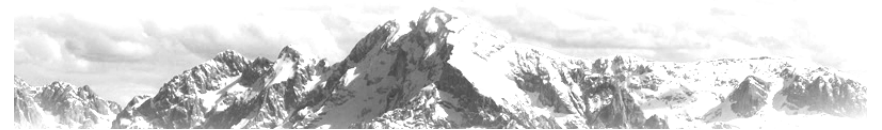


The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
in
West Virginia
presents:

Prayerscapes



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If you desire more information about the Regional Church, you are encouraged to visit our homepage, www.WVDisciples.org, or contact the Regional Minister, Rev. Thaddaeus Allen, at (304)428-1681.

for
Advent

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in West Virginia

Advent Devotional Guide

These daily readings are offered by the Order of Ministry of the Christian Church in West Virginia for your Advent journey. They may also be accessed online or subscribed for email delivery at: prayerscapes.wordpress.com

Sunday, November 30, 2008

Read Mark 13:24-37

From Rev. Richard Howard, Morgantown First C. C.

Our passage today reminds us of the original reason for the observance of the season of Advent: **preparing for the second coming of Christ.** When we pray *"thy kingdom come"* in the Lord's Prayer, we need to understand for what we are praying. According to the Book of the prophet Amos (5:18-20), the *"Day of the Lord"* will be *"darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it..."*

Mark 13 has been traditionally known as the "Little Apocalypse" of the New Testament, with the Book of Revelation being the "big" apocalypse. It is known by this name for good reason! It cautions us to be watchful and to prepare carefully and thoughtfully for the Second Coming. Doing what we are called to do by Matthew 25 would be a good start!

After reading and reflecting on Mark 13:24-37, can we still treat the season of Advent as merely a "prequel" to Christmas? The Good News in all this "doom and gloom" is that the Very Light of God brings eternal light into the darkness that life can often be. The promise of eternal life in God will be kept because of Emmanuel: "God With Us."

Our hope is in you, Eternal One, in a world dying for the salvation that only you can give. Awaken us to how your will may be done by us on earth, as in heaven.

Monday, December 1

Read Isaiah 40:1-8

From Rev. Andrea Brownlee, Cameron Big Run C. C. & Fork Ridge C. C.

A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God...'

It seems we are always preparing, always getting ready, never completely ready for what awaits us in the future. As Christians we seem to be in a continuous cycle of preparation, action, and reflection, all the while hearing the Prophet Isaiah uttering the words "Clear the way for the LORD".

As we begin this first week of Advent we do so in anticipation of the coming of our Lord. Once these weeks of preparation are over, my hope is we can still hear the prophet saying "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever." A voice is calling; take time to hear it this Advent season.

Saturday, January 3

Read Revelation 21:1-6a

From Rev. Joshua Patty, Fairmont Central C. C.

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."

As another Christmas season fades, we can take a breath from the pervasive advertising of the season. It doesn't matter which store – they all have products with "NEW in 2008" stickers. It isn't just bigger TVs or faster computers; there's NEW cookies, NEW soap, NEW clothing.

For all of the newness promised, all too often NEW is just the same stuff in different packaging. So when we read God's promise in Revelation, maybe we think it's just hype – same stuff in a different package. After all, this Christian "stuff" has been around for 2000 years. The 2008 Christmas model – "NEW in 2008" – is pretty much like the 2007 model.

But God isn't interested in giving us "limited edition" packaging. When God promises NEWness, it's not just difference, but improvement. God promises to take what is broken and make it better – to heal divisions, to comfort afflictions, to encourage the struggling, to champion the meek. To bring about a NEW heaven and a NEW earth for the children of God. To make each of us better.

As we move from this season of light into a NEW year, let's not let our "NEW in 2009" model of being Christian look like the "NEW in 1973" model. Instead, may we experience God's promise – "I make all things NEW" – and be changed by God's grace and bathed in God's love this NEW year.

Refresh me for this new season of life, loving God. Improve me through your grace that I might live more abundantly in the newness of life that you promise me, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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living reminder of Jesus words, “Not everyone who calls me “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven.”

On the other hand, the story reveals that our relationship to Jesus involves love in our dealings with others when the Lord comes to us. Jesus came to be the Savior, and a part of salvation is living it out in love. The simple command of Jesus is to “love one another.”

We have come to both the stable and the cross and experienced the love of God in Christ for salvation. That gracious gift is lived out not only in our life of faith, but also a life of love for those around us.

Help me, O God, to live out Christ’s example of love and faithfulness in this new day and throughout the year.



Friday, January 2

Read Psalm 98

From Pastor Rae Browning, Cumberland, MD First C. C.

I can’t sing alone in public. But, I love to sing. Sometimes, I’m off key, sometimes I lose my place and sing the next line when others are singing a line above. But, I love to praise God in song.

I wish at times that I had learned more in music, but I know since I didn’t that I can still sing and praise God. I thank Him in all I do. I praise Him for what He has done.

Help me to shout joyfully that my salvation is in Jesus, my Savior. Amen

O Lord, prepare in me a highway for your coming. Straighten out my crooked places, and give me a vision of your promises fulfilled in your Son Jesus Christ.

Tuesday, December 2

Read Isaiah 40:9-11

From Rev. Dr. Larry Grimes, Beech Bottom Community C. C.

We were climbing slowly out of the deep valley under heavy canopy. It was dark there beneath the trees. We could feel the valley rise step by step. Our thighs loosened. The pain left. The trail flattened and ran straight along a ridge. Then, to our right, we saw it. Where trees had been the full sky was alive with light. Stars. Galaxies of stars. We walked out onto solid rock, stood, stared into the bright. The moon hung in crescent, the love star reached down from beneath it. We put down our packs there on the rocks. Pulled out a loaf of flat bread, broke it and ate. Then we slept in the soft glow, waking in crisp dawn looking down into a meadow where a young boy carried a lamb in his arms. Behind him the ewe followed toward the open door of a barn.

Here is your God!

My God, here is your child. Carry me close to your heart, as I open my life to Christ’s coming!

Wednesday, December 3

Read Psalm 85:1-7

From Rev. Magdalyn Sebastian, Wheeling First C. C.

Restore us again, O God of our salvation.

Late at night she paced the house. Raggedy nightie. Christmas lights blinking around the windows. The hum of the refrigerator and the ticking of the clock her companions in this lonely ritual.

The problems of the day, of her life, weighed on her stooped shoulders. Her mind ran repeatedly over the worst of the “what if’s” - those things that seemed inevitable, impossible, and immutable.

After she chased her problems around in her mind for the hundredth time, she sat on the worn recliner. With head in her hands, she cried, “I can’t do this, Lord! Help me. Save me.”

The holiday season seems to amplify our life issues: not enough

money for heat or gifts, the empty chair of our lost loved one, the child lost to drugs or alcohol or worse.

During this Advent season we await to embrace the Christ child who will restore us, who will make us whole. Our problems may still confront us the Christ child will save us from despair, allowing hope to wash over us.

Restore us O Lord. Make us whole. Help us to remember your saving acts and be filled with hope.

Thursday, December 4

Read Psalm 85:8-13

From Rev. Dawna Watkins, Bluefield, WV

You know that excited feeling of rediscovery in rereading an old favorite book; one you haven't read in years. It seems familiar but you had forgotten the details so there are new insights. That's the excitement of the Advent Story for me; rediscovering the details.

If we read this entire Psalm, there is a prayer that we as children of God be forgiven of our sins and be restored. But in this focus at the end, we reclaim the peace, hope, love and joy of Jesus' message.

While you're rereading the scriptures that make up the Advent and Christmas Story, watch for the joining of steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness and peace. In other words, count blessings and see where that path leads.

God of life, in your sight everything old is new again. Help me to hear with new ears, see with new eyes, experience with a new heart the fulfillment of your promises in Christ Jesus.

Friday, December 5

Read 2 Peter 3:8-15a

From Pastor Rodney Hubbs, McMechen First C. C.

Can we remember how hard it was to wait for Christmas morning when we were children? It seemed like an eternity, with our parents telling us to be "good" or we would get coal in our stockings. It was hard to be "good" that long.

Sometimes when we see all the troubles and trials around us we tend to think that the world is coming to an end. However, in 2 Peter 3:8 he tells us that a thousand years is like a day to our Lord. We need to realize that our God is a very loving and patient God. He wants everyone to repent and come to Him.

Just like the children waiting in anticipation for Christmas, so should we be waiting in anticipation for the Lord's second coming. We need to tell everyone about our Lord and Savior and live our lives in a manner that the world will know that we are God's children.

God, grant us patience while we wait our Lord's second coming.

Tuesday, December 30

Read Titus 3:4-7

From Pastor Rae Browning, Cumberland, MD First C. C.

Eternal life is my inheritance, and can be yours. I am saved by the grace of God through Jesus when I accepted Him as my Lord and Savior. My life would be lost in all that I do if I would not have come to the table with Jesus.

Each Sunday when we gather around the table of the Lord, We remember the sacrifice he made for all. We beg for forgiveness for the wrongs we do, and ask that mercy be granted to us and all who are God's children. The saving grace given to all of us through God's love and kindness in sending His Son is the greatest gift that we can receive.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for life which is made new by your gracious invitation. Amen.

Wednesday, December 31

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

From Rev. David T. Chafin, Deputy Regional Minister

This text is not just "for the *Birds*." It speaks of life in the new millennium, just as well as it did in the '60's and in Solomonic times. For all our sophistication, we still partake of the human cycles of birth and death, laughing and weeping, sowing and reaping, war and peace.

On the cusp of a new calendar, I can't help but wonder how all these things call to *us* to "turn" (a word not in the text, but certainly in the folk hit that we remember). It may not be not so much in the extraordinary events of our lives that we are summoned to turn our lives toward the God, as it is the mundane.

The writer could think of nothing better for us than to "be happy, enjoy ourselves,...eat and drink, and take pleasure in our work." Maybe those are the noblest goals and the best stewardship of our time we can imagine for 2009. Perhaps living such a life would truly reflect a turning for us and for earth's history.

May this new year be blessed with a new awareness of how blessed we are in the mundane, simple things, O God.

Thursday, January 1, 2009

Read Matthew 25:31-46

From Rev. Donald Snyder, Beckley First C. C.

Whether it is "evens and odds" or "rock, paper, scissors" kids know how pick teams. Being on the right team is important, but being picked first even more so. In this parable of Jesus the Lord is picking "teams," but not so much for competition as reward.

The harsh reality of the Lord's word sends a chill down most of spines because of the finality of them. On the one hand this parable is a

Make me anew, O God, as I embrace the Holy Child in gratitude and wonder.

Week 5

Sunday, December 28, 2008

Read Hebrews 1:1-4

From Pastor Judy Bennett, Wheeling Island C. C.

God still speaks to us today – on that we would probably agree. But in this Advent season, are the prophets' voices loud and clear or drowned out by the extraneous noises of everyday life?

During this season in which we commemorate the coming of Jesus, the Son of the living God, into our lives – does it make a difference? Or are we like Dickens' Scrooge and exhibiting a "Bah! Humbug!" attitude?

We are the prophets. Let us spread the news far and near. Christ was born! Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again.

Enable me, O God, to sift through the noise of the season and listen to the quietly powerful sound of your coming.

Monday, December 29

Read Isaiah 52:7-10

From Rev. Magdalyn Sebastian, Wheeling First C. C.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation.

What makes holy ground holy, and can holy ground consecrate those who stand upon it?

Our passage from Isaiah suggests that mountains - already regarded as holy places that transcend the earthly and heavenly realms - have the ability to make holy the one who stands in that transcendent place bringing Good News.

In a post-Easter light, we read into this passage the joyful anticipation of salvation through the person and life of Jesus Christ - the Ultimate Good News. But what about those who have not heard? Does not this passage suggest that we are called to announce the Good News of peace and salvation through Jesus? Could it not also suggest that our faithful proclamation from the sacred mountain top has a consecrating effect on us? Holy, beautiful feet.

Lord God, help us not to keep Good News to ourselves this Advent. May we proclaim the coming of the Lord standing on beautiful, mountaintop feet.

Saturday, December 6

Read Mark 1:1-8

From Rev. Del Parris, Lost Ck., WV

Most often my Advent reflections and prayers have focused on exercises to prepare my own heart and life for receiving Christ as He comes to me in the Christmas story. However, as I read Mark's opening verses, the quote from Isaiah caught my attention: "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare the way."

As I reflected on these words my thoughts turned to how in this Advent season, and in my daily life, do I prepare the way for Christ to be present to others? Do my thoughts, words and actions offer others an opportunity to experience the grace and redeeming love of God as made so clear in the birth of Jesus?

Make a list or identify some specific ways that you can be a messenger who "prepares the way of the Lord."

How can I be your messenger, O God? Teach me now, that the windows of grace may be open in me.

Week 2

Sunday, December 7, 2008

Read Isaiah 61:1-4

From Rev. Aaron Watkins, Bluefield First C. C.

About once or twice a week I hear the doorbell ring at the backdoor of our church and someone who is in need is asking for help. We do our best to provide assistance when we can.

Isaiah 61:1-4 says that "the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners." Christ came to this the world to do just that.

This Advent season let us celebrate what the birth of Jesus means for us and what we can do to glorify His coming.

O Lord, your world is hurting, but you have called and anointed your people to heal. Empower me to lend my hands to your healing work in Christ Jesus.

Monday, December 8

Read Isaiah 61:4-11

From Rev. Joshua Patty, Fairmont Central C. C.

Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines; but you shall be called priests of the Lord.

We don't always think about it in the bustle and stress. We ignore the check-out clerk at the grocery; we grumble that the fry cook

doesn't move fast enough. We wish the driver in front of us WOULD PICK A PARKING SPOT ALREADY!

It's not that we aren't nice people. But somehow the season of light and joy brings out our frustrations against *them*. Don't *they* know how busy we are!?

Isaiah's prophecy is about divine justice in the future – the day of the Lord. But we don't need to wait until the end of days; we are surrounded by strangers in our everyday lives.

While we are out, putting together Christmas parties, buying Christmas gifts, eating a quick lunch, we are served by these strangers and foreigners. Maybe we know some of them – friends of our kids – but not all of them. And we wish they'd hurry up. We have *important stuff* we need to do.

Maybe those who serve us, feeding our flocks, growing and serving our food, should not be strangers and foreigners, but friends and co-workers – fellow priests of the Lord.

Gracious God, as I go about my daily tasks, make me less demanding and more encouraging of others. Allow me to reflect the hope of your presence in this world.

Tuesday, December 9

Read Luke 1:67-79

From Rev. Magdalyn Sebastian, Wheeling First C. C.

...to give light to those who sit in darkness . . . to guide our feet into the way of peace.

My grand scheme was for the women to walk labyrinth at night up at the Mount. Using the headlights of the bus, votive candles, and flashlight we were to walk the winding path in prayer.

In an effort to “help” I announced that I would show the women where the path began, which way to go. But in the shadows, I soon became confused and spun around in place like some cartoon character.

My sisters in Christ, most of whom had never walked labyrinth, helped me see the stone that outlined the beginning of the path. Together we walked, one after the other, foot following foot, around and around towards the sacred center. Confusion gave way to peace. Chatter gave way to silent prayer.

Christ's light shines brighter than any candle or flashlight. Christ's light often shines through those that God places as our companions along the way.

Lord we await the coming of the Christ who will show us the way. May we move from the darkness of our lives towards your brilliant, saving light.

Thursday, December 25: Christmas Day

Read Luke 2:8-20

From Rev. Thaddaeus B. Allen, Regional Minister

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

The sights and the sounds and stories are sacred and alive in this text and in our lives. Today we celebrate the gift of God in flesh, the gift of Jesus. May we see God again, and may we hear God again, and may we tuck into our hearts some stories worth remembering again. Where will you see God today? What sounds are pure gifts? Are there any memories and new experiences that today can be claimed as God-given?

It is Christmas! Let today be a day where the stress and strain dissolve. Let today be a gift where see and hear the Holy One in our midst. It is Christmas and God loves us. This we have been told, and we know it anew.

Help us to see you today, Dear God, in new and powerful ways. Thank you for coming to live among us, and thank you for loving us. Help us to reveal your grace in our flesh as we share your truth with the world.

Friday, December 26

Read John 1:1-14

From Rev. David T. Chafin, Deputy Regional Minister

Perfect mystery, yet nothing could be plainer to our eyes and ears this day: God's glory is revealed in the living Word. The One who was to come has now appeared, and we have witnessed the appearing in the most awe-inspiring and yet simple way—the birth of a baby.

Strange, isn't it, that God would make such a low-key entry into our lives? And yet it makes a lot of sense. This is the same God who has come among us throughout history in a myriad of quiet ways, inspiring wonder where we might never expect to experience it, bringing life into being with only a word! Be awake to the wonder with me.

We praise you, God of Glory—high and lifted up, and walking here, earthbound among the lowly—for your living Word, alive and with us now and forever!

Saturday, December 27

Read Luke 2:22-40

From Pastor Judy Bennett, Wheeling Island C. C.

A baby in the house! There's nothing quite like it. Mary, Joseph, Simeon and Anna, each with their own deep emotions and amazement, just as we when we beheld the miracle of new life.

In this holy season, we need to encounter the Baby anew. Meet Jesus again for the very first time. Allow the Spirit to speak to us through the mystery of it all. Hold the Baby so close that we become as one. Allow our eyes to see and our minds attempt to understand the salvation that God has prepared for all people.

Simple exchange of values—you give them money, they give you
The wool of your daydreams full of moths,
stuff you don't need, needs you can't stuff

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Sing the laughter of children chasing bright butterflies
Sing the smell of new bread broken and shared
Sing one neighbor driving another from the hospital
Sing the angels song to the frightened maiden

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Sing the song of angels everywhere: the song of soup bubbling
The clatter of food cans, the song of heifers and ducks among the
hungry
Sing the sound of hammers and saws, of cross-beams raised
Sing the joy of blood given drop by saving drop

"The Lord is king!

The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.

*Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.*

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

And the people say—Amen!

Wednesday, December 24: Christmas Eve **Read Luke 2:1-14**

From Rev. Thaddaeus B. Allen, Regional Minister

The image of a multitude of voices simultaneously praising God is a particularly beautiful one. There is something quite holy about losing ourselves into the company of our brothers and sisters in the praise of our God. I wish there were more of these moments in life!

Tonight Christians around the world will be worshipping with one voice. Our sanctuaries will be a little bit fuller, and our voices will join easily with others as we sing wonderful hymns, and confess anew that Christ is Lord.

Christmas Eve seems to be one of those moments in life when all is well. I look forward to joining my voice with yours as we worship on this Holy Night.

Fill us with your praises, O God, that we may join our hearts and voices with the great company of heavenly hosts and your people of good will on earth, singing "Alleluia" for your Ultimate Gift! May we be filled anew with the wonder of this night, and be born anew in the likeness of the Christ of Bethlehem. Amen.

Merry Christmas!

Wednesday, December 10

Read Psalm 126

From Rev. Richard Howard, Morgantown First C. C.

The LORD has done great things for them.

A simple statement, yet containing such great promise! When we reflect on all that God has done for us and Creation itself, the Advent season reminds us of the greatest gift of all: the very Son of God. It calls us to lives lived in gratitude to God, to live out our time with an "attitude of gratitude."

Verse after verse of Psalm 126, when viewed through a Christian lens, offers many reasons for celebration of the gift of the Son of God to the world. With this gift, the fortunes of Zion have been restored, mouths are filled with laughter, and we cannot contain our joy but must shout it out to the entire world.

It reminds us that though we are in a time of transition, the Kingdom is at hand, and peaceful victory has been secured through the ever growing distribution of God's Justice. It also reminds us that the in-breaking process will not be complete until the Son of God returns in triumph.

So, while there may still be weeping in the world today, we can take some comfort that it is part of the sowing process that will inevitably lead to a joyous harvest with much joy and celebration at the advent of the fullness of the Realm of God.

Train us as patient servants, O God, to look forward with hope to the joyful harvest of peace for those who love you.

Thursday, December 11

Read Isaiah 40:25-31

From Rev. Donald Snyder, Beckley First C. C.

These were difficult times for the people of Israel. Whether prophecy foreseen or prophecy of hope Isaiah seems to be saying to God's people, "In the light of what I have said, how can you believe God is ignoring you? Don't you understand? God is utterly other than we are. The Lord does not work in our time table, and He has none of our limitations. But He is at work and you can depend on him!"

These are difficult times for the people of God, regardless of who is to blame. Change is coming, but change is fickle. Hope is not.

The meaning of Christmas, to which we draw near, is not based the profit margin of retailers, the wealth of gifts we shower upon one another, nor even upon hope in transition. Our hope is in the great constant: God.

When you feel all of life crushing you and you cannot go another step, remember that you can call upon God to renew your strength. Faith

and hope in the one who is Immanuel allows His strength to become our strength.

Inspire my hope, O God, my Strength. Give to me the resolute confidence in your present power.

Friday, December 12

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

From Rev. Del Parris, Lost Creek, WV

As I read these words of Paul to the Thessalonians I am reminded of how important habits are to my daily life. Of course there are helpful habits that I hope to maintain and unhealthy habits that I strive to break, but habits of all kinds set the direction of our lives.

If we are to be directed toward receiving the gift of God in Christ, Paul offers us some of the “helpful” habits. Developing the habits of prayer, of gratitude and joy in living, of being attentive to God’s spirit, and of being committed to what is right and good will go a long way in making sure that our hearts are open to the grace and love of God.

We await your coming with eager hearts, O God. Give us grace and courage to live as those who know you and love you.

Saturday, December 13

Read John 1:6-8, 19-28

From Rev. Dawna Watkins, Bluefield, WV

I’ve been traveling a lot and noticed there are sometimes confusing signs for road construction sites. In one state the signs say, “Road Work Next 17 Miles” and it means that there are 17 miles worth of construction ahead. In another state it means that we can expect construction in 17 miles.

Leaders can sometimes read the signs and get confused. But one thing I’ve learned about road signs is that eventually—the closer you get—the clearer it becomes. When the Jewish advocates get closer to John, a witness to the coming of Christ, they are able to see the signs more clearly.

As we get closer to the Christmas message during Advent, try looking more closely at all the signs of Christ’s message for your life.

Help me to see the signs of Christ’s coming, O God, and to understand from them what you are calling me to do.

Please remember to pray for your Regional Church and its ministries as you prepare to give your Christmas Offering.

In the movie *Preacher’s Wife*, Whitney Houston croons “*who would have imagined a king.*”

As a parent I remember that first embrace of my child, wet from the womb, amazingly made. I remember my wonder at who was this new person and who would they be. As they grew and now as young adults I wonder at who they are and who they will be.

I imagine Mary first holding Jesus, wet from the womb and wondering who is he and who will he become. Knowing his divine conception, her questions must have loomed even larger. Did she remember the Isaiah scripture? Could she imagine a King?

Gracious One, as we await, help us to reflect on who Jesus is in our lives and who we would like to become through Christ. Help us to grow into the people you imagine.

Tuesday, December 23

Read Psalm 96

From Rev. Dr. Larry Grimes, Beech Bottom Community C. C.

“The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.”

We watched it fall all morning
Until the bell closed out the day.
We saw the deep descent, the jagged graphs
Heard deep voices proclaim calamity
1.2 trillion dollars . . . gone, lost, disappeared

And the people say: *“The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.”*

And it kept falling day after week, falling
In London, Paris, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Moscow
We saw them confer, wearing black suits, grave
Faces, speaking of credit flow, cash infusions

*And the people say: “The Lord is king!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.”*

*Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.*

Be not anxious about tomorrow. Pray each day for daily bread.
Look to the babe at the star’s end, a mongrel in a manger.
Click the remote. Darken the screen. Hear the still small voice—
it speaks in the whirlwind, to the whirlwind, from the whirlwind

*Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.*

Simple exchange of values—Wal-Mart, Macy’s, Neiman-Marcus

Week 4

Sunday, December 21, 2008

Read Ezekiel 34:11-31

From Rev. Dr. William B. Allen, Regional Minister Emeritus

"For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out... You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture and I am your God, says the Lord GOD."

This is great Advent passage, speaking of God's coming into the world to rescue God's people. And that is exactly what Advent is about. God *comes* to us.

This is an assurance of rescue and abundance for the people of God. It is also a wake-up call! While God will lovingly take care of the downtrodden and the upright; God will also "take care of" those who abuse others and despoil the earth, only in a different way.

So we have a promise of redemption. We also have a clarion call to treat people well and to honor the creation.

When we deal with people it will be well to remember this judgment: "Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep."

When caring for the earth, this is a pertinent comment: "Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? When you drink of clear water, must you foul the rest with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have fouled with your feet?"

Advent is a very good time for us to contemplate our lifestyles as we await once more the coming of the Lord.

We will want to be those of whom it is said: "I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild animals from the land, so that they may live in the wild and sleep in the woods securely. I will make them and the region around my hill a blessing; and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing."

Open my eyes, Lord, to the suffering of your creation, and my ears to your clear call to speak for justice and peace, in the spirit of Christ.

Monday, December 22

Read Isaiah 9:2-7

From Rev. Magdalyn Sebastian, Wheeling First C. C.

"For a child has been born for us, a song given to us . . . Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6

Week 3

Sunday, December 14, 2008

Read Isaiah 11:1-9

From Rev. Jayne Chafin, Parkersburg, WV

I am a visual learner. I have to see things in picture or word before they make sense to me. So, I guess it's no surprise that this passage from Isaiah, with all of its word-pictures, is one of my favorites.

In these nine verses comes the hope of the one to come, what his ministry and teaching will be about, and how all of God's creation will live together in love and peace. Nine short verses that make me slow down in this often hectic season and look, and wonder at what God can do.

What a wonderful hope for us, that "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord." Thanks be to God!

Make me aware of the wonder of your coming, O God, and help me to see anew your vision for a new creation.

Monday, December 15

Read 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

From Pastor William Pollack, St. Albans First C. C.

The coming of the Christmas season is filled with a holy hope. During the time of Advent preparation, we are reminded in today's scripture that God keeps His promise. He reminds David, "Your house and kingdom will endure before Me forever..." (v. 16a)

As we know from our understanding of history, God fulfilled His promise to David through the birth of Jesus, the Christ.

Let us hold to the same confidence David had in his Lord, as we celebrate the days of this season and look for the hope realized in our lives at the coming of the King in all His glory!

Lord of Life, inspire new hope in me as these holy days unfold, that I may behold your coming in this time and in all times.

Tuesday, December 16

Read Luke 1:47-55

From Rev. Bob Brooks, New Martinsville First C. C.

We know very little about Mary. Mark skips the birth of Jesus altogether, and Mark's Jesus seems indifferent to his mother. Matthew's Mary is mute. She is present, but silent. Paul thinks it worth remarking that God's Son was "born of a woman," but he never mentions her name. Thank goodness we have Luke. Luke's Mary does not keep silent. Luke's Mary has something to sing about.

In the Magnificat, Mary tells of her Savior who has "looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant." Mary is poor and pregnant and unmarried. But she sings! Why? Because Luke knows that Mary, poor and pregnant, is favored by God. So, she sings. Mary sings a song of freedom for all who, even in poverty still believe that God will make a way where there is no way. She sings of a God who "has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts and lifted up the lowly." Mary rejoices in a world turned upside down by this birth.

I wonder - Can we sing Mary's song?

Open my lips, O God, and my mouth shall show forth your praise.

Wednesday, December 17

Read Psalm 89:1-8, 13-18

From Rev. Andrea Brownlee, Cameron Big Run C. C. & Fork Ridge C. C.

When was the last time you proclaimed God's steadfast love and faithfulness? As the holiday season quickly rushes by an array of tasks pile up. We can get so busy with the Christmas holiday that we forget the weeks leading up to this one special night are just as holy.

The weeks of Advent leading to Christmas are truly Holy-days of waiting and preparing. We must not forget to keep our attention on God.

In the Psalm for today David reminds us of the covenant God made with him. We also hear David singing praises; praises he vows will be sung to all generations. In the midst of the hustle and bustle of the holidays (Holy-days) we must remember to continue singing our praises to God, for nothing can compare to the faithfulness God has shown us.

When was the last time you proclaimed God's steadfast love and faithfulness?

O God, stir within me a prophetic word that will bring others to a new awareness of your steadfast love and faithfulness.

Thursday, December 18

Read Psalm 89:19-26

From Rev. Dawna Watkins, Bluefield, WV

The words "steadfast love and faithfulness" jump out at me. Mostly because when I hear them I think of the Hebrew word *hesed*, covenant loyalty.

God's promise to us, our promise to God, and our promise to each other is this steadfast love and faithfulness. Only sometimes we forget and need to be reminded what that covenant entails (like renewing our wedding vows). Covenant loyalty is about who we choose (and who chooses us) to live with as equals; it's a covenant of equality.

David chose to be anointed into this covenant and so did Jesus. Advent, in a way, is an announcement (invitation) for all of us into *hesed* and Equality.

Help me to experience anew your calling and anointing within the covenant of your people, God of justice and of love.

Friday, December 19

Read Romans 16:25-27

From Rev. Aaron Watkins, Bluefield First C. C.

"So that all nations might believe"--what exciting and hopeful words that Paul expresses to us in the final doxology of the Book of Romans.

Would it not be wonderful for all people on this earth to believe in the eternal God? Is it possible? Yes! For this is what God wants. This is what God commands.

The words of the Gospel, whether written by Matthew, Mark, Luke or John give us the truth, the truth that Christ lives, not only on high, but within us and amongst us and is worthy of praise.

May all Nations believe in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Saving God, may I bear witness to my faith in you through the Christ who lives in me, that all might believe.

Saturday, December 20

Read Luke 1:26-38

From Rev. Sandy Downs, Parkersburg First C. C.

The Beatles weren't trying to create a new Advent hymn when they recorded "Let it Be." Yet, this is the very message that Mary replied to Gabriel.

These are amazing words of wisdom from a young girl in a very troubled location and time. There is peace in these words. There is power in these words.

We all have difficult times. We all get called by the Lord to do great things for God that seem totally impossible by human standards.

We live out our faith when we tell God, "Let it be unto me as you have said" and then, like Mary, go and do God's will.

Help me, Lord, as you have helped your servants from all times and places, to receive your word and your will, and to do it.