

The light has come. Let our growing and our living into God's new day glorify the One who gives it to us!

*Bless the birthing of this new year, O God of grace,
Maker of all our days,
for you have prepared the way in us to live them graciously and fully
in the light of Jesus our Christ and our Redeemer.*



We give thanks for your support
of the ministries of the
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
in West Virginia
through the Christmas Offering,
and for your faithful support
of Disciples Mission Fund throughout the year.

© 2009 Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in West Virginia
All rights reserved.

Permission is granted for non-commercial duplication, to include this copyright notice
and attribution of authorship, where given.

For more information, contact Rev. David T. Chafin, Editor: dchafin@wvdisciples.org

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in West Virginia
1402 Washington Avenue - Parkersburg, WV 26101

Visit Prayerscapes.wordpress.com or www.WVDisciples.org
to read online or subscribe by email

Advent Prayerscapes:



*In the fullness
of
time...*

Created by
The Order of Ministry
of the
Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
in
West Virginia
2009

Friday, Dec. 25

Christmas Day

Read John 1:1-14

from Rev. Thaddaeus B. Allen, Regional Minister

And we are loved so much, that God chose to live among us.

In the midst of our mess and confusion, God lives with us still. Let there be no doubt: In the truth of the Incarnation (our Lord putting on flesh – taking up humanity) God “gets us,” as my youngest wisely says. This is the Good News and this is Christmas.

On this holy day, we celebrate with great thanksgiving that Christ has marked the world and all of creation. We affirm again, and we announce to all who have ears to hear, that we are God’s children, through the power of God made known in Jesus.

Light has arrived on the scene! Dark places and scary scenarios beware: In Jesus we are free to live in the light. The light of Christ illumines our way and warms us on the journey of life.

On Christmas we celebrate the Incarnation of our Lord. We are not alone. God is with us.

*Gracious and loving God, with thankful hearts
we offer praise for the Word made Flesh
and for your very real presence among us.
Give us courage to receive the light of Christ,
and strong voices to announce its presence.
Live within us, today and always,
and may we live with you now and forever. Amen.*

Saturday, Dec. 26

Read Luke 2:22-40

from Rev. David T. Chafin, Deputy Regional Minister

As the new year encroaches upon this old one, we are challenged by the startling news of the Christ’s appearing to take on a life-long labor: Growing in wisdom through the grace of the One who made us.

What we have seen and heard and come to believe is going to shape us to meet each new day’s adventure. Every promise fulfilled in Christ’s advent has prepared the way for us to set right that which is upside-down. There is hope for those who are yearning for a glimmer of it; there is peace for those who have waited to taste its sweet comfort; there is a future for those who have journeyed in confusion and fear.

*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*

was attuned to God, he recognized his dream as a message from God and believed it, despite all of the scientific evidence to the contrary. However, Joseph went one more important step: He acted on what God revealed in the face of the certain disapproval of his neighbors.

As we experience Advent, may we develop our ear for God's voice. When we hear, may our devotion be strong enough to cause us to follow that heavenly message, no matter how difficult or unpopular that may be.

*Open our ears to hear you, O God,
and our hearts to the possibility of living out your word.*



Thursday, Dec. 24 **Christmas Eve** Read Luke 2:1-20

*from Rev. Dr. William B. Allen, Regional Minister Emeritus
serving as Regional Minister—Christian Church in Pennsylvania*

This could be the best known and most beloved passage of scripture in the Christian canon. It inspires us over the centuries. The journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, no room in the inn, the manger crib, the shepherds and angels, all speak to us of vital truths about ourselves and our God.

God is active and involved in the most mundane and inconvenient events of life – like tax collection, hard journeys, bureaucratic nuisances and the birth of babies. Into these events come powerful encounters with God with the assurance, “Do not be afraid; for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people...” In this is the invitation to participate in saying and living: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

We stand at a powerful moment and in the presence of a powerful God, in our own lives, in the life of the church, and in the history of the world. Let us “not be afraid,” and let us give “glory to God.”

*O God, you cast out fear and inspire praise
in the coming of your Son Jesus Christ.
Now make of us fearless, praise-filled people
as we receive him once again into our world.*

Week One: HOPE

Sunday, Nov. 29

Read Luke 21:25-36

from Rev. Scott Thayer, Bethany—Memorial Church of Christ

Happy New Year! No, I haven't lost my calendar. I realize that it's only November 29, not January 1, but followers of Jesus the world over know that the church marks the beginning of the Christian year on this day, the first Sunday of Advent. I rather like that. I like being part of an alternative rhythm that sees New Year's Day as a time of watching for signs of Christ's in-breaking reign, not just as an excuse for throwing yet one more party.

Today's lectionary Gospel passage from Luke reminds Christians that Advent is a time, not just to remember the first coming of Jesus, but to look forward to the second coming of the Savior. Now that is something to celebrate!

*O God, we look for signs that your realm is near,
that your Word rules the world.*

Join us together in a spirit of thanksgiving and earnest prayer.

Monday, Nov. 30

Read Isaiah 11:1-9

from Rev. Del Parris, Clarksburg—Central Christian Church

The wolf and the lamb, the calf and the lion, all lying down together in peace? Some fantasy! We cannot even have peace in this country, much less peace in the world.

So why would Isaiah provide his people with this vision when it seems so unrealistic? The word that comes to my mind here is “hope.” In spite of what seems to be an impossibility, Isaiah is challenging us to hope for peace. Hope is defined as: “desire accompanied by expectation of fulfillment.”

This Advent, I plan to pray a lot for peace in my heart and peace in the world.

*Lord, fill our hearts with hope that is based on our experience
of your love, for with you all things are possible.*

Tuesday, Dec. 1

Read Isaiah 40:1-8

from Dr. Kimberly Bentrott, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

*“A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord.’”
John the Baptist is said to have uttered these words from the*

prophet Isaiah. In fact, it was John the Baptist whose job was to prepare the people of the Israel for the arrival of Jesus and his public ministry.

But who prepares the way of the Lord today? Who is charged with helping people receive Christ's message of grace, compassion, and justice?

We may be tempted to think that this type of job is only for prophets like John the Baptist or for parish ministers. However the fact is that all of us that seek to follow the path of Jesus have been commissioned to work on his behalf.

We are a prophetic people and as such we are called to prepare our own hearts and minds, as well as those of others, to hear the message that Christ brings to his people.

*God who speaks to us still,
help us to hear the voice of the prophet
and prepare ourselves to meet and receive the Christ.*

Wednesday, Dec. 2

Read Isaiah 40:9-11

from Rev. Patrick Bentrott, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Every Sunday at church the Haitian people sing hymns of praise to God and give thanks for all that God has done for them. "Mesi Senye," (thank you Lord) they yell out with their eyes closed and their arms lifted towards the sky.

Sometimes I wonder what they are thanking God for? Most of them live in tiny shacks and experience hunger on a daily basis. There is arguably no country on earth that has undergone the amount of oppression and persecution as Haiti. And yet there they are every Sunday celebrating life, giving thanks for all that they have, and patiently waiting for the day that God delivers his people.

During Advent we can be in solidarity with the Haitian people by following their lead and celebrating the gift of the life, the gift of the Son, and the hope that the future holds when one day justice is available to all people.

*O coming One,
help me to remember that it is not for me alone
that you have come to our world,
but it is directly to me that you call
for justice, for peace, for hope,
even in the voice of those least heard
and in the sight of those least seen.
Help me to see, to hear, to do—all at your bidding.*

Monday, Dec. 21

Read Isaiah 9:2-7

*from Mr. Timothy Graves, Lexington Theological Seminary
Seminarian in Residence, Parkersburg—First Christian Church*

For fans of science fiction, the cold, dispassionate character is a familiar one. From robots to Vulcans to androids, we are fascinated by what it would be like to lack emotions. I suspect this fascination is rooted in our desire to avoid emotions that are painful or uncomfortable. Yet, made in the image of God, we all have emotions.

Negative emotions, which might sometimes cause us to withdraw from others, can also lead to positives, when fueled by the One who is hope. Guilt can help us to avoid doing that which hurts others. Regret can push us to seek reconciliation with a loved one. Loss can result in walking through doors we might not have otherwise noticed.

*Hopeful One, open our ears and hearts to your will for our lives.
Fuel our emotions with Hope in the One who came as a baby,
lived among us, suffered, died, and was resurrected.*

Tuesday, Dec. 22

Read Matthew 1:18-25

*from Rev. Chaplain Norma Jean McClung
Parkersburg—First Christian Church*

Joseph, the man who would be the earthly father of the Holy Child, must have been a very special person – a very kind, loving, and understanding man. The registration of citizens described in Luke meant that he and his betrothed would make a difficult journey. Joseph did his best, and stayed at Mary's side to do whatever he could.

Yet the most wonderful gift was given to the world that night – Jesus, Mary's firstborn who was slated to bring to the world the Good News for all mankind. When we think about it, we can see that God not only chose Mary, but also chose Joseph – a kind, loving, wise earthly father. What a wonderful example of family for us!

*As we give thanks for your servant Joseph,
help us, O God, to be ready and willing
to move at your Spirit's calling.*

Wednesday, Dec. 23

Read Titus 2:11-14

from Rev. Darrell Pierce, Retired Minister, Clarksburg, WV

Advent helps us develop an ear for hearing God. We see evidence in the gospel of Joseph's heavenly ear. Finding out that Mary was pregnant, he decided to break off their engagement. Then, in a dream, God revealed that Mary was innocent of wrong. Because his ear

Saturday, Dec. 19

Read Luke 1:39-45

from Pastor Rodney Hubbs, McMechen—First Christian Church

Elizabeth was the wife of a priest, and Mary was a poor, unknown virgin, yet Elizabeth did not look down on Mary. Prejudice had no place then and it should have no place now among God's people. Instead, Elizabeth immediately proclaimed the baby in Mary's womb as her Lord.

So let us rejoice and react the way Elizabeth's baby did when we think about the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. May we put away all the hustle and bustle of the holiday season and focus on the love that Jesus brought into this world. Then let us spread the news throughout the land.

*Thank you, Father, for all your abundant blessings.
Help us to celebrate the real meaning of Christmas:
the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

Week 4: LOVE

Sunday, Dec. 20

Read Luke 1:46-55

from Rev. Jayne Chafin, New Martinsville—First Christian Church

I've always loved Mary's Song, these great words of praise and celebration and faith. But I think I have a different perspective on them now, as a woman, as a mother, as a grandmother. Given the laws of the day when Mary found herself pregnant and alone, uncertain at what her future would hold, uncertain of Joseph's reaction or the rest of her family, I have come to marvel at her great faith to be able to sing to God, "God has done great things for me and holy is God's name."

Let's face it: bearing children is not always an easy job. Sometimes you feel sick, you watch your body stretching in ways you never thought it could, and yet - yes, and yet - "my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Too often, we think we carry our burdens or even our bundles of joy alone. Perhaps we should take a hint from Mary and know that God is with us, even through the hard times of ridicule and pain, and even in our joys.

*Loving God, in this Holy Season, may we open ourselves
to sing with Mary, may our souls proclaim your greatness,
and may we truly know the great things you have done for us.*

Thursday, Dec. 3

Read Malachi 3:1-4

from Rev. Aaron Watkins, Bluefield—First Christian Church

Every day I look in the mail for something good. I don't want to see bills, although those do come on a regular basis. No, I want to find something personal - maybe a card or a letter from someone who cares about me - addressed to me.

Consider if you would, the postal carrier being messengers, bringing messages every day in some form or another. The final book of the Old Testament, Malachi, speaks of a messenger. In fact, the word Malachi itself means "messenger." To many this messenger was Elijah, but in fact this messenger turned out to be John the Baptist. With passion and verve, he commanded the people—the religious leaders included—to repent and make themselves clean, for God was coming: God in the form of a baby boy.

*Lord, you bring us hope in uncommon packages.
Help us to envision your promised new day as we hear your word.*

Friday, Dec. 4

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

from Rev. Sarah Webb, Wheeling, WV

What is your heart's greatest longing? When we read this intimate letter that was exchanged between dear friends, we see their longing for each other. They find strength in one another. Encouragement. Together they share a deep well of love for their God, their anticipation of Christ's return, and their profound commitment to prepare. But there is a deeper current in which the hunger for our God becomes an ache.

What is your heart's greatest longing? For what do you yearn? In the stillness of the Advent wait, when we move away from the hustle of things that distract -- the quiet finds us. Our hearts release and swell and we are bathed in bliss. It is the one communion that fills our deepest longing.

Lord Jesus, clear the way for our hearts to open.

Saturday, Dec. 5

Read Luke 3:1-6

from Rev. Joshua Patty, Fairmont—Central Christian Church

John the Baptist is always introduced the same way, with words from Isaiah. "A voice crying out... 'Prepare the way of the Lord.'" Valleys are raised, mountains flattened – it's the ancient version of a massive interstate highway project.

Who is doing the preparation work? Is it John through his preaching? Though John's role is important, it seems that the task is too big for any one man.

Instead, the prophet's words ought to be seen as a prayer. God is raising up the valleys, leveling off the mountains, and smoothing the way. God prepares the way of the Lord.

God also prepares the Lord's way into each of our hearts. God smoothes our rough edges, straightens our crookedness, and raises us from our lowliness. May we join the prophet and pray for this.

In my life, O God, prepare the way of the Lord.

Week Two: PEACE

Sunday, Dec. 6

Read Luke 1:67-79

from Rev. Dawna Watkins, Bluefield—First Christian Church

My father is neither song writer nor singer for that matter, but I remember once getting a letter from him. In it contained all the hopes and joys of having been my father and for the God-led path that I might take as a young woman. Tears! Lots of joy-filled tears!

Zechariah had waited a long time to be a father and to learn that his son would have a dangerous yet holy calling as Christ's trumpeter. Tears! Lots of tears! Filled with the Spirit, he sang this praise song filled with all the hope and joy for this child and his God-led path as a young man. What if you received the Divine Word that your child would "go before the Lord to prepare the way...to give his people knowledge of salvation?"

In joy and in tears, O Giver of Peace, awaken us to the life-giving possibilities at work in our children...and in ourselves.

Monday, Dec. 7

Read Isaiah 61:1-11

from Rev. Mark Mills, Moundsville—First Christian Church

The title given to this text in the NIV is "The Year of the Lord's Favor." It begins with Isaiah speaking of his calling and beckons to us to take it personally. I read this and consider what God seems to have anointed or called me to be and to do.

Many of us might identify with living in a state of the "wandering generality." In the face of a struggling economy, shootings

Thursday, Dec. 17

Read Psalm 85:8-13

from Rev. William Pollack, St. Albans—First Christian Church

The coming of the Lord will be an exciting time! For a world that is in constant hope for a new day, a fresh start and peace in the midst of all the insanity of life, the Lord will come. When He appears, we shall all experience His words of peace along with the certain assurance we are loved. Our scripture text is filled with imagery that relates a beautiful homecoming. It is loaded with the imagining of a new day.

Let us prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord this Advent season, even as we seek to extend an invitation to those who seek a new day for themselves as well. May Advent create in us a firmer faith and deeper commitment to our Lord who comes!

Lord Jesus, we wait hopefully and expectantly for your return.

Come as you will, and find us faithful in our Kingdom work.

Friday, Dec. 18

Read Micah 5:2-5a

*from Rev. Dr. Larry Grimes, Bethany College
and Beech Bottom—Community Christian Church*

How to make it—
peace, that is.

The roux is always first.
Stir it up from with least of these.
Begin with the little people. Attend to their voice.
They know from ancient days the recipe.

Don't forget the travail. It must be the birthing kind,
a sharp spice that makes all things new.
Add the mercy next. Then God's steadfast love.
From this shall come strength,
strength that secures to the ends of the earth

... and this shall be peace.

*Make of us a people of peace, O God,
born of your Word,
born of your Spirit.*

to hear all that's there for us? Then let us "Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness..."

*Prepare us for the joy of the great celebration, Lord,
as we revel in the signs of new life that surround us.*

Tuesday, Dec. 15

Read Galatians 3:23—4:7

from Rev. Richard Howard, Morgantown—First Christian Church

In his epistle to the church in Galatia, the Apostle Paul states our "oneness in Christ" as a fact. We may not always realize the reality of this truth, but the fact remains that all who are made right with God through faith in Christ are, "...one in Christ Jesus."

In verse 28, Paul addresses the issues of race, class and gender, dismissing them all as outmoded considerations. In the midst of the raging debate, Paul says simply, "There is no longer Jew or Greek..." For Christians today, there can no longer be the worldly distinctions of upper class and lower class, black and white, male and female, boss and worker, first world or third world. If all are one in Christ Jesus, we must all live and act with this belief as our polar star.

*Gracious God, as we move ever closer to our celebration
of your gift of the Christ Child, may we truly seek to be
one in him, with him, and for him.*

Wednesday, Dec. 16

Read 1 John 4:7-16

from Rev. Magdalyn Sebastian, Wheeling—First Christian Church

Most of us have been raised on Hollywood movies depicting Christmas as a magical time of year. *Miracle on 34th Street* and *It's a Wonderful Life* form our vision of the time leading to Christmas. In part, we anticipate this time of the year because of our movie-influenced expectation of a world-wide transformation of human behavior.

Yet the writer of 1 John gives us a basis for this hope. God is Love made manifest in Jesus Christ. When our faith is placed in the human/divine Jesus, we may be transformed. The love that God showed in Jesus is ours to have and to share with one another. Loving one another in Christ's name, we can be transformed and transform the world. More for than "just the season," it can be our *life*. That's pretty magical.

*Savior God, may we believe that we are loved
and can love to heal a fragmented world.*

in our schools, and blossoming reports of H1N1 infection, where is our hope?

The season of Advent is a time of preparation and hope. We journey toward Christmas, the birth of Light into darkness. Surely, with our faith in place and a positive sense of expectancy, we can say that we are journeying into the year of the Lord's favor.

*Creating God, spark fervor within my heart.
Accomplish the purpose you have for me.*

Tuesday, Dec. 8

Read Psalm 85:1-7

from Rev. Sanford Downs, Parkersburg—First Christian Church

This psalm can be summed up in a one sentence prayer, "O Lord, you have helped us out of problems in the past, now please revive us again." The season of Advent may be summed up in the same way. While it is a season of thanksgiving for what God has done in the past—sandwiched between Thanksgiving and Christmas, the celebration of the Incarnate Word coming to earth for us – it is mainly a season of penitence and preparation for both Christmas and the Second Coming.

Like this psalmist, we thank God for the Redemption that has come to us – and pray that during this season of Advent, God will revive us once again.

*O Lord, you have helped us out of problems in the past,
now please revive us again.*

Wednesday, Dec. 9

Read Psalm 85:8-13

*from Rev. Andrea Brownlee, Cameron—Big Run Christian Church
and Glen Easton—Fork Ridge Christian Church*

"Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts."

It is easy this time of year to turn toward God. We are focusing on the coming Christ Child and the peace and hope we see through his birth. In the coming weeks as we try to *re-turn* again to God let us open our ears as the psalmist did. Let us open our eyes and see the beauty of the peace we receive as the holy days of Christmas come closer.

Spend a moment now listening in the stillness for God's word of peace to you.

*In the chaos of one moment and the stillness of the next,
speak peace to your people, O God, that we might rest in you.*

Thursday, Dec. 10

Read Zephaniah 3:14-20

from Rev. Donald Snyder, Beckley—First Christian Church

A promise is a serious matter. As kids, we cross our hearts as a sign of commitment. God has made promises to Israel regarding a coming deliverer, and Zephaniah sees the fulfillment of the great stream of promises for the people of God, even though in exile it may be hard to believe.

In the fulfillment of holy promises two aspects of sin must be covered. On the one hand, our sins of conscience (guiltiness) must be removed so that we can come to God in confident hope. On the other hand, the character of God must be appeased for the offense of sin (disobedience). This deliverance - promised by the prophets and born in the person of Jesus - renews us for action, frees us for activity, and saves us to serve.

O God, you work to make peace with us at every turn of life.

We praise you for the peace that comes in Christ our Deliverer.

Friday, Dec. 11

Read Philippians 4:4-7

from Rev. Billy Crane, Grafton—First Christian Church

Feeling down? Paul gives us some great words that will give you a lift. The first word is "rejoice." He says we are to "rejoice in the Lord." He says it twice! He is rejoicing in what the Lord has already done for them, and in what His return would mean to His followers.

The next word is "prayer." We are to make "our requests to God," in harmony with His will, not our demands. The next word is "thanksgiving." Let us always begin our requests with thanksgiving for what God has already done for us.

The final word is "peace." In following Paul's foregoing steps we can experience "the peace of God" in any circumstance we must face. "Rejoice! I will say it again: Rejoice!"

We praise you, O God, for your "final word" of peace given to us in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Saturday, Dec. 12

Read Luke 3:7-18

from Rev. Kevin Bowers, Weirton—First Christian Church

I remember as a boy looking at the wonderful displays in the department store windows. Those many years ago we were amazed at the bright colors, wonderful lights, and robotic displays. I always wanted to be on the inside, but I always found myself on the outside looking in.

To be on the inside is still our fervent hope. Let us look into our hearts and lives and get ready for Christmas. Let us share what we have with others. Let us work at being more Christ-like. Let us live in an expectation of what the glory of the New Coming King brings.

The Good News is that you don't have to be on the outside, just looking at it - you can be on the inside. I encourage you this Advent to do just that. Stop looking on and join in!

Dear God, thank you for this wonderful season.

Thank you for letting me be a part of it.

Week Three: JOY

Sunday, Dec. 13

Read Isaiah 12:2-6

from Rev. Judy Bennett, Wheeling—Island Christian Church

I was a child when I regularly visited my great uncle's farm and was allowed to help draw water from his well. As I read this passage I experience a child's joy of anticipation. The heart picture of a thick rope - a wooden bucket - a handle to turn and draw the clear cold water to ground level where I could use a dipper and have a refreshing drink.

In this season, it is with joy that we receive God's precious gift to our lives of Jesus Christ - the living water. We come with joy to the well of salvation - God's well, His rope, His bucket, and we draw and drink with thanksgiving and praise.

"Give thanks to the Lord, and call on His name."

Life-giving God, help us to drink deeply of your deep, deep well and rejoice in the delicious taste of your salvation.

Monday, Dec. 14

Read Psalm 96

from Pastor Rae Browning, Cumberland, MD—First Christian Church

All the earth sings a new song to the Lord. All the earth prepares for the celebration of Christ Birth. We prepare for such occasions with streamers, balloons, cake and candles, candy, posters, singing, dancing, gathering with happiness swiveling our every being.

God's preparation in celebrating the birth of Jesus can be seen everywhere all the time reminding us of how great and amazing is God. He loves us so much that he fills our lives with decorations and signs everywhere we go in this journey. Do we open our eyes to see and ears