
Amen.

December 15

The Quiet Faith of Mary

By Nancy Gratzer

Bible Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Have you ever imagined how Mary must have felt when the angel Gabriel appeared, calling her *highly favored* and announcing that she would give birth to the Son of God?

Mary—a young, newly engaged virgin—didn’t protest or ask, “Why me?” Her only question was, “How will this happen?” She didn’t doubt the message or the miracle; she simply sought to understand how God would bring it about. What remarkable faith!

Mary had every reason to be afraid. She knew the whispers that would follow and the looks of judgment she would receive. She risked rejection from her family and from Joseph, her fiancé. Under Jewish law, she could even face death by stoning.

Yet Mary chose faith over fear. Her response was simple, pure, and full of trust: “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” In that moment, instead of worrying about herself, Mary laid aside her fears, her plans, and her reputation, and trusted in God’s will. Later, her heart overflowed with praise in the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55), rejoicing in His mercy and faithfulness. Even in uncertainty, her soul sang with confidence.

Mary’s quiet faith still speaks to us today. When life feels uncertain or frightening, how do we respond? Do we cling to control, or do we echo Mary’s words: “I am the Lord’s servant”?

If we began each day with that same prayer of surrender, imagine how our lives might change. We would walk in peace instead of fear, trust instead of worry, and obedience instead of hesitation.

As we move through this Advent season, may Mary’s humble example draw us closer to God. May her faith remind us that true courage is not loud or bold—it is quiet trust in the goodness of our Lord.

December 16

Third Week of Advent: The Candle of Joy

By Brad Wagner

Scripture: *"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord!'"* - Luke 2:10-11 (NIV)

This third week of Advent, we light the candle of Joy. It is often called the Shepherd's Candle, and for good reason. The angel's stunning announcement of "good news of great joy" was not delivered in a palace or a temple. It was given to humble shepherds in the middle of their workday, out in the ordinary, messy fields. This detail is everything. It tells us that God's joy is not an exclusive treasure to be hoarded, but a universal gift to be proclaimed and shared with everyone, especially those on the outside looking in.

The angel's message was for "all the people," and our United Methodist mission calls us to live as if we truly believe that. The joy we have in Christ finds its fullest expression when it overflows from our hearts and into our community. Discipleship is learning to be conduits of this joy. We do this when we embody the good news through tangible acts of love, creating spaces of welcome and belonging where people can experience the joyful reality of a God who sees them and loves them.

The shepherds' response was immediate: they went to see this thing that had happened. Our response is to go and be a part of what God is doing in our world, carrying His joy with us.

Prayer: *God of Unending Joy, fill our hearts with the same wonder the shepherds felt on that holy night. Turn that wonder into joyful action. We pray for every person in our church to discover the profound, resilient joy that comes from serving others in Your name. May our life together as a congregation be a source of good news and great joy for our entire community, reflecting the good news meant for all people. Amen.*



December 17

Just A Farm Boy From Inman

by Rick Minter

Is it possible for some humble people from a small country church to become positive examples for hundreds or even thousands of people simply by living a Christ-like life?

It is, at least in the case of my great grandmother Blanche Burch Harp and her family and her fellow members of the Inman Methodist Church. Granny Harp and many of those women have been rightfully compared to Dorcas, from the Bible.

Let me tell you about her. She was intelligent and well-educated, having graduated Cum Laude from Wesleyan College. She came home to teach at the Inman school, but when she married Will Harp she became a full-time farm wife and raised six children.

She toiled for years feeding field hands daily and her large extended family on Sundays.

During the Depression, many a hobo following the railroad through Inman, got a meal cooked by Granny Harp. (Hobos had ways of letting others know where to find a friendly welcome.)

She was widowed in the 1930s, and for years never had any money to speak of. What she did have went for taxes, groceries and to the church. She never owned a car, and enjoyed few luxuries.

I never heard her raise her voice or criticize anyone.
Everyone in Inman loved and respected her.

When her grandson, the late Rev. Don Harp Jr., retired from the 8,500-member Peachtree Road United Methodist Church in Buckhead, his retirement party was held in Inman.

Those Buckhead folks, having listened to Don's stories for years, knew all about Granny Harp and the goodness of the Inman community. They had learned some powerful lessons.

Don, too, absorbed a lot growing up. Despite having a strong, lengthy resume, he has a humble inscription on his grave stone, which is adjacent to Granny Harp's. It reads: "*Just a farm boy from Inman.*"

December 18

Joy in the Ordinary

By Rev. Whitney Hair

Sometimes the most unexpected joy can be found in the simplest, most ordinary moments.

I was blessed to grow up surrounded by generations of love: four grandparents and even my great-grandmother who we called Mamaw. As the first girl born into the family in three generations, I was especially spoiled by my Mamaw. She lived in a sturdy little house built in the 1950s, and to me, it was like a magical playhouse.

Every visit was an adventure. We'd explore the attic and the old smokehouse, peer into the well, and wander through the barn. Once, we even found a litter of feral kittens and carried them onto her screened porch, spending the whole afternoon laughing and playing with them.

But the memory that still makes me smile happened one Christmas when I was about ten years old. My Mamaw and I were hauling her presents from her house to my Papaw's for the Christmas Eve party. We loaded up the wheelbarrow and made the first trip across the yard without a hitch. On the second trip, there were only two small packages left to carry.

And what does my ninety-year-old Mamaw do? She plopped herself right down in that wheelbarrow, belly-laughing and told me to wheel her to Christmas. So off we went, me pushing, her giggling, the night air full of joy and light.

That's the kind of joy Advent invites us to notice: not the loud, polished kind, but the deep, contagious laughter that bubbles up when love is present. Joy doesn't erase the aches or the waiting of the season. Instead, it slips in among them, reminding us that Emmanuel delights in our laughter and our life together.

Prayer:

God of joy,

*Thank you for meeting us in the ordinary
in laughter shared, in memories that warm our hearts,
in the playful moments that remind us life is a gift.
Help us find joy, not only when everything is perfect,
but right here, in the middle of our ordinary days.*

Amen.

December 19

Rejoice in the Lord Always!

By Deborah Morris

Philippians 4:4-7 "What does it look like to rejoice "always" and can we rejoice and find joy in hard times?"

In Philippians 4:4, Paul tells us as part of his letter to Philippi to "Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice"!

What does this look like? For me; it is spending time with God. Listening to him and letting him teach and lead me in His ways. This has deepened my faith and trust in Him. By staying focused on God; I have become eternally grateful, thankful and appreciative for all that he has provided for me. (I am not talking about just the material or monetary things; yes he did and still does make provisions for those.)

I'm talking about God's love and salvation, his compassion, kindness, strength, and peace, etc., (all undeserved by the way) but he thought otherwise. In return; I can show gentleness to all by doing little or big random acts of kindness, serving those in need, or just lending a listening ear, these are just some of ways, there is a multitude of others. As Paul tells us in (vs 5) " Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near."

This is what Rejoicing in the Lord looks like to me.

Now; can we rejoice in hard times? Yes we can, however, it is not as easy as when things are going well because we tend to dwell on the things that are troubling us and forget to take it to God.

Paul tells us in (vs 6-7) "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God , which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ." Isn't it wonderful to know that we don't have to be anxious and carry our hardships alone? I know that when I take my troubles to God, with thanksgiving, he resolves them in a much greater way than I ever could. And this has given me the ultimate gift, "The Peace of God."

And for All of this; I am eternally grateful, thankful, appreciative and blessed beyond measure. So yes, I will "Rejoice in the Lord Always!"

Praying that you will also find ways to Rejoice in the Lord Always!

December 20

The Wise Man Who Didn't Want to Be There

By Rev. Whitney Hair

When I was thirteen, I found myself unexpectedly cast as a wise man in our church's Christmas nativity. It wasn't planned. I was just supposed to assist with the kids, serving as a buddy for the kids with special needs. When the time came to put on the costumes, one boy was too afraid to go on stage. We tried to encourage him, but his fear couldn't be calmed. At the same time, he didn't want to disappoint the church because "there are supposed to be THREE wise men." With that comment, the director looked at me and said, "It should fit." Moments later, I was walking down the aisle in a borrowed costume, fake beard and all, mortified but obedient.

I didn't feel very "wise" that night. I felt awkward and embarrassed, wishing to disappear. But looking back, that moment captures something deeply true about Advent: God often invites us into His story in ways that humble us. The Christmas story is full of people caught off guard, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the wise men. None of them expecting to be center stage in God's grand plan.

And yet, they all said "yes."

That's the miracle of Christmas: that the God of all creation would humble Himself to be with us and that we, in turn, are invited to humble ourselves to be with Him. Sometimes worship doesn't look like perfection or poise. Sometimes it looks like a 13-year-old in a beard that doesn't fit, doing her best to make room for someone else to experience joy. And maybe that's what Advent is really about: making room for Christ to be born in our midst, even when it stretches us, humbles us, or surprises us.

Prayer:

Lord, help me to say "yes" to You, even when it feels awkward or humbling. Thank You for stepping into our world in love. This Advent, help me make room for You in my heart, my plans, and my service. Amen.



December 21

Holding Space for Love

By Rev. Whitney Hair

You are invited to light a candle on this day to be reminded of the light that shines in the darkness.

Introduction:

Today, we light a candle to hold space for Love.

This flame is a reminder:

Love still matters.

Love still changes things.

And the Light of Love is still shining in the darkness.

As you light your candle, say aloud or silently:

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." -1 John 4:7-8

Reflection:

Love is more than a feeling; it is the very character of God. In Advent, we remember that love took on flesh and came to dwell among us. Love came down, not in power or perfection, but in humility and tenderness.

To hold space for love is to open our hearts again to a love that doesn't give up. It's to let God's love reshape how we see ourselves and others. This love is patient, healing, holy, and it is for you.

Prayer:

God of Love,

You entered our world in vulnerability and grace.

Teach me to love as You love

not with fear or condition,

but with courage and compassion.

Let Your love take root in me

and grow into something the world can see.

Amen.

December 22

Fourth Week of Advent: The Candle of Love

By Brad Wagner

Scripture: *"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."* - 1 John 4:9-11 (NIV)

As we light the fourth and final candle of Advent, we arrive at the heart of the story: Love. The Apostle John makes it beautifully clear that God's love is not a distant theory or a passive feeling. It is an action. God showed His love by sending His Son. In Jesus, God's love became incarnate—it put on flesh and moved into the neighborhood. This is the miracle we are about to celebrate.

This divine act is the blueprint for our own lives as followers of Christ. John's logic is inescapable: "since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." This is not a gentle suggestion; it is the very definition of a maturing faith. Our love for God must also become incarnate. It must have hands to serve, feet to walk across the street, and a voice to offer comfort. This is the essence of our mission and the practical meaning of being Christ's hands and feet.

As we stand on the threshold of Christmas, ready to welcome the embodiment of Love, we are reminded that the most authentic way to worship Him is to live out His love. We welcome Love into our hearts by giving it away to our community.

Prayer: *God of Incarnate Love, we are in awe of Your incredible gift. You did not hold back, but gave us Your very self in Jesus. As we prepare to celebrate His birth, empower us to love our community with a love that is active, visible, and unconditional. We pray for our church to be known as a place where Your love is not just spoken of, but shown, as we do Your work together. Amen.*



December 23

Joseph, the Obedient Dreamer By Clay Brisbois

Scripture Reading: Matthew 1:18-24

In "Nate Bargatze's Nashville Christmas" comedy special, an angel visits the holy family with a confusing (and hilarious!) prophecy about how Christmas will be celebrated 2000 years later. In one segment, the angel tells them that there will be songs about Mary and the wise men. The father of Jesus then asks, "and will there be songs about me, Joseph?" This is followed by an awkward silence, filled with audience laughter. Why is it that our Christmas songs focus on Jesus, Mary, the wise men, angels, and silent nights, but not Joseph? What might we learn from the man with whom God entrusted his one and only son?

The gospel of Matthew tells us the most about the life of Joseph, and the stories about him are all well known. However, our familiarity with these scenes might cause us to overlook a striking pattern of God's interaction with him, as well as his responses:

1. "An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream" (Mt 1:20), and "When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him." (Mt 1:23)
2. "An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream" (Mt 2:13), and "he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt." (2:14)
3. "An angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph" (Mt 2:19), and "he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel." (Mt 2:21)
4. "Being warned in a dream", and "he withdrew to the district of Galilee." (Mt 2:22)

Similar to his Old Testament namesake, the Lord speaks to Joseph in dreams – four times! And each time he responds in perfect obedience. Some of the things God asks him to do must have been very hard to accept, such as marrying his fiancée who was pregnant before they were married, leaving his homeland under cover of darkness and moving his family to a foreign nation. Yet he seems to have acted without hesitation, moving in faithfulness from the moment he wakes. We also see this legacy of faithful obedience in the life of his stepson, Jesus, especially the night before his crucifixion when he prays, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." (Mt 26:39)

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for Joseph as we remember his faithfulness this Advent season. May his legacy also be ours as we listen for the leading of the Holy Spirit through times of prayer, the reading scripture, and dreams. And may we be people who also respond in faithful obedience, trusting You each step of the way.

December 24

Held by God's Love

By Katie Nalley

Read: Matthew 1:20-24, Luke 1:38

How often do you experience the unexpected?
Do you have times that things just do not go as you had planned?

As a special needs mom, and simply as a mother of five children, our family quite regularly experiences things not going as planned. There have been many times over the years that I have had to trust God in unexpected circumstances.

If we look at the story of Jesus' birth, it may seem that so much was unexpected and even unplanned. Joseph and Mary both had to trust God during their unexpected circumstances. Neither of them had planned for much of what they were experiencing, but it was all in God's plans.

We can find joy in knowing that everything is in God's perfect plan.

How do you feel knowing that God himself chose to come to earth in the midst of (seemingly) the most "un-planned" situation?

Do you see God's handiwork even when your own plans are "falling apart"?

*Light the candle and listen to the song "Just be Held" by Casting Crowns.
Just listen and reflect on the words in this song.*

The Lord definitely held Mary and Joseph when they felt like their world and their plans were falling apart. They trusted Him and HIS plan and delighted in the joy of the Lord.

And, what a marvelous thought that Mary and Joseph were able to also physically hold our Lord, Jesus, in His physical form.

What a true gift for Mary to be able to experience. To be held and to hold.

We too must trust that God's plans for our lives are perfect and rejoice in the joy of the Lord, even in our unexpected circumstances.

Verses to reflect on: Isaiah 26:3-4, Psalm 62:5-6, 8

December 25, 2025

The Light Still Shines

By Rev. Whitney Hair

Scripture:

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. - John 1:5, 14

Reflection:

There's something sacred about Christmas morning. Before the noise and celebration begin, there's often a quiet moment, where we sit in the mystery of it all. God has come. Light has entered the world. And the darkness has not overcome it. John's Gospel doesn't give us shepherds or a manger or angels in the sky. Instead, it gives us a cosmic picture: Light piercing through the fabric of darkness. The birth of Jesus is more than a sweet story; it's an act of divine defiance against everything that tries to steal life, hope, and joy.

And we still need that light today.

Many people carry shadows into Christmas morning: grief for a loved one who's no longer here, anxiety over a strained relationship, fear about the future, or simply the ache of loneliness. The promise of this verse isn't that the darkness disappears immediately, but that it does not win. The light keeps shining. And because of Jesus, it always will.

On this holy day, whether your heart is full or fragile, hear this good news: the light of Christ shines for you. It cannot be extinguished. Not by pain. Not by fear. Not by death. Christ has come, and the darkness has not overcome him.

Prayer:

Jesus, Light of the World, shine in our hearts today. Remind us that no darkness is greater than your love. On this Christmas morning, help us to see your light, trust your presence, and carry your hope into the world. Amen.



We Invite you to join us for Advent

11/30 Hanging of the Greens

One Service at 11:00am
Potluck after Service

12/6 Christmas Craft Bazaar and Country Breakfast

Craft Bazaar 8:00-1:00pm
Country Breakfast 8:00-10:30am

12/7 Advent Worship

One Service at 11:00am

12/14 Advent Worship

One Service at 11:00am

12/21 Advent Worship

One Service at 11:00am

12/24 Candlelight Christmas Eve

One Service at 5:30pm

12/28 Lessons & Carols

One Service at 11:00am



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