

Vintage Thoughts
An Advent Devotional



November 28

A People of Hope

**We are a people of hope.
Touched by God in the midst of our despair,
Set upon a rock of faith and blessed,
We accept deliverance,
Then stumble,
Circling the mountain,
Longing again for bondage.**

**We are a people of hope.
Waiting for redemption in the wilderness,
Longing for the promised messiah to come,
We stand before the manger,
Then turn our backs,
Narrowing our visions,
Refusing the new.**

**We are a people of hope.
Touched by God in the past, we turn to him
With confidence and seek his face---
The prodicals return,
Ashamed, forgiven, blessed,
Returning home consoled,
Crying "Abba, Father."**

Mary Livingston Roy~1979

November 29

Cyber Monday.

Barry Petrucci~2021

The second day of Advent.

The second day of Hanukkah.

Mixing and meddling between the holy and the secular

The sacred and the profane.

And we do like to keep one foot in each corner

Keeping our options open.

GMA advised this morning that **EVEN IF** a high ticket item was
not needed right now, it would be wise to
buy it now and use it later.

Good to know.

Playing on our fear of scarcity is a cultural trick
to get us feeling insecure

To get us to store up as many finite nuts as we can
for the ever-lengthening winters

And Advent says wait in expectation of God's abundant love.

And Hanukkah says that, against all odds, there is sufficient oil.

The heart hurts a bit when we consider that Cyber Monday has far
superior press than either Advent or Hanukkah.

Guess it knows its audience.



November 30

Wasn't it just yesterday the leaves were lush green
and the view of the office building obscured by such?
When summer was still fresh in mind and fall planning
found success...or "growth areas", that passing mourned.
And now on the tipping toward December and the start of
yet another waiting

A call to be calm and introspective in a journey we think we know
but know not at all...for it is new.

"Come, Thou Long Expected (but eternally surprising) Jesus"
begins its uninvited hum in my heart.

And I push back...wasn't it yesterday when the leaves were green?
How could it be that we tip toward December?

Ah, but there are still two days before the advent call
To be still...and know.

I will be ready then, I am sure.

For now, I watch the last few leaves hanging on
For dear life.

And consider throwing a few apples out on the suburban lawn for
the deer life gathered to forage for bits of something
hiding in browning grass.

Barry Petrucci~2012

December 1

Look for the Cardinal

Read: Isaiah 31:5-7

I spent a lot of time outside walking around my neighborhood, the park, and hiking in the mountains, during the pandemic. So did LOTS of other people! When the paths were crowded, the exercise was

not as enjoyable. To maintain social distance, I veered off trails to avoid traffic. When a group was close by, I waited for them to pass. One time, I saw a spot of red nearby— A cardinal was perched in a tree ahead. I've heard seeing a cardinal symbolizes a loved one who died "coming down from heaven to visit." When my son was alive, he often ran ahead on trails. He knew to stay in sight. Once we caught up, he traveled ahead.



While I worked my way back to the path, this cardinal swooped to another tree, then another. Following the cardinal, I managed to head back in the right direction. As usual, my son led the way. This time of year, our vision becomes crowded. We are over-stimulated by things. The prophet Isaiah suggests we "throw away" things. This year, make an effort to re-focus on the true meaning of Advent.

Prayer: Lord, open our eyes and hearts. Fill us with your sacred blessings. Amen.

Kelly Desclos-Estes – Glen Allen, VA

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December 3

God Answers Unexpectedly

Read Philippians 4:11-13

I wasn't ready to retire, but needed more time with family. So, I decided to go part-time with both churches I served. It was a compromise for my churches and me. I would work from home, making the two-hour drive each weekend for services. The churches would save money, and I would have time with family. Lately, I've asked God to reveal barriers to deepening our relationship, within me. One thing came to mind – financial worry. Would I have enough to do the things I needed and wanted? Would I have enough to keep up the house and car? Could I continue giving to charities I loved or continue to tithe? I hadn't realized the level of my anxiety. The next day in my devotional time, there was my sacred sign. Paul told the Philippians that he had "learned the secret to being content in every circumstance... I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength". I laughed in amazement! God's sign was clear. Follow Him and all will be well.



Prayer: Holy One, we are amazed at the signs you give us when we ask. Thank you for these sure signs of your love and sacredness. Amen.

Sybil Perrell – Lilesville, NC

December 4

Read: John 1:12-13

*But those who did welcome him,
those who believed in his name,
he authorized to become God's children,
born not from blood
nor from human desire or passion,
but born from God.*

I love this scripture. It is my favorite. I love the verses above and below as well (actually the whole book!) but these two are my favorites. They are often spoken on Christmas Eve as we welcome and celebrate the Holy Baby...a baby born with color, to immigrant parents, without a home, wrapped in rags...

And I wonder...

What does it mean to be born from God?

Does it matter that I'm white?

Or black?

Or Latino?

Or something in between?

Does it matter that my clothes are tattered and smelly?

Or trend setting and smell brand new?

Does it matter that my house is down river?

Or that it's on a lake?

Does it matter how many letters come after my name?

Or none at all?

And if it matters, to whom does it matter?

I think...

That God held my soul in strong hands

breathed me into life,

said I am a child of God,

and that I am enough.

Does anyone or anything else really matter?

Tonya Boot~2018

December 5

Advent Prayer

Creator God,

As we continue down this advent road,
help us to put the brakes on
in our lives of business
and mad preparation.

If even for just a moment,
let us stand watch – in anticipation
of the miracle that has been
repeated for “Thousands of years”,
yet still astounds us anew each year.
For the special child that is to come,
Jesus Christ – God among us.

In stillness of Advent love and light,
may we be quiet enough to hear your voice,
still enough to feel your touch,
listen as well as speak and wait as well as act.

Oh God, hear our prayer...

Amen

Pastor Sara Carlson~2013

December 6

Angels in Disguise

Read: Isaiah 12:2

Somehow, I stumbled and fell on my face in our driveway. The result: abrasions, blood, and bruises wherever I hit! My husband's call to 911 brought paramedics who took my vital signs and pronounced them good. Angels in disguise? As word spread about my fall, more "angels" appeared in the form of people who prayed for my recovery, sent cards, and one who showed up with a meal! I took each as a sign of God's care and presence. In scripture, we often read, "Do not be afraid." Like the shepherds in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night, we need assurance that angelic visits are no cause for fear. They are from the Lord, who always has our salvation at heart. Through this, I learned God is my strength and might. If I ignored the signs of God's care, I would not be as far along in my recovery as I am. In-deed, God's healing presence is available to all. And may we each recognize God's angels when they visit! Prayer: Thank you most gracious God for your presence to us, especially in Christ, who saves and heals us through the power of your Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Chris Suerdieck – Emmitsburg, MD

December 7

Detour

Read: Luke 2:15-16

My wife and I came across a detour sign blocking the road coming home from a doctor's visit. Driving less than half a mile, another detour sign loomed before us, but it headed back toward the town. I ignored that one since it was not going the direction I thought it should. I promptly got lost in a maze of off-roads before finally stumbling across a regular street several miles away, where I found yet another detour sign with an arrow. This time I followed the signs... even if I thought they weren't taking me in the direction I wanted to go. Eventually, by following the signs, we reached the main road and arrived safely home. Typical male, you may say. The problem was my attitude— not the abundance of signs along the way. Sometimes, we miss the signs and get lost. And sometimes, we see them but want to go our own way. Are you facing a roadblock in your life? Am I the only one who has ignored a sign and gone my own way when God tried to bring me home? The shepherds followed the signs that led to Jesus. Will you? Prayer: Heavenly Father, be patient and guide all of us willful, wayward children home.

Amen.

William Nash Wade – Strasburg, VA



December 8

The First Christmas Card

As we all know, the giving of Christmas cards is a tradition.
But, did you ever wonder why?
Well, I'll tell you.

Back in the Bible times, people didn't have Christmas!
They didn't know that Christmas was coming that year.
The angel told Mary about the coming child.

Well, the angel Gabriel was the first Christmas card.
And who gave the first card? God!

Well, that's the story of the first Christmas card!

Written by an 11 year old~2015

Reflect: Who or what has brought you joy?
To whom might you bring Good tidings?



December 9



Barry Petrucci
2021

The book still sits in a dusty box in the basement.

What to Expect When You're Expecting.

An Advent book of sorts.

Took a huge amount of mystery out of the period of
human gestation.

Countless would-be parents read the pages, bent countless pages,
stuffed multi-colored sticky notes into marked up pages.

Knowing what to expect is supposed to make things easier, right?

And yet.

And yet the heart races with each page of more information,
of things to keep in mind, of changes to come,
of hope and dreams.

In the end, the baby is coming one way or another.

Always has. Always will.

Still, we do like to know what to expect
and an expert is always a nice touch.

So it is with the Church.

The beginning of the Church year, Advent, places 4 weeks of
expectant hope in front of a culturally co-opted Christmas.

Advent is a time to take it back, to read the book, to get some tips,
to remind each other in the stories of the past and,

YES! We do know how the gestation period ends.

Still we are a part of that journey. It's nice to know what to expect.

December 10

Signs of Love

Read: Acts 5:12-14

This Advent season invites us to look in awe at God's ultimate sign of love, gifted to humanity— the baby Jesus. There are many signs in the Bible, and I find myself searching for new signs today. In my prayers, I often ask God to "show me a sign!" In Acts we're told, "The early Apostles did signs and wonders among the people, so that more believers were added to their numbers daily. This challenges my thinking. Rather than looking for signs from God, how can I be a sign of love to others? During this busy season, I will look for opportunities to put love into action. It may mean giving a word of encouragement to a tired store clerk, or visiting a shut-in neighbor, or giving a welcoming smile to the strangers I meet. Are you prepared to be a sign? What gift can we bring? "Love came down at Christmas." A wondrous, miraculous gift was brought to Earth! During this sacred season, I pray we stay alert to everyday encounters, where we can be a loving sign to all who come into our path.



Prayer: Lord, teach us to be signs of love so we may help new believers come to you. Amen.

Bob Brooks – Fredericksburg, VA ~2021

December 11

Change Comes...

The third chapter of Ecclesiastes tells us that for everything under Heaven there is a season and a purpose.

We are born.
We die.
We cry.
We laugh.
We seek.
We lose.
We are silent.
We speak.
We mourn.
We dance.



Like you who are reading this right now, I have experienced a dramatic change in my life in 2019. My life as I knew it on January 1 is not what it is today. And I know you can say the same. You got married this year. You got divorced this year. Your first grandchild was born this year. Your father died this year. You graduated from college this year.

You lost your job this year.

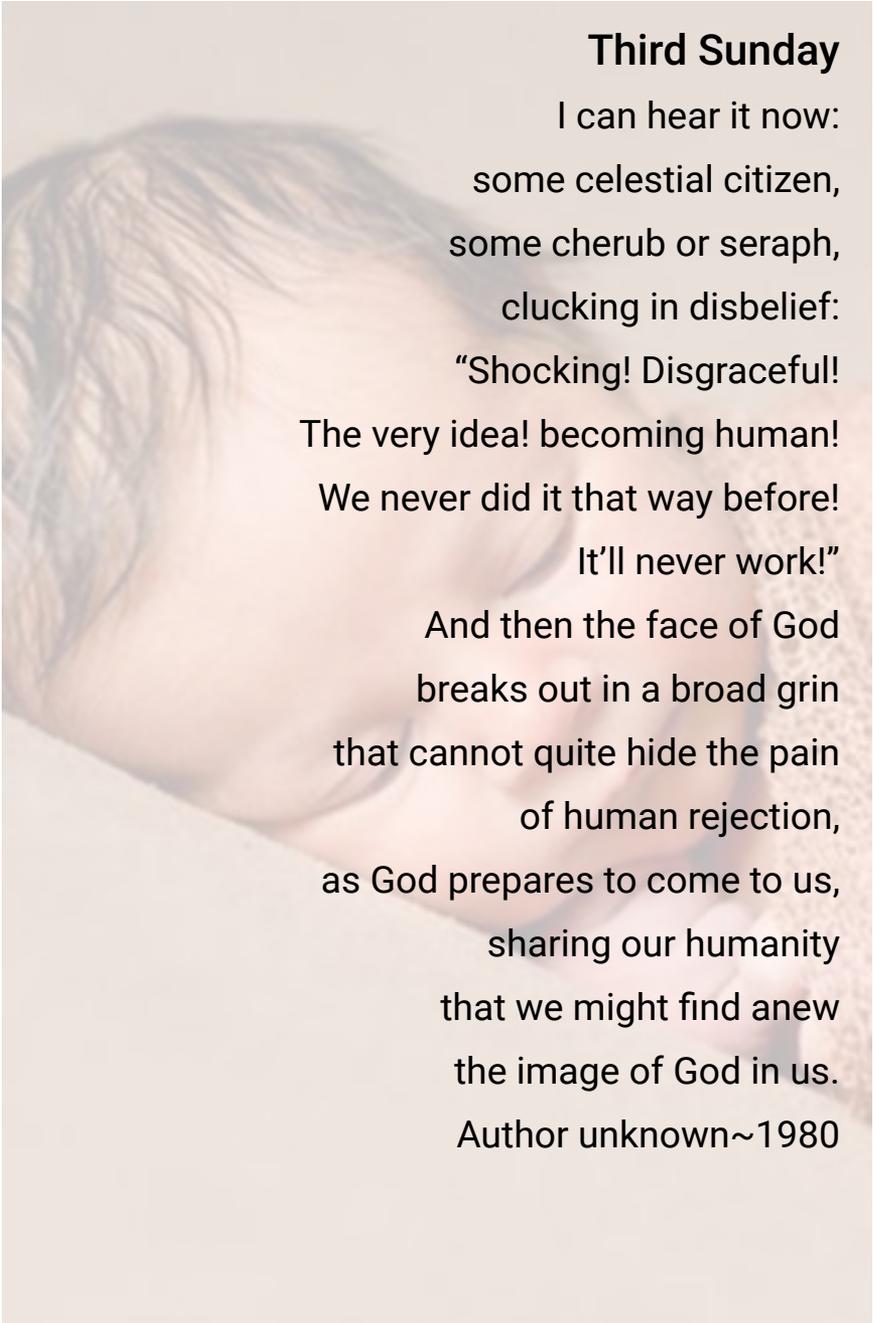
Change ... will always ... happen.

But ... Silent Night will always be sung. Families will always gather. Candles will always be lit. Children's eyes will always shimmer with joy. Mary and Joseph will always go to Bethlehem ...and the baby will always be born.

Lisa Drzick~2019

December 12

Third Sunday



I can hear it now:
some celestial citizen,
some cherub or seraph,
clucking in disbelief:
“Shocking! Disgraceful!
The very idea! becoming human!
We never did it that way before!
It’ll never work!”
And then the face of God
breaks out in a broad grin
that cannot quite hide the pain
of human rejection,
as God prepares to come to us,
sharing our humanity
that we might find anew
the image of God in us.
Author unknown~1980

December 13

2021 has been a season of waiting
In physician's waiting rooms
And examination rooms
And offices
On gurneys and tables in varied and sundry manner of medical
garb
The doctor will be right with you
Wait
MyChart spits out the news almost immediately
And best friend Google defines the indefinable
Just wait!
Wait for it with hope.
Be faithful.
Hang in there.
God never gives more that we can handle.
And there is a reason for everything.
And that which does not kill you makes you stronger.
So just wait.
And the room is so dang cold
And I have to wait in this ridiculous thing that opens in the back.
Jesus! Come on.
Yeah, it's like that.
Advent waits on emergent good news...
that comes born with a cloud bursting in joy.

Barry Petrucci~2021



December 14

A Tiny Messenger with a Big Message

Read: Isaiah 40:28-31

A couple of years ago, I had a “routine” operation that led to two more hospitalizations and illnesses of all kinds. My operation was in February. By May, I was underweight and exhausted. I barely had the energy to make it through the day. I wondered if I would get well or if life would now be like this. Every morning, I sat on our deck, watched the birds, and prayed. One day, while holding my prayer beads, my head bowed in prayer, I suddenly heard the fast beat of tiny wings. I looked up at a Ruby Throated Hummingbird hovering inches from my face. The bird darted from side to side but centered itself before me again. Clear as the sight of the little bird, these words came into my mind:



“You are small, but just like this tiny hummingbird, you are strong.”

God knew I’d been reading about hummingbirds. They fly 500 miles nonstop across the Gulf of Mexico to return from their migration. I wondered how something that small could make such an arduous journey. Now, because God gave me this sign, I knew I could make my trip back to health.

Prayer: Father, thank you for listening to our prayers and meeting us in our everyday lives.

Amen.

Regina K. Carson – Chesterfield, VA~2021

December 15

The Silent Seers

Of all the witnesses around that holy manger,
perhaps it was the animals that saw best what lay ahead,
for they had passed the aching roads, slept in the wet and
hungry fields, known the sharp sting of sticks
and thorns and curses, endured the constant bruise
of burdens not their own, the tendency of men to use
and then discard rather than meet and pay the debt of
gratitude. For them the future also held the knacker's rope,
the flayer's blade, the tearing of their bodies
for the sparing of a race.



In the shadows of that stable might it be
his warmest welcome lay within their
quiet comprehending gaze?

J.Barrie Shepherd~1979

December 16

Getting Still, Finding Peace

Read: Psalm 46:10

I was feeling “caretaker overload” and needed time away.

A friend told me about a Franciscan prayer center.

There, I could have a private room and three meals a day. It sounded like heaven. And it was, but it didn’t appear so at first. Located in a rural area without much scenic allure, the center felt isolated. The interiors were dimly lit and too quiet. Inside my room, a small lantern glowed next to a placard that read: Be still and know that I am God. I admit, I felt a little trapped and at loose ends. I looked for things “to do.” I walked the labyrinth, explored the library and browsed the book store. At dinner, I had a friendly conversation with another guest. Afterward, I scrolled the internet to find a good local hike for the next day. It took twenty-four hours, but I finally got still. I sat without a book, wandered outside with no destination, and took a nap. The quiet and absence of demands on me worked their holy touch.

Peace replaced anxiety.

Prayer: Loving God, we are busy and distracted. Grant us stillness in the midst of our comings and goings so that we may know your peace.

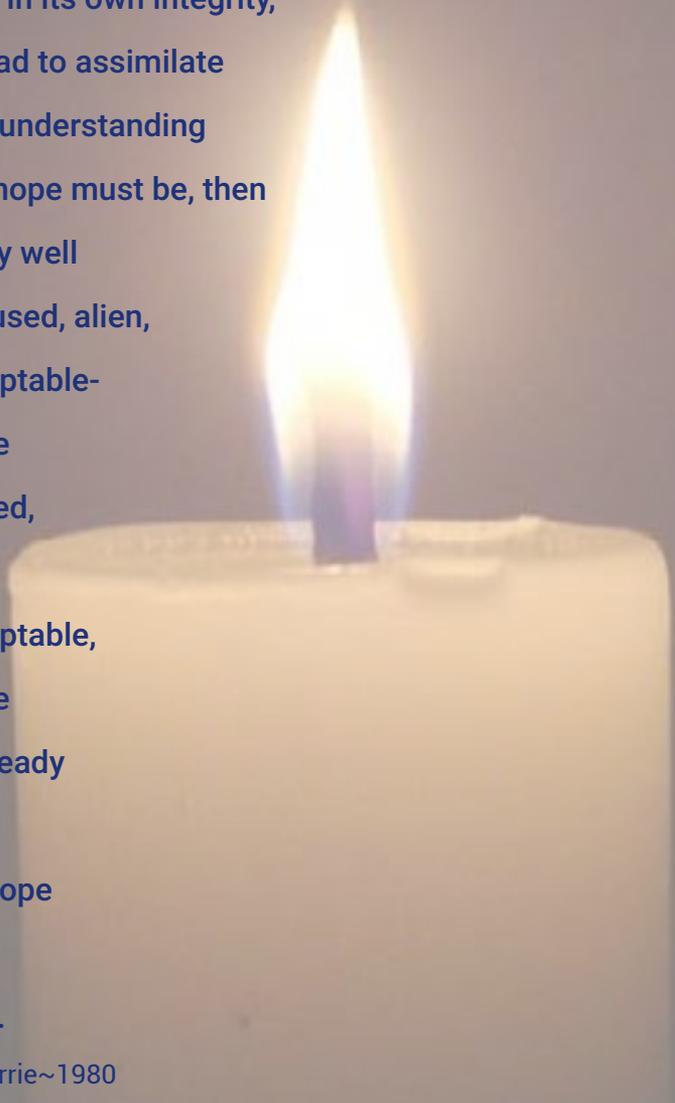
Amen.

Katherine Roberts – Chapel Hill, NC~2021

December 17

Christ has opened
a new hope for the human race,
and if we refuse to let that hope
confront us in its own integrity,
trying instead to assimilate
it to a prior understanding
of what all hope must be, then
we may very well
find it confused, alien,
and unacceptable-
not because
it is confused,
alien,
and unacceptable,
but because
we have already
decided
what the scope
and limits
of hope are.

John Macquarrie~1980



December 18

Interpreting

Read 2 Peter 1:16-21

The Peter who never had a thought he didn't shout said that Scripture is not a matter of interpretation and it's a nice thought that the Spirit stops scribal edits and manuscript errors but the Library of Alexandria burned down and the Vulgate is full of interpretation and every new take is us trying to put God's words in our mouths with aching jaws held too wide to contain them. The Peter who fell through water and three answers thought it was not human will but the work of the Spirit but we have predicted Christ's triumphant, orchestrated return at least once a generation using this interpreted text so either Peter was wrong or our mouths are far too small for the entirety of the Word that is God, that was with God, from Whom came life that the darkness cannot overcome, to Whom we stumble on weary feet with mouths full of our interpretations of how much we think we understand about this God made child, this starlit night, this enfleshed Divine.

Jenaba Waggy~2021

December 19

Fourth Sunday

Read: Isaiah 40:1

God says, "Comfort my people..."

**Comfort us when we are sad, comfort us
when we are alone, comfort us when we are rejected.**

God says, " Speak tenderly..."

**Speak tenderly to the wounded, speak
tenderly to the hurting ones, speak
tenderly to the weary.**

God offered comfort to Mary and Joseph as they
traveled on their long, uncomfortable journey.

**God spoke tenderly to the young mother
as she waited for her first birthing.**

God offers comfort when empty places
threaten to consume us.

**God speaks tenderly to us in our loneliness when people around us
seem happy and full of joy.**

As we light this fourth Advent candle, the candle of
Comfort, let us remember that God's child, born in a rough stable,
needed comfort and tenderness.

May the God of Love and Light comfort us,
and may we comfort each other.

Amen

Beth A. Richardson~1991

December 20

Christmas Prayer

Lord of Christmas, hear our prayers.
Lead us through the blizzards of this season
where forced festivities and material gifts leave us longing.

Send your voice on the wind.
Awaken us to your spiritual presence.

Warm us into your generous heart,
revealing the simple gifts of beauty and worth
that are visible to eyes that see.

Cause us to pause when the sun sets its
gold on the wings of a bird. Cause us to feel when worn vel-
vet hands reach out to us.

Calm us and slow us, great Lord, that we
may listen to souls behind faces of children
as we are woven together with
their unspoken prayers.

Lord Jesus Christ, lead us on into Christmas
where your gifts are abundant,
your gifts are made of love.

Kay F. Anderson~1992

December 21

God Emerges from Our Chaos

Read: Luke 2:16

I was serving a church in Hampton, VA when Hurricane Isabel devastated the area. Powerful winds tore down power lines and put us in darkness for days. Storm surge from the bay sent floodwaters into folks' homes. At one home, the water carried away a prized nativity set, scattering the figurines and pieces. After the storm, I noticed in the newspaper an item in the Lost and Found section: Found – After Isabel – Olive Wood Joseph – hand carving. Since there was a phone number and I wrote a religious column for the newspaper, I decided to call and see if there was a story. The person who'd found Joseph told me that after the ad ran, someone reported she found Mary in her yard. Another person in Hampton had found a Wise Man. The entire set wasn't put back together but there was hope— just as we have when putting the pieces of our lives back together after a storm in our lives. Here was a sign that God's good news endures the worst of storms. Joseph and Mary emerged from a wrecked world, the first two actors in the drama that was the birth of Jesus.

Prayer: God who emerged from the darkness of this world to save us, make us whole this Advent season. Amen.



December 22

Psalm 130

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen
for the morning,
more than watchmen
for the morning*

You are invited to meditate and journal on this Psalm
What does it mean for you to wait?
What is the hope of your heart in this season of Advent?



December 23

Normal

Read Micah 4:6-8

God promised the broken people return and I am so tired of hearing it's "back to normal" as though we even know what we used to look like, we who live in new abnormalities. Micah is remembered for justice and mercy and humility but God promises to gather the lame and "those I have brought to grief." What strange ownership, as though God is also reminded of justice, mercy, and walking humbly beside those whose normal was always destined to be broken because God promised to care for those we abandoned and the manger is not in the direction of "back."

Jenaba Waggy~2021

December 25

Read: John 15:9-11

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

IT'S CHRISTMAS! I remember as a kid loving this day. Playing with new toys, all the fun foods, jammies all day, parents relaxed as they could finally take a breath after making it through. Then, I'd wake up on the 26th and feel disappointment. Christmas was "over." This thing I had waited for was done... complete... It came and went so fast.

As I've gotten older and learned more about the holiday- in addition to learning there are really 12 WHOLE DAYS of Christmas (until Jan 6th Epiphany) and we can stretch the holiday spirit out for a bit- I've thought about our desire to anticipate but not dwell in the holiday. We have Christmas music starting sometimes before Halloween- an early and aggressive build up. And yet, most folks I know take down Christmas decorations before New Year's Day. It's interesting that when Christmas is over- we are ready to move to the next new thing.

And here in the Gospel of John, we are told to abide in Christ's love. Abiding in Christ's love makes our joy full. Abide- another word we often use synonymously is to dwell. What would it look like to be present in the joy of Christmas? What would it look like to dwell with each other in that holly, jolly holiday spirit? This is a way we can practice presence- not rushing to the next thing. And in abiding in those moments of love, we can access greater capacity for joy in our life, even those hard moments that surely spring up. Christ wasn't born for us to rush away and "move on," but for us to have life abundant.

As we enter these twelve days of Christmas,
how will you abide in Christ's love?

Pastor Jess Davenport~2021

The Christmas Star

May the light that shone
From the Christmas Star
On that night so long ago
Fall on you this Christmas night
And set your face aglow.

May it shine from your eyes.
May it rest in your mind.
May it burn in your Spirit bright.
May the Peace it spoke to a weary world,
Bring joy to your heart tonight.

Author Unknown~2012