

YOUR OWN ADVENT MEMORIES



Welcome

One of the things I most love about being a child of God is that we always have something to rejoice about. And one of the things I most love about Hubbard Church is that it gives us ample opportunity to do so. Especially through our Advent Devotionals.

The devotions throughout are not self-centered; they're God-centered. They speak less to what Christmas does for us and more to what Christmas reveals about the greatness, glory, and goodness of God. They are filled with memories and nostalgia; interspersed with biblical lines of historic verse about God's redemptive plan for the world and God's eternal purpose for the ages. In other words, they create an ideal template for experiencing Advent.

They don't simply have stories to tell; they have songs to sing! Each day's reading in this book provides a hymn, a prayer, a passage and/or a brief devotional thought for you to ponder, listen to, share, and enjoy!

Friends, this year continues to be a season of mask mandates, missing friends, missing hugs, missing singing, and for some of you, missing church. Although it is true that all these things are still happening, one thing rings true - God's steadfast love remains constant in us and through us.

I pray you'll spend these days leading up to and beyond Christmas lifting up your eyes, your face fully fixed on our great God and Savior as you savor this year's devotions.

Grace and peace to you and yours during the Advent and Christmas seasons.

Pastor Lauren





Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

*Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.*

*Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.*

DECEMBER 25





Chaos! on Christmas Eve

By Sally Wills

Bible Verse: “Be still and know that I am God.” Psalms 46:10a

In December 1986, we lived in Stillwater, Oklahoma, and I was on the staff of First United Methodist Church.

The Christmas Eve services were a high point of the liturgical year, and we’d been planning them for weeks. Unlike regular Sunday services, the entire pastoral staff would be involved. In place of a sermon we were doing a reader’s theater adaptation of Henry Van Dyke’s story, “The Fourth Wise Man.” All was ready for the services that evening. I was at home when the phone rang. Loretta Mitchell, our Minister with Older Adults, had fallen on the ice and was injured. We jumped into high gear. Bob left to take Loretta to the emergency room and I went to the church to work with the rest of the staff to adjust worship, including “The Fourth Wise Man,” for four worship leaders rather than five.

Shortly before the 5 o’clock service, we were ready to go. We each took a deep breath, put on our robes and stoles and walked together to meet the choir members coming up from the basement. As we walked, we noticed a bulging ceiling tile. The water pipes had frozen and burst. What a commotion!

One person grabbed a big screwdriver from a nearby closet and poked a hole in the ceiling tile while someone else brought a wastebasket for the water which gushed out. I dashed to a supply room to grab all the absorbent material I could find. Another person called a plumber—no small task on Christmas Eve!

It never occurred to any of us to go into the sanctuary and announce that worship would be delayed a few minutes. The senior minister’s wife was deployed to meet the plumber at the side door, and the rest of us lined up to walk down the hallway, and process into the sanctuary, ready to lead worship. The organist began the processional hymn, and we all moved forward.

I’ve never forgotten entering the sanctuary that evening. As I stepped through the door, the chaos of the past few hours simply fell away. The sanctuary was serene, filled with candlelight, organ music, singing, and grace. We walked to the front, ready to experience once again the mystery of the incarnation.

Prayer: God, still the chaos of our lives these busy Advent days, and prepare our hearts to receive the baby in the manger. *Amen.*

Reprinted from HUMC’s Devotionals for Advent 2018



Contents

1. Footsteps & Listening	Kaylyn Anderson
2. With a Voice of Singing	Jennie Anderson
3. Our Troubled Times	Neil & Nancy Jordhiem
4. Advent Opportunities	Shari Perrine
5. Where Mission Leads	Arnie Kuhn
6. Advent Traditions	Liz Stevens
7. The Power of Light	Ed Poitras
8. Home for Christmas	Carol Wall
9. Laying My Concerns at Jesus’ Feet	Dolly Hallstrom
10. Choose Potato!	Matthew & Elizabeth Schultz
11. Memories of Christmas	Gail Manlove
12. I Needed God’s Help!	Janell Saunders
13. Never Impossible	Pastor Lauren Hauger
14. God Has Given Us Hope	Margi Taggart
15. Snowbird Greetings	Larry & Carol Davis
16. My Witness Tree	Joy Derr
17. The Magic and Miracle of Christmas	Tom Harmon
18. How Do We Live with Change?	Arlene Valentin
19. The Loving Arms of HUMC	Emma Taggart
20. What is Christmas Really Worth?	Marie Nordberg
21. Heaven and Nature Sing	David Thoeleke
22. The Blessing of Five Generations	Pat Beaumont
23. Time	Fred & Marj Nordstrom
24. The Day After Christmas	Marion Hansen
25. Mary Did You Know?	Diane Thoeleke
26. The Friendly Beasts	Alice Strom
27. Chaos! on Christmas Eve	Sally Wills

Merry Christmas



Footsteps & Listening

By Kaylyn Anderson

Hymn:

Footsteps of Jesus

"Sweetly, Lord have we heard Thee, calling "Come follow Me!"

And we see where Thy footprints falling, Lead us to Thee.

Footprints of Jesus that make the pathway glow

We will follow the steps of Jesus where-e're they go."

Words: Mary B.C. Slade 1871; Music: Asa B. Everett, 1871

Bible Verses: *"The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."* John 10:13

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."

Revelations 3:20

My horse Jolly and I attended posse training at the Brainerd fair grounds a few years ago. She was stalled in a long barn with many stalls. I noticed that when she heard my footsteps, she would come to the front gate of the stall and wait for me. I did some experiments - coming in different doors and paying attention to which direction she was facing. Even when facing the opposite direction, she recognized my footsteps and moved towards the gate.

Horses and footsteps ... what kind of Advent devotion is this?

Advent is a time of spiritual preparation, it is our time to pray, reflect, and listen with our hearts. What sounds will catch your focus this noisy holiday season? There are many references to footsteps in the Bible. Whose footsteps are you listening for this Advent?

Prayer: Dear Lord, May we be always listening for your footsteps and be at the gate, ready for direction and service. May we have an ears forward, anticipatory attitude. Thank you dear Lord, for walking towards us. *Amen.*



The Friendly Beasts

By Alice Strom

My mother, Phyllis Bolton, planned the Sunday School Christmas Programs at HUMC for many years. She was so preoccupied with the night's performance as she bustled out the door, that she got into her car and backed out...forgetting to open the garage door. She didn't inspect vehicle damage or the doors hanging precariously by their dislodged hinges; she just drove to the Christmas Program, one of the biggest events of the year at HUMC!

This particular year, the program wove its story from *The Friendly Beasts*, a beloved Christmas carol. Animals in the lowly stable where the Christ Child was born played a prominent role in the play.

The church filled with parents, relatives and community members. At that time, 12 to 15 teenagers, Methodist Youth Fellowship members from Hubbard and the prairie farms to the east, made up the church choir...the Norman girls, Dissmores, the Pike kids, LaBontes, Sanfords, Boltions, Manloves.

The young children were dressed in homemade costumes made from thick bathrobes, towels tethered on their heads with cotton rope, sheets simply sewn, angel wings shaped...but their imaginations were filled with the wonder of the night. They quietly assembled in their places at the crèche, fashioned out of rough timbers, a gold paper star hung high atop and straw scattered about.

As the teenage choir filed into the choir loft, they sang the opening verse to the lovely carol. *"Jesus, our brother, kind and good, Was humbly born in a stable rude, And the friendly beasts around Him stood; Jesus, our brother, kind and good."*

Then from the crèche arose a child's voice, so beautiful and tenderly singing, "I", said the donkey, shaggy and brown, "I carried His Mother up hill and down: I carried Her safely to Bethlehem town." "I" said the donkey, shaggy and brown.

As the play moved along, various children sang the part of the red and white cow, the sheep with the curly horn, the dove from the rafters high and the yellow and black camel. The final verse was sung by the choir and the children together:

*"Thus every beast by some good spell, in the stable dark was glad to tell,
Of the gift he gave Emmanuel, the gift he gave Emmanuel."*

Thank you for precious childhood memories at HUMC. *Amen*



Mary Did You Know?

By Diane Thoelke

Bible Verse: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.” Luke 1:35

As Mary was holding sweet baby Jesus, was she humming a simple melody to him? Did she know she was looking at the face of God? She was told by the angel who visited her months before that she would have a divine birth, “. . . you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.”

She knew this baby was destined for greatness, but did she know she would watch Him die on the cross? Over 30 years pass, until Jesus grows to be the man, the Messiah the Jewish people were promised.

“*Mary Did You Know?*” is a song I love to hear each Christmas. It reminds me of what the future will be for little baby Jesus—that he has come to save us. Rather than ask Mary if she knew, let’s ask ourselves. We celebrate Jesus’ birth, but do we know and believe. . . .

He will walk on water

He will heal the blind

He has come to save us

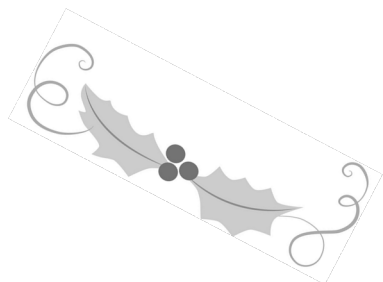
He will deliver us

He will calm the water with His hand

He will die on the cross for us

That the sleeping Child is the great, the GREAT I AM?

Prayer: God, our Father, thank you for sending your Son to us. Remind us that His birth is the beginning and His death is our salvation. *Amen*



With a Voice of Singing

By Jennie Anderson

Bible Verse: “I will sing to the Lord as long as I live.” Psalm 104:33

The past 21 months have been difficult for me as a musician. Not much flute playing and no choir singing. And socially, probably like you, it has been difficult trying to navigate day-to-day life.

Should I go out, should I isolate at home? Can I do this, can I do that? I get exhausted wondering what to do. I’m lost.

When I returned as HUMC’s choir director, it seemed as if life—and creating music—was returning to normal. And then, we had to pause as COVID positivity rates increased in our community. My heart sank. Our choir was providing the much needed music ministry to our congregation, filling their souls with comforting words through song. By the time this devotional is printed, the choir still might not be singing. I hope we are, as Christmas music is my favorite.

But through it all, I have heard these lyrics in my head:

“*With a voice of singing, prepare ye this and let it be heard – Alleluia!*”

The best part of directing is preparing the Sunday anthem. It’s like putting together a puzzle: choosing the music to connect with the sermon, rehearsing a song for the first time (sometimes a bit dicey); and finally, hearing voices uniting together on Sunday morning as beautiful harmonies fill our souls with song.

I remain hopeful that we will soon be singing again so that we can prepare and make a joyful noise to the Lord! I’m sure you do too. So until then, I will put on my favorite Christmas CDs (yep, a bit old school) and sing along!

Prayer: Dear Lord, I want to be having fun creating music with the choir. I crave hearing the beautiful anthems. I long to have my soul filled with music. Please let it be so. *Amen*





Our Troubled Times

By Neil & Nancy Jordheim

Bible Verse: “We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts.” Romans 5: 3-5

Hymn: *My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*

Nancy and I have been sitting at home a lot during these past few months. We have tried to follow the rules of COVID-19 just like many of you. But we have reached out like never before. We have formed a couple of pods of people that we know are also following the rules. We do a Zoom with church friends every Saturday. We talk to our children in Denver and Stavanger, Norway, every Sunday and much more.

Staying connected during trying times is critical to one’s mental health. I hope all of you are doing the same. We have found that reaching out is our way of taking care of ourselves. We are particularly proud of Pastor Lauren and her husband Jeff. They took the challenge of presenting a church service from their home with limited experience in producing an on-line service. We have seen their tech skills grow right along with the message. Who would have thought that *The Cat in the Hat* could come from their lake? Well, with the help of a friendly carpenter, some paint and a willingness to use entertainment to capture a viewing public, it all happened.

Life hands us lemons sometimes. It is our job to turn it into lemonade.

Prayer: Thank you God for helping us through this difficult time in our lives. Thank you for special people who have helped us cope with our loneliness. Many have shared their thoughts and feelings in a way that has made us feel included in life. Your inspiration has come to us through on-line church and from our everyday experiences. Help us to look for the good in life and not dwell on the bad or those things we can not control. We pray this in your name. *Amen.*

Reprinted from HUMC's Devotionals for Advent 2020



The Day After Christmas

By Marion Hansen

Bible Verse: “I am with you always.” Matthew 28:20

It’s the day after Christmas when all through the house not a person was stirring except for a mouse.

The mouse looked around with a puzzled frown. Where was the Christ child? Wasn’t he just here? The mouse looked up, looked down and all around. The Christ child was no where to be found. Where, oh where, could he have gone?

Suddenly there was a thump, a great groan and clatter as the people of the house arose, calling, “WHAT’S THE MATTER?”

“It’s the day after Christmas,” the mouse said with a chatter, “and the Christ child is gone. That’s what is the matter!!”

“Don’t despair,” the people responded. “Jesus is right here in our hearts for us to savor.”

It’s time to dash away, dash away all. Jesus needs to be shared with everyone, YES, ALL!

The mouse was amazed as there rose a great clatter:

“MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL AND HAVE LIFE EVERAFTER.”

Prayer: Thank you for reminding us—with a touch of humor—that Christ is always with us. *Amen*





Time

By Fred & Marj Nordstrom

Bible Verse: "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Ephesians 5:16

Can you imagine the time crunch every year during Advent with rehearsals for *Messiah* (we've been singing in church choirs for 70 years, ever since we met at the University of Iowa in 1946), organizing caroling in the neighborhood, getting ready for Santa Claus, etc? If so, let us share our favorite devotional which we found years ago and keep on our refrigerators in both Minnesota and Florida!

What would you do if your bank credited your account every morning with eighty-four thousand six hundred dollars but every night canceled whatever you failed to use during the day?

You'd draw out every cent, wouldn't you? You have such a bank. Every morning God credits your account with eighty-four thousand six hundred seconds. Every night He cancels whatever you failed to use.

You can't buy time and you can't save it. You can only spend it. If you don't spend it well, you waste it.

Yesterday is a canceled check. Tomorrow is a Promissory Note. Today is all the cash you have. Spend it wisely.

Prayer: Keep us Father, from wasting our time talents and treasures. Inspire us to live in love to You. Constrain us to do only those things that honor You through Christ Jesus, whose birthday we are preparing to celebrate. *Amen.*

Reprinted from HUMC's Devotionals for Advent 2016



Advent Opportunities

By Shari Perrine

Bible Verse: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." Luke 2:14

I am writing this on November 10. My days (and nights) are filled with plans and lists for "Thanksbirthmas."

Ok, I'll explain! "Thanksbirthmas" is our family celebration of Thanksgiving, a couple birthdays, and Christmas! It all happens on Thanksgiving Day and includes the usual gifts, games, and of course, a lot of food!

However, this is not really about "Thanksbirthmas"! These thoughts are more centered on the days that follow.

Advent, with all of its symbolism and tradition holds much meaning for me. Because I have much of the stress and pressure of the season behind me, I am more able to pause, to reflect, to absorb and to marvel at the most wondrous gift God has given us, his Son! I am more able to take the time to prepare my heart to receive this gift.

Oh, I still have "to do" lists, but I am better able to put JESUS at the top!

Prayer: I pray in this holy season and throughout the year God may quiet you with his peace, comfort you with his presence, and bless you with his love.





Where Mission Leads

By Arnie Kuhn, Missions Committee Chair

Bible Verse: *“And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.” 2 Corinthians 8:10-12*

Thanks, HUMC members for your rapid and generous responses to our mission projects over the past few months. Both our International UMCOR disaster kits and our local Family Safety Network kits were timely, and were warmly received by those organizations and will be put to good use to assist those in need.

Our last project of the year will be to purchase gift certificates for the Toys for Boys and Girls Christmas project, which we can accomplish through our regular budget. Any additional financial gifts to missions in 2021 are warmly appreciated and will be put to good use, I assure you.

May you find peace and comfort during the holiday season.

Prayer: Dear God, you have told us that “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35) May we always be mindful of those in need. May we always be a church “Where Love Dwells, Faith Grows and Mission Leads.”
Amen



The Blessing of Five Generations

By Pat Beaumont

Bible Verse: *“Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.” Psalm 71:18*

It has been a grueling year for all of us, as we try to adjust to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. All of us have been praying, faithfully, for the Lord to intervene.

The Bible tells us, *“You do not realize what I am doing, but later you will understand.”* (1Thessalonians 5) So, we must rely on *“Faith, which is the substance of things hoped for and evidence of things not seen.”* (Hebrews 11:1)

I never dreamed that I would be blessed with good health and live to be over 93! Nor did I dream of being a great-great-grandparent, living to see five generations. Two years ago, Hudson Paul was born to my great-granddaughter and her husband, followed by a second miracle, a sweet baby sister, Kinzley, born last December.

God has blessed me with 6 children and 17 grandchildren (11 boys and 6 girls). These grandchildren have blessed me with 12 great-grandsons and 8 great-granddaughters. And the frosting on the cake—the two great-great-grandchildren mentioned above, Hudson and Kinzley.

Yes, it is a marvelously big family. It is rare for all of us to get together as some live in California and others in Illinois, but the majority live in the Minneapolis area.

What is amazing is that their common denominator is ME!! I thank the Lord for allowing me to live long enough to be the matriarch of such a lovely family.

Prayer: Dear God, I pray that I will be a good example for all the progeny of mine, and hope they find a way to serve you as I would want them to. I believe that life is 10% what happens to them and 90% how they react. We do not know what these next months (years) will bring but with your help we will persevere and put our fears in your hands. *Amen*



Heaven and Nature Sing

By David Thoelke

Bible Verses: *"My word that goes out of my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands."* Isaiah 55: 11-12

We see, in the very first book of the Bible, that God created our earth and declared it good. Throughout the Scriptures we come across repeated references to God's creation and to its goodness. Similarly, many of our great hymns acknowledge and praise the Lord for earth's beauty, for example, *"Fairest Lord Jesus."* During Advent and Christmas we remember, *"Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming"* and the majestic carol, *"Joy to the World."* Let heaven and nature sing!

Clearly, humanity, and each of us, is accountable to God and to God's creation. God gave human beings responsibilities toward the earth from those earliest of days—even to put the very first humans in charge of the world's very first garden! Later on, God told Moses to instruct the Israelites: *"Do not pollute the land where you are."* And, *"Do not defile the land where you live and where I dwell . . ."* (Numbers 35: 33-34). God expects no less from us.

As Christians living in beautiful northern Minnesota, we know this. However, in the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, while barraged by advertisements everywhere to "buy this" or to "travel here," it's easy to get caught up in the secular noise and excitement. This is not necessarily bad, as long as we take time to keep in mind "the reason for the season." Let's remember to pause and provide time and place to listen for the still, small voice of God; to read God's Word; and to hear heaven and nature sing.

Prayer: God, creator of everything: thank you for providing a world that is beautiful to behold and that is able to provide for the needs of all. Commit each of us to try to keep our planet beautiful and bountiful, and to share the blessings we have received. *Amen.*



Advent Traditions

By Liz Stevens

Bible Verse: *"This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."* Luke 2:12

An Advent tradition at our house is setting up the nativity scenes. We have several and each has a story to go with it.

The oldest nativity set is from my grandmother and I was told the set was her mother's. The figures are small and show a lot of wear - one of the sheep no longer has a nose. The box the set was in when I received it contained straw-like packing material to protect the pieces. For years I set up the nativity scene at Advent, always wondering what had happened to the original baby Jesus. The one in the manger was made of plastic and obviously not the original.

One year as I was setting out the pieces, underneath the straw I found the original baby. At some point before Grandma gave the set to me, the Christ child must have fallen out of the manger into the packing straw, and she then used a "replacement" baby. Now the original is in the manger, but I keep the replacement because it was part of the set for many years. Each Advent as I set up the scene I think of my grandmother and the "lost" baby Jesus.

Another nativity set was given to us by my mother when our grandchildren were very young. This one is made of wood, and when the little ones came for Christmas they were allowed to play with it and move the figures around. After they all went home I would sometimes find little hands had rearranged all of the pieces to their liking, and I would smile.

Advent is a time of waiting, but also a time to remember. May you find joy in the simple things this Advent season.

Prayer:

Praise to the Lord of all creation,
Glory to God, the fount of grace;
May peace abide in every nation,
Goodwill to all of every race.

Amen



The Power of Light

By Ed Poitras

Bible Verse: “By the tender mercy of God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Luke 1: 78-9

Advent has returned, and again we hear the promise of the coming of the Prince of Peace. Of all the grand words that we have come to associate with the Christmas child, perhaps these are the hardest to process. If the Prince of Peace arrived two thousand years ago, where is the promised peace?

The human condition appears to remain the way Thomas Hobbes described it nearly four hundred years ago: “The condition of man is a condition of war of everyone against everyone.” (*Leviathan*, 1651) Yes, we hear of successful conflict resolution and peacemaking from time to time, but there seems to be no end to the cruelty, violence, and exploitation within our human family. But where would we be if God had not sent so many messengers of peace, culminating in Jesus?

Probably the best image for us as we try to follow Jesus’ way of reconciliation, love and peace is the coming of light into the darkness. Light is magical. No matter how deep the darkness, a single ray of light will overcome the blackness and show the way.

Like that great cloud of witnesses recounted in The Letter to the Hebrews, our predecessors in the faith – and we, as well – have not received the promised peace, but we still trust in God’s promises.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.” In our time this is our Christmas calling.

Prayer: Merciful God, may we always be peacemakers. *Amen*.



What is Christmas Really Worth?

By Marie Nordberg

Bible Verse: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.” James 1:17

A few days ago, I heard an economist speculate that in 2021, Americans will spend more than \$2 billion on the Christmas holidays. The reality is mind-numbing.

As I tried to digest the enormity of that amount, I thought back to Christmases when I was a kid, when our family of (then) six, plus grandparents next door, had little money to spend on Christmas, but we approached it as though we were millionaires.

During the 1940s, Park Rapids boasted two “dime stores” on Main Street. A few days before Christmas, my dad gave me and each of my three sisters a \$1 bill and told us that’s what we could spend on presents for everyone in the family. In 2021, I can imagine how our grandchildren would roll their eyes with a look that says, “Really”? But my sisters and I marched into those stores, clutching our dollars and determined to find the best gift ever for each other, Mom and Dad, and Grandpa and Grandma. And we always did.

On Christmas morning, we all got up early and rushed downstairs to open our presents. Compared to today, the number of gifts was small, but every one was opened with oohs and ahhs and exclamations of “It’s just what I wanted.” It wasn’t much: a book, paper dolls, a small bottle of perfume, but we knew those gifts were chosen carefully and lovingly. We were grateful for each gift and for our warm home and each other.

Prayer: Lord, help us let go of our desire for material wealth and focus on the real spirit of Christmas and God’s gift of His son for us. *Amen*



The Loving Arms of HUMC

By Emma Taggart

Bible Verse: "Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything." Ephesians 5:20

HUMC has been such an integral part of my life, that I know these words won't even come close to doing it justice. This church has shaped me, not only as a musician, but also as a person, in so many ways, and I owe so much because of that!

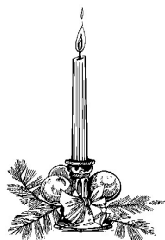
It's been over a decade since I first performed at HUMC, and throughout those ten years, I have formed so many bonds with so many wonderful people. Although it was initially the music that brought us all together, it is more than just notes and tunes that keep us connected now. I feel as if I am truly part of a family, and that sense of inclusivity means more to me than all the applause of any other concert hall could.

It means so much to me that, as a community, we are able to fuse our appreciation of music together with our worship of God; the two really are inseparable! I couldn't imagine my life without the loving arms of HUMC.

Prayer: As I move off to college and beyond, I will always remember the support and encouragement that each and every one of these wonderful people has given me! *Amen*

Historical Highlight: On August 18, 2013, Emma Taggart, 10, and Jacob Taggart, 6, classically trained pianists, appeared in concert at Hubbard United Methodist Church. In 2018, at the age of 5, Cecilia made her concert debut at HUMC. Emma, Jacob and Cecilia are the grandchildren of Margi and Ron Taggart.

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Home for Christmas

By Carol Wall

Bible Verse: "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you." Isaiah 54:10

It was December 1963 and I was a freshman at Concordia College. All I could think of was my home in Bottineau, ND, and my family getting ready for Christmas. One of the Christmas preparations I missed the most was decorating our tree with bright, multicolored lights and the many treasured ornaments, bought or made, almost all having significant meaning for my family.

In fact I was so homesick, I was literally sick. The campus doctor told me to go home, even though school was not out for another week. My Dad and my Uncle Johnnie drove to Moorhead to get me. On the way home to Bottineau, Dad said he had a surprise for me. I could hardly wait for the five and one-half hour drive to be over.

When we finally arrived I ran into the house and to my shock the Christmas tree was done all in red—red lights, red balls and red bows. Even the beloved bubble lights were gone! Dad was so proud and I, well I was devastated but I had to act like I just loved this "new" Christmas tree. It came to me then that life is ever changing, and that change would always be a part of my life. But I knew then, and I know today, that the one thing that doesn't change is God's love for us.

Praise God for His steadfastness.

Prayer: Oh loving God, we know that however life unfolds, you are with us and love us. For that we thank and praise you. *Amen*

Reprinted from HUMC's Devotionals for Advent 2017



Laying My Concerns at Jesus' Feet

By Dolly Hallstrom

Bible Verse: "Jesus asked the man, 'How long has he been like this?' The father replied, 'He has been like this since a child. The demon has often thrown him into fire or into water to destroy him. If it is possible for you, put yourself in our place, and please help us!' Jesus said to him, 'As far as possibilities go, everything is possible for a person who believes.'" Mark 9: 21-23

Poem: "The light of God surrounds me,
the love of God enfolds me.
The power of God protects me,
the presence of God watches over me.
Wherever I am, God is."

James Dillet Freeman

Very few things are reassuring these days, as we live and some die of the COVID virus. But the words above do reassure me.

What comforts me is to lay my concerns at Jesus' feet, as I know I can't handle them myself. Our concerns are many for all generations. Fathers usually like to take care of their children, comfort them, and relieve them of their burdens. No other father can do this with such assurance except our Heavenly Father. When concerns confront us we need to talk to our Father in prayer and praise Him. As I write this it is a relief to know my recent COVID test was negative; it is only a cold. But as I waited, I laid it at the feet of Jesus. Our answers don't always come back as we would like, because it is all in the plan He has for us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me remember not to carry my own burdens as You are always waiting to hear from me wherever I am, at any time. I am so grateful to have You in my heart. *Amen*



How Do We Live With Change?

By Arlene Valentin

Bible Verse: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" declares the Lord." Isaiah 55:8

My change is Christmas without Arnie.

Last year in Arizona, Arnie was in the hospital over Christmas and there were no visitors. I did fine but I knew he would be home in a couple days.

Now it is different, because Arnie died in 2021.

I still say I will be fine, but deep down inside I think, "Will I be fine?"

God gave me the scriptures and I will be fine with God's thoughts and ways.

We all have changes, some are harder than others. God is always there to help us but sometimes we forget to allow God to help us.

Prayer: Please God, don't let me forget to ask you to help me as I learn to live without Arnie. *Amen*





The Magic and Miracle of Christmas

By Tom Harmon

Bible Verse: “The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf and the young lion will feed together, and a little child will lead them.” Isaiah 11:6

“The Peaceful Kingdom,” is a familiar Advent/Christmas reading. It imagines an “Eden-like” community where there is harmony between all the orders of creation.

John Wesley envisioned this text as a call for us to live in peace and harmony with one another in contrast to the lack of harmony he often saw in his day and we definitely see in ours. To him this is a call for us to become more holy, to live more Christ-like.

Last Christmas Eve we did not go to an “in-person” worship service nor did we have our annual family fondue dinner. Our daughter, husband and two sons came to stay overnight. We put packages under the tree (except of course for Santa’s), hung stockings on the fireplace mantle and yet the evening felt a bit empty, lacking something until Deb suggested we should have our own Christmas Eve Service, just the six of us.

Johnny, the musician, suggested we sing a few Christmas Carols to get in the spirit of Christmas. Deb thought I should whip up an extemporaneous devotion – which I thanked her for the thought but declined. So we turned out the lights (it’s best to sing acapella in the dark), sat in the glow of the fireplace and sang *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* and *Silent Night*.

Then it happened! The magic and miracle of Christmas, when we heard six-year-old Garrett, with minor assistance from his mother, read the entire Christmas Story from Luke 2:1-20. When he finished we all sat in silence and felt the blessing of awe and peace like we had never experienced on any other Christmas Eve.

And all because “A little child will lead them.”

Prayer: Gracious God, open our hearts so that Love’s pure light may be the dawn of redeeming grace. *Amen*.



Choose Potato!

Reaction to a Facebook Post: By Matthew Schultz and Elizabeth Derr Schultz

Bible Verse: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.” Proverbs 3:5-6

When Matt Schultz explains his Facebook post showing a basket of Halloween candy with a brown russet potato perched on top, he says:

“Most children choose the potato. Tonight, kids chose Potato more than 25 times, each time triumphantly telling their friends and family, ‘I GOT A POTATO! One kid shouted, ‘A potato, just like last year,’ and another group told me, ‘Oh, you’re the potato house? You’re legends.’ This has become an unexpected and joyful tradition. Given free choice, kids choose Potato over and over again.”

“Just so you know, Matt’s joy at doing this has only grown over the years,” says his wife, Elizabeth, in response to his Facebook post.

“Tonight, he is prepared with several bags of potatoes and a bag of onions.”

Matt and Elizabeth, who is the daughter of Jack and Joy Derr, are ordained Presbyterian ministers in Anchorage, Alaska, where Matt serves as the senior pastor at First Presbyterian Church. Before posting his message in time for Halloween, Matt even consulted the family’s beloved dog, Starbuck.

“Starbuck would like to remind you that even though the world feels very difficult and dangerous right now, it always has been” he says. “And, just as people persevered in the past, we will also. If we keep our hopes alive and proceed with care and compassion, we can still pass the world on to our children better than it was passed to us. By the way, Starbuck says she would also like a treat.”

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for Matt’s creativity and humor that has brought such joy and laughter to children and adults in Anchorage and beyond. Thank you for his messages of faith and hope. May we all choose Potato! *Amen*



Memories of Christmas

By Gail Manlove

Bible Verse: “And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.” Matthew 2:11

Growing up in the ‘40s, I was blessed to have two sets of grandparents within a half-hour’s drive. My maternal grandma, Agnes Abrahamson, grew up in Norway, so we enjoyed her Christmas traditions, like holding hands while we walked around the Christmas tree and singing a song before opening our home-made gifts.

My dad’s parents were second generation pioneers, so the aunts, uncles and cousins gathered at their home on the northeast side of the prairie to exchange gifts. An uncle would mysteriously disappear while Santa Claus paid a visit to each home in their absence.

Who could forget the Hubbard School and Sunday School programs on the coldest nights of the year? The school program was held at the IOOF Hall (Independent Order of Odd Fellows) in Hubbard, which had a large stage. There were plays, recitations and singing by the students, who were so proud to perform for their families and friends. Afterward, a bag of peanuts and hard candies was handed out to each child.

The Sunday School programs could have been called “The Bathrobe Review,” since Joseph, the shepherds and wise men all wore borrowed bathrobes. The angels got to wear wings sprinkled with glitter. At that time, our church had no kitchen, indoor bathroom or fellowship room, so there was little space to put on costumes and get ready. The kids were nervous and excited, while teachers just tried to “keep the lid on.”

Phyllis Bolton was in charge of many of our Sunday School programs. She always stressed that Jesus was the reason for the season.

Prayer: Thank you God for Advent, a time of waiting but also a time to remember—to remember family, church, community, and yes, Sunday School programs! *Amen*



My Witness Tree

By Joy Derr

Bible Verse: “The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good.” Genesis 1:12

We knew we were getting close to the lake when my father would call out, “There’s the witness tree.” We would peer out the window as he slowed to turn at the corner where an old, dying pine tree stood, a story waiting to be told.

Dad told us that when homesteaders settled the Hubbard Prairie in the late 1870s, the early surveyors blazed solitary trees that grew in the open at the imaginary corners of the parcels to mark boundaries.

Today, the term also refers to trees that have lived for hundreds of years, trees that were present at key events in American history, such as a sycamore tree on the Antietam National Battlefield, or the white oak at the Gettysburg National Military Park.

I have a photo of “my witness tree,” taken in 1975, standing tall and isolated, its few remaining branches dead and devoid of needles. For years it heralded the beginning of family gatherings at the cabin, campfires, swimming and fishing for sunnies. And then one year it was gone! No branches, no stump. The corner where it had stood for more than a hundred years was empty!

But the memory of that “witness tree” lives on.

It was a touchstone for me as a young girl, one I shared with Jack the first time I asked him to take the gravel road cutoff to the cabin, rather than follow the paved road. It was—and is—a reminder of the courage and strength of the pioneers who settled this beautiful north country, cutting deep into prairie sod to plant crops, felling tall pines to build homes, and surviving bitter cold while waiting for the promise of spring.

Prayer: Dear God, help me to recognize the significance of the witness tree, the role it played in setting boundaries at the turn of the century. Help me to understand the social and personal boundaries we live with today, boundaries that guide the way we interact with other people and other cultures. *Amen*



Snowbird Greetings

By Larry & Carol Davis

Bible Verse: *"For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go."*
Psalm 91-11

Christmas is in the air when the weather is cooling and the snow is falling. It is the season of the birth of our Lord Jesus.

Let's take time to worship the birth of our Lord Jesus, saying our prayers and thanks for the life He created for all of our families and friends.

Carol and I want to wish all of our Northern friends at Hubbard United Methodist a wonderful Christmas holiday.

Historical Note: Hubbard United Methodist Church is unique in that its members are both residential and seasonal. During the winter, when the "snowbirds" have flown south, there are anywhere from 90 to 100 year-round residents who worship on Sunday. But during the summer, when the "lakers" return to their vacation homes on the lake, the congregation swells to 160 or 200!. You might say there are two congregations, summer and winter. But together they form a cohesive whole and thrive in a unique symbiotic relationship that defines HUMC. *125th Commemorative Booklet*



I Needed God's Help!

By Janell Saunders

Bible Verses: *"Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything; tell God your needs and don't forget to thank him for his answers. If you do this you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand."* Philippians 4: 6-7

"You can get anything you want—anything you ask for in prayer—if you believe !"
Matthew 21: 22

For the last three years I had been taking care of my friends' mom one day a week. She was in her 90's and had Alzheimer's. The job was to clean, do laundry and serve her a couple meals.

About a year ago she fell, pulled muscles, and broke a bone in her hand. Now my job went from easy to very, very hard. She DID NOT want to exercise and that was the one thing she needed to do to get stronger so she could continue to live on her own at home. It was very painful for her to get up and she was very stubborn. I would worry about safely getting her up to do exercises, to walk from bed to chair or the kitchen table.

I really needed God's help! I prayed for patience. I prayed that she would do the exercises and walk the circles in her house. God answered my prayers! It seemed that I was the only one that was able to get her to do ALL her exercises and to do her six to eight "circle walk-about." She passed away earlier this year and is now in heaven. I am almost positive she is NOT doing her exercises.

Prayer: Dear heavenly father, please help the health care workers. Give them the patience and strength to daily continue working with the elderly and those with Alzheimer's and dementia. Also, dear Lord, please help the patients accept the help. *Amen*



Never Impossible

By Pastor Lauren Hauger

Bible Verses: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy; he will be called Son of God ... For nothing will be impossible with God.” Luke 1:35-37

The “ancient of days” (Daniel 7:9) became a newborn. The One who created the first woman was born of a woman. Though heaven and earth cannot contain Him, God chose to be confined to a human body.

God chose to be held in the arms of a teenage girl, even though his “everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27), hold the entire universe in place. God, whose voice is “powerful” and “full of majesty” (Psalms 29:4), communicated with the coo and cry of a tiny baby. God, who “sits enthroned as king forever” (Psalms 29:10), exchanged his throne for an animal’s feeding trough.

Because the story of Jesus’ birth is so familiar to us, we do something we don’t do often enough. We believe the impossible. We sing with joyful acceptance about things that make no earthly sense unless God actually did what cannot possibly be done.

This year, as you prepare for Christmas, don’t start with what you already know of the story. Instead, imagine the young girl to whom the events of Luke 1 occurred on just another ordinary day. She didn’t wake up that morning expecting an angel to visit. She had no way of knowing what God had chosen her to do. Before her name was written in Scripture, before her likeness appeared in countless nativity scenes, Mary believed. She believed the impossible.

This Advent, faced with God-assigned tasks, you may be asking, “How can I do this? I don’t have the ability. I don’t have the time. I don’t have the resources. This is impossible!” But your task, like Mary’s, is made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. You and I must be willing to surrender ourselves by faith and let God take over, knowing God can do the impossible through us.

Prayer: Lord, apart from you, I will accomplish nothing of eternal significance today or throughout this Christmas season. Fill me with your Spirit and enable me to accomplish all you have purposed for me to do. Help me to trust not in my own strength, skills or success, but only in you—for your honor and glory alone.

Amen



God Has Given Us Hope

By Margi Taggart

Bible Verse: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Romans 15:13

Advent!

Anticipation!!

Excitement!!!

We look forward to worship, music, cards, warm visits with friends and, of course, many of us are preparing for visits to or from our grandchildren.

The first four Advent candles represent hope, faith, joy and peace. Oh, how we need all four of these at this time.

When I look at our grandchildren I see these characteristics embodied in each of them. People talk about children’s excitement for Christmas, but I believe that grandparents share in that excitement. God has given us hope in the form of grandchildren.

How can any grandparent look at their grandchildren and not have hope, faith, joy and peace? I always look forward to time with our grandchildren, but Christmas is so very special. As we prepare for Christmas I think about each child and what is special to them whether it is a special food, activity or gift. In doing this, each year I am truly astounded by the unique gifts and talents that God has given each one. I know that every grandparent feels the same.

Prayer: Thank you God for giving us another reason to have hope, faith, joy and peace. *Amen*

