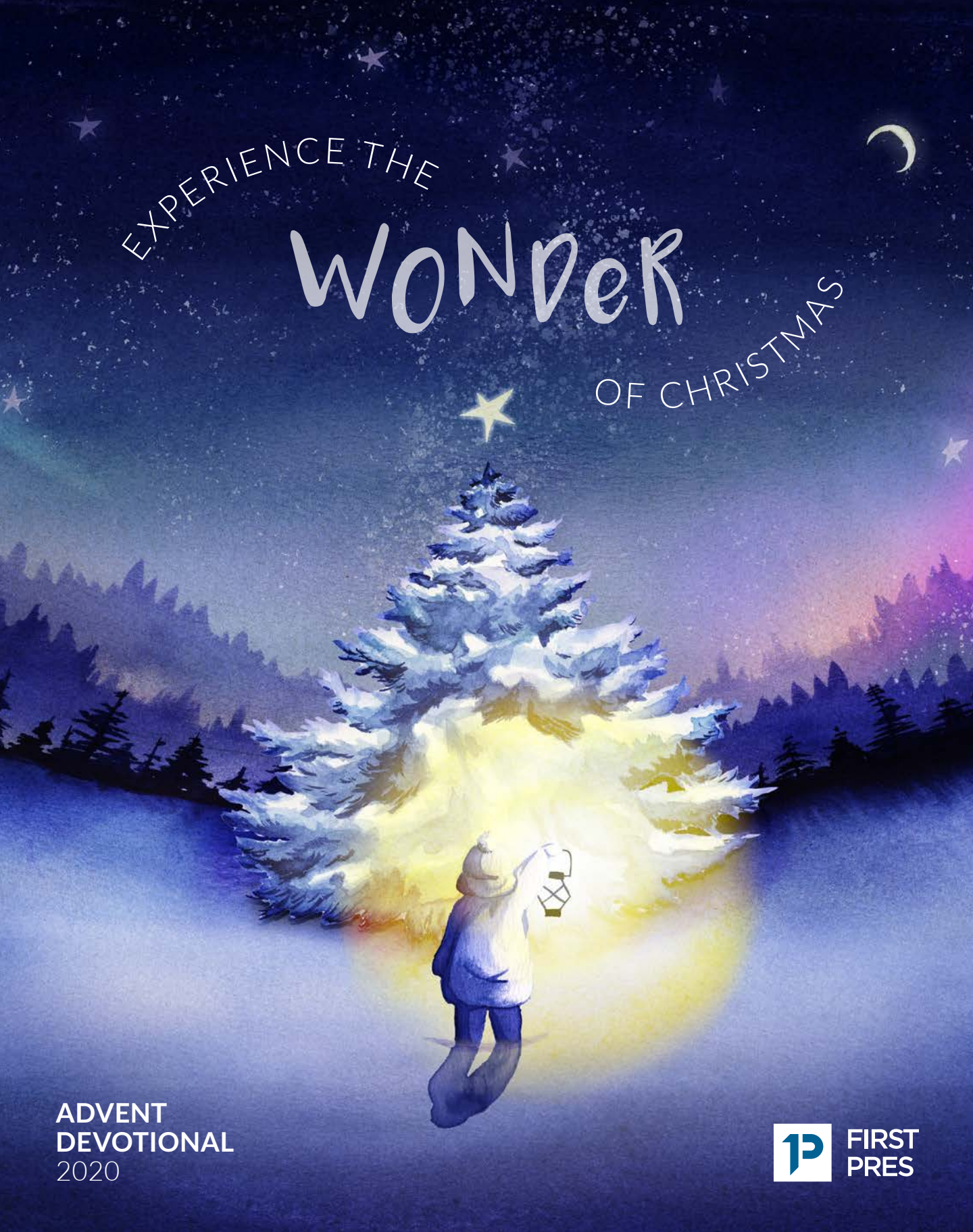


EXPERIENCE THE

Wonder

OF CHRISTMAS



ADVENT
DEVOTIONAL
2020



FIRST
PRES

Look among the nations, and see:
wonder and be astounded.

For I am doing a work
in your days that you
would not believe if told.

HABAKKUK 1:5

EXPERIENCE THE

WONDER

OF CHRISTMAS

Lift up your heads,
you gates;
be lifted up,
you ancient doors,
that the King of glory
may come in.

PSALM 24:7

Struggle can force your head downward. When this happens, you begin to miss the wonder that is ever present around you. Over the past several years I have started dipping my toes into the world of long endurance sport. My wife and I have found ourselves on all-day adventures in the mountains, usually hiking or biking or backpacking. Hours into our adventure (and with hours to go) one of us will look up and say, “Wow! Look! I can’t believe we almost missed that!” In our strain to just make it through the day we sometimes fail to see the wonder that is all around us.

2020 has been no stranger to struggle. All of us have found ourselves in moments—sometimes lasting months—with our heads down in intense, prolonged strain and our hands grasping tight around the plow just hoping to not let go.

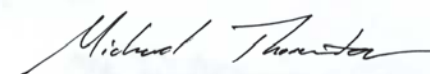
We need a change, a lifting of the head to see the wonder that is there. Advent (literally “arrival”) is what we cry out for, the coming, the “arrival” of the One who can lift our heads for good, loosen our hands forever, and show us the full wonder of Himself once and for all. Advent is an annual reminder that all is not lost. Even more, all is found in Christ. Christ has come and He will come again. We wait; we hope. We cry out; we anticipate. We see; we celebrate.

The grace of heaven comes, our hands relax, our heads are lifted up. We see the holiness of heaven sprinkled around our lives. We see the wonder of Emmanuel, God with us. We exclaim, “Wow! Look! I can’t believe we almost missed that!”

Sunday mornings have often been the trigger for my head lifting up. Worship lifts our hearts away from the struggle and strain and toward the vision of who we are in Christ and where we’re headed. Our souls are filled once again with the wonder of all wonders. God has come and God is with us.

I’m praying for you this Advent, that your head be lifted up, that God will open your eyes to see His Kingdom growing right where you are. O, may your head be lifted up by the wonder of it all! May the King of Glory come into your heart once again. May your heart sing, “Wow! Come, Lord Jesus, come!”

Yours and His,



Michael Thornton
PASTOR OF DISCIPLESHIP



HOW TO USE THIS ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

First Pres is a congregation reflecting the love of Jesus to be **Light and Life for the City**. Advent is an annual reminder that all is not lost. Actually, all is found in Christ. This book focuses primarily on Scripture, with additional resources to remind us that Christ has come, and He will come again. We wait; we hope. We cry out; we anticipate. We see; we celebrate.

Devotional and Scripture Reading

Designed to begin on Sunday, November 29, this book presents daily Scripture passages and reflections from our pastors and staff for the Advent season.

Sundays of Advent

Each Sunday features a short Scripture passage and reflection from Lead Pastor Tim McConnell and a note about the Advent candle for each Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve.

Advent Wreath

Find instructions on how to create your own Advent wreath for your home to help you anticipate the coming of the One who is True Light and who shines in our darkness.

Extras

This book features additional tools to help you lift your head to see the holiness of heaven sprinkled around our lives including carols, original art by Bob Simpich, original cover art by Sallie Kidman, a Christmas cake recipe from Gail Stevens and more.

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DECEMBER CALENDAR

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR
29 1 ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT	30	1 Celebrate Giving Tuesday with a gift purchased from Something Significant for Christmas (page 66)	2	3
6 2 ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT Attend the Children's Ministry event A Walk Through Bethlehem from 4 – 6 p.m.	7	8	9	10 Attend the Women's Christmas Lunch from 12 – 1 p.m.
13 3 RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT Scan this QR code to watch Christmas Joy! online 	14	15	16	17
20 4 TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT CHRISTMAS SUNDAY	21 Attend the First Pres Flying W Ranch Christmas Experience	22	23	24 Attend Christmas Eve Services at First Pres
27 THE FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMASTIDE	28	29	30	31

FRI	SAT
4	5
11 Attend the Men's Christmas Lunch from 12 – 1 p.m.	12
18	19
25 CHRISTMAS DAY	26
1	2

HELP OTHERS EXPERIENCE THE WONDER OF CHRISTMAS EVE

Christmas is a great time for celebration and a rich opportunity to make the wonder of Jesus known. Our volunteers are vital when it comes to welcoming and hosting folks on Christmas Eve. This year with limited seating capacity, Christmas Eve services will be held at several venues throughout our campus, including a Wonder Village experience for the whole family before and after services on the Bijou Street block.

Serve with us on Christmas Eve

Visit firstprescos.org/Christmas for details and to sign up to serve.

Use this QR code to quickly open our website from your phone.



CREATE YOUR OWN ADVENT WREATH WITH CANDLES

Advent wreaths with candles illustrate and remind us how Jesus is the Light of the world who brings peace, hope, joy and love into a dark world. Spend time creating an Advent Wreath for your home this season to remind you of the coming King. Each Sunday of Advent, light the corresponding candle leading to the final Christ Candle on Christmas Eve.

Share a picture of your Advent Wreath by using [#FirstPresAdventWreath](#) or tagging [@firstprescos](#) on social media.

CRAFT TIME: 1-2 HOURS

Supplies:

- Pre-made small wreath or evergreen cuttings
- 5 Advent candles (any size)
- Pinecones or extra Christmas decorative items
- Cake stand or any stand to build your wreath on
- Green floral wire (any gauge)
- Pruners or scissors
- Hot glue gun and glue

Instructions:

1. Arrange your pre-made wreath or evergreen cuttings in a circle on your stand or on your table. Use the green floral wire to help shape the evergreen cuttings. Ensure you have plenty of space to place the candles.
2. Place the four Faith, Hope, Love, and Joy candles around the wreath and the fifth Christ Candle in the center.
3. Add pinecones or other decorative items to your wreath to make it festive.

THE TRADITION OF THE ADVENT WREATH

There are many stories about how the Advent Wreath with its candles came to be. There is probably something true about each story ... that happens as traditions and practices wax and wane over time. One of the great stories about its origins is a missionary story. As Christian missionaries went to the Germanic tribes, they discovered people who had made wreaths with candles that they would light in the hopes that light would return in a dark season of winter. The missionaries used that to teach the gospel ... to illustrate how Jesus is the Light of the world who brings peace, hope, joy and love into a dark world. The symbolism portrays the growing intensity of light each week as a candle is added. We thus

increasingly anticipate the coming of the One who is True Light and who shines in our darkness.

In addition to the candles, the rest of the wreath also has significance in teaching the faith. The wreath is made of evergreen, reminding us of the eternal life Jesus gives. The prickly needles tell us of Jesus' crown of thorns and remind us of His suffering death on our behalf. And the circular shape which has no beginning and no end reminds us of the eternal nature of God. Indeed, the Advent Wreath can be a visual story reminding us of who the coming King is and what He has done for us.



first sunday of advent

DAY 1

Sunday, November 29

ISAIAH 64:1-9

The ancients thought the sky was an impenetrable dome. Aristotle thought we were at the center of a series of spheres holding all the planets and stars in place. Even though NASA had launched plenty of things into space and Yuri Gagarin had been up there and back, it took no small amount of courage for Alan Shepard to strap into the nosecone of Freedom 7 on May 5, 1961 and launch into outer space. Little did he know he would eventually play golf on the surface of the moon.

Isaiah cast his eyes up to the stars. He looked up at the sky. Isaiah knew the distance between God and mankind. He understood the impenetrable barrier of sin. How can we be in relationship with a Holy God when our sin separates us from Him? No chance. But what if God breaks the barrier? What if God reaches out toward us? What if God finds a way into our very lives and souls? “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!” (Isaiah 64:1)

And then, one day, God did. This is the Wonder of Christmas.



Tim McConnell
LEAD PASTOR



advent candle: faith

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

This Advent season we are focusing on the wonder of Jesus—God with us. His presence among us is pure gift ... undeserved, free and extravagant. Yet we ask, “How can I believe this good news?” Surely, we’ve got to do something to gain access to the creator of the universe. We work endlessly to serve the demands of our modern gods—success, pleasure, technology, politics. The list is endless. They make us work for rewards. But the wonder of Advent is that even the faith to believe the good news of God’s rescue is also a gift. Martin Luther described the gift of faith this way:

“... faith holds out its hands and opens the sack to allow itself to be presented with good things. For as God the Giver by His love bestows this gift, therefore we are recipients by faith, in which faith does nothing more than receive the gift. For it is not our doing, and it cannot be merited through our work... All you need to do is to open ... your heart, hold still, and allow it to be entirely filled.”

That’s worthy of wonder!



Watch and share videos from our pastors and staff on our Facebook by following [@firstprescos](#). Scan this QR code to begin watching.

DAY
2

Monday, November 30

HEBREWS 1:1-4

How incredible is it that God desires to speak to us? And it's not merely words that God uses to get our attention, he desires to draw us into relationship. If it was merely information God wanted to send us, I suppose a letter or a news article or a Christmas card would have sufficed. But in the book of Hebrews, we are reminded that God chose to speak to us by His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself was the messenger and the message. The Word of God doesn't come to us simply in ink or by mail. The Word of God comes to us embodied by a living person, the Son of God. The Word of God is spoken. It is meant to be heard. And it is Jesus who speaks. When someone speaks to us, there is an expectation that we might speak back. In this beautiful season of Christmas, what do you want to say to God? The One who made you and reaches out to you in Jesus wants to hear your voice. So, speak up! Say "Hello!" The Lord is listening and wants to hear your voice.



Jennifer Holz
EXECUTIVE PASTOR

DAY
3

Tuesday, December 1

ISAIAH 9:2-7

Think back to a time when you experienced deep darkness—the kind of darkness that seems to surround you and swallow you. Once I was camping and forgot my flashlight. We were far from city lights, and the stars were clouded over. Pitch darkness surrounded me, and I felt lost. With no reference points or visual cues, I was not able to anticipate what was coming or where I was going.

Light. Light pierces the darkness and immediately dispels the disorientation and isolation of the dark.

Our passage today begins with a dramatic and beautiful scene: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned" (Isaiah 9:2).

Imagine yourself into this passage. Walking in sheer darkness with outstretched hands, you feebly attempt to find your way. And suddenly light breaks forth—a great light.

This beautiful light is Jesus. He dispels darkness, shatters oppressive yokes (verse 4), and cleans up the mess of battle (verse 5). This child to be born brings peace, and hope, and light; he will rule with true justice and righteousness (verses 6-7). May your heart be stirred in wonder at a God who broke through our darkness with the light of hope.



Lydia Lockhart
PASTOR OF MISSION ENGAGEMENT



DAY Wednesday, December 2

4

LUKE 1:1-25

There is a motif seen throughout Scripture: the barren woman who miraculously becomes pregnant. In each case, the children of these women become central figures in God’s story (Isaac, Jacob & Esau, Joseph, Samson, Samuel). Now, in the opening of Luke’s Gospel, we learn of another miracle. Elizabeth will give birth despite her old age, and this child will take up the mantle of Elijah, preparing the people for the coming of the Lord (the result of yet another miraculous pregnancy)! When we consider these events, there is a clear message: “Nothing gets in the way of God’s redemptive plan for His world!”

As we reorient our hearts around the good news of the incarnation, may we be challenged to reconsider the things we think restrict our ability to live fully for God. All of us have limitations or burdens in our life that might be used as excuses to not live or love as we ought, yet we know that God is not fazed by the things we see as barriers. God’s redemptive plan goes forth in all circumstances and we are called to join in His work! This Advent, may we trust the Lord’s promises and character, relying on Him instead of being discouraged in our effort to Live for God.

Greg Hartnett
PASTOR OF EVANGELISM
AND YOUNG ADULTS



DAY Thursday, December 3

5

ISAIAH 40:28-31

After hearing so much about the Grand Canyon, I was prepared to be unimpressed during my first visit. I was startled, therefore, by an instinctive response of “Wow!” when I first saw it. Unfortunately, return visits haven’t prompted similar amazement. Perhaps G.K. Chesterton had something like this in mind when noting, “The world is not lacking in wonders, but in a sense of wonder.” Too often, our familiarity with the Christmas story and the season’s busyness blind us to the incredible wonder of what God has done. God came to us! He entered our world! He took upon Himself the frailty of our flesh!

Our greatest challenge this and every Christmas isn’t to keep up with the season’s activity. No, it’s to recapture a sense of awe and wonder at the incredible initiative God undertook for our sake. At a specific time in history, in a specific place in this world, He came to change your life.

My favorite Christmas quote is from James Boice: “Do you want to celebrate Christmas? Then be amazed at it. Allow it to stretch your mind.” Would you allow your mind to be stretched this Christmas by what God has done?

John Goodale
PASTOR OF CARING MINISTRIES



DAY

6

Friday, December 4

GENESIS 22:1-19

In the previous chapter, Isaac finally arrives as the long-awaited, promised son to Abraham and Sarah. We may have thought that Abraham's long journey of faith was finally coming to an end. But now, a monumental test requiring raw obedience is before him. God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son.

How could Abraham possibly do what God is now asking? For any father, this would be insurmountable! Moreover, was not God's plan to bless His people through the coming lineage that would stem from this son? Is God now escorting Abraham down a detour to a dead end altogether, turning His back on the original promise? For both Abraham and those who would come later, it would appear that God's favorable future was on the edge of total annihilation.

And yet ... even at the sound of his son's haunting question ... Abraham, with unfiltered faith, replies, "The Lord will provide." Even in this, Abraham knew God would keep His promise.

God did. And He still does today.

As Abraham's adopted sons and daughters, facing our own impossible circumstances, we rejoice in Jesus who has come as the Provision.



Matt Holtzman
PASTOR FOR ENGAGEMENT
AND CARE

DAY

7

Saturday, December 5

REVELATION 1:4-8

Verse five of our passage today offers a trifold heralding of Jesus' identity, each enriching our contemplation of Advent. First, Jesus is "the faithful witness." Now our preeminent exemplar, Christ walked among us in pure, faithful relationship with the Father. We follow His witness by ourselves faithfully "living lives worthy of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). Second, Jesus is revealed as the "firstborn from the dead," pointing emphatically to Christ's sovereign reign over the entire cosmos through His triumph over death itself. If Christ is risen from the grave, He is Lord of all. Thirdly, Jesus is declared as "the ruler of the kings of the earth." As verse seven later affirms, we celebrate that at the second coming of Christ this present reality of Jesus' total Lordship will be universally acknowledged. The scepter of the Lord will shine as the sun for all eternity and claim no limits to its reach.

Verse five then transitions into this stunning, worship-invoking doxology: "To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever!" Yes, amen, come again, Lord Jesus. Give us hearts of faithful witness to your Kingdom and reign.



Michael Thornton
PASTOR OF DISCIPLESHIP

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

Anonymous

1. O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and
 2. O come, thou Day - spring, come and cheer our
 3. O come, thou Wis - dom of from on high, and
 4. O come, De - sire of na - tions, bind all

5
 ran - som cap - tive Is - ra - el, that mourns in lone - ly
 spi - rits by thine ad - vent here; dis - perse the gloom - y
 or - der all things, far and nigh; to us the path of
 peo - ples in one heart and mind; bid en - vy, strife and

9
 ex - ile here, un - til the Son of God ap - pear.
 clouds of night, and death's dark shad - ows put to flight.
 knowl - edge show, cause us in her ways to go.
 quar - rels cease; fill the whole world with hea - ven's peace.

14
 Re - joice! Re - joice! Em - man - u - el shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!



BRING YOU GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY FOR ALL OF MANKIND... LUKE 2

SOUR CREAM

COFFEE CAKE

Ingredients:

- 1 cup butter
- 1¾ cups sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1¼ cups sour cream
- ½ tsp. vanilla
- 2 cups flour
- ¾ tsp. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. salt
- ½ cup chopped nuts (pecans or walnuts)
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 4 tsp. sugar

Notes:

You can make the batter in a food processor; measure out the dry ingredients in a bowl and the nuts mixture in another bowl. The first five ingredients process first, and then when it is smooth, slowly pour in the flour mixture. This saves a lot of time and works fine. After that, proceed to the layering in the pan.

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Grease and flour (or use Bakers Joy) one 9-inch Bundt cake pan or 9-inch tube pan.
2. In a medium bowl, cream butter and gradually add sugar until light. Add in eggs one at a time. Fold in sour cream and vanilla. Fold in flour, baking powder and salt.
3. In a small bowl, combine nuts, cinnamon and sugar. Place about 1/3 of batter in the pan. Sprinkle with nut mix. Another layer of batter, another layer of nut mix, then add the last 1/3 of the batter.
4. Bake about 1 hour until a toothpick tester comes out clean. Cool for 10 minutes and then tip out onto a cooling rack. This cake keeps very well in the refrigerator and beautifully in the freezer.



SHARING A FAMILY TRADITION

A Christmas Recipe from John and Gail Stevens

John and Gail Stevens moved to Colorado Springs in January 1969 when he became the Minister of College and Young Adults at First Pres. Two years later, Dr. Stevens was installed as First Pres' 12th Senior Minister and he served 34 years in that capacity.

To this day—a span of 51 joyous years—the Stevens family has enjoyed a Christmas day treat thanks to a recipe given to Gail by a First Pres member just after they arrived in the Springs in 1969.

“We had been married two-and-a-half years, with a baby (Stan) on the way,” Gail said. “One of our

longtime members gave me this recipe along with the Bundt pan to make it in. Such a great idea for relative newlyweds just arrived in town! This coffee cake has been part of our Christmas morning traditional breakfast ever since! All of that thanks to a thoughtful lady named Viola Greenawalt.”

For years, Gail would make about 10 Sour Cream Coffee Cakes and give them to First Pres senior pastors and staff. Now, Gail is sharing this holiday treat with everyone at First Pres and blessing us at Christmas!



second sunday of advent

DAY 8

Sunday, December 6

MARK 1:1-8

I remember waiting for Santa. Do you think he's really getting ready to come? Do you think he has thought of me? Do you think his sleigh full of presents will really make its way all the way here from all the way there? And will there be something special with my own name on it? Oh, the magic and wonder of Santa. I still feel it. At some point on Christmas Eve, I will still look up into the sky ... just to check.

Saint Nicholas worships at the manger. Santa bends his knee to bow before the cross. The gifts he brings are only a dim reflection, and a celebration, of the greatest gift of all: God's gift of His Son Jesus, our Lord and Savior. "And this was his message: 'After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie'" (Mark 1:7.) Like John the Baptist says here, the One who is coming is worthy and more powerful than all our anticipation and hope.

He is coming. He is on the way. This is the Wonder of Christmas.



Tim McConnell
LEAD PASTOR



advent candle: hope

1 PETER 1: 3-4

Sometimes we confuse being hopeful with being optimistic but hope and optimism are two very different things. Optimism looks at the circumstances and says, "It's all going to work out." It's the equivalent of singing "The sun will come out tomorrow..." when it's gray and gloomy today. The apostle Peter writes of hope, telling us that we have a living hope because of the resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus conquered death, then we can always place our hope in Him and not the daily circumstances of our lives.

Peter does not speak of hope flippantly. He saw what happened to John the Baptist, Jesus and Stephen. He knows of the sorrow and disappointment of this world. But he knows we can hope for eternal life because it is all in the hands of Jesus, the Lord of all. Frederick Buechner, Presbyterian pastor and author wrote that in the midst of our troubles we have a "hope that into the world the King does come. And in the name of the Lord. And is always coming, blessed be He. And will come afire with glory at the end of time." And that will be a wonder!



Watch and share videos from our pastors and staff on our Facebook by following [@firstprescos](#). Scan this QR code to begin watching.

DAY

9

Monday, December 7

PSALM 86:8-10

In a world cluttered with a multitude of gods, David asserts, “You alone are God.” No other being is comparable; no god does the unexplainable deeds that Yahweh does. David is reflecting both on God’s rescue of the people of Israel from Egypt and his intimate relationship with God. David knows that the appropriate response to the one true God is worship and that one day, “All the nations you (God) have made will come and worship” the LORD. David looks forward to the day when everyone will glorify the name of God.

In a world cluttered with a multitude of distractions—things and ideas and people to worship—where is your focus? It is easy to lose sight of the “marvelous deeds”—the amazing works of God. Slow down. Pay attention. Ask yourself where God was active in your life today. Ask those close to you where in the ordinariness of today they have seen the extraordinary hand of God. Then take time to praise God. Bow before Him in acknowledgment of His greatness and faithfulness. God alone is worthy of our worship.



Linda Boyles
ASSISTING MINISTER OF CARE

DAY

10

Tuesday, December 8

ISAIAH 7:14

We live in an unsettling time. Our hearts yearn for “blessed assurance ... a foretaste of glory divine!”

In 734 B.C., Isaiah prophesied the coming Messiah to a troubled nation of Judah—a nation in need of assurance. King Ahaz, frightened and overwhelmed, refused to put his trust in God. Peace of mind was within his grasp, as God spoke through Isaiah saying, “Keep calm and don’t be afraid.” But Ahaz would have none of it.

Judah was living in fear because of its enemies. Fear rises in us because of the instability of our time. Yet, ultimate peace—The Prince of Peace—of whom Isaiah prophesied, is about to be born!

Midst our worries, fears and questions—our sovereign God acts according to His own loving plan. He gives us a sign! “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

No matter what is happening in our world and lives, we can be at peace. We rest in Isaiah 26:3: “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in You.”

All is well; we have blessed assurance—Jesus’ birth is bringing a foretaste of glory divine!



Jim DeJarnette
MINISTER OF WORSHIP AND MUSIC

DAY

11

Wednesday, December 9

LUKE 1:26–33

I still remember the thrill Brooke and I had when the ultrasound operator delivered the news: “It’s a boy!” As we sat there staring at the monitor screen, a remarkable joy filled our hearts. In a matter of seconds, that little machine enabled us to know that a baby boy was on the way!

As wonderful as that was, the ultrasound didn’t reveal everything about this new little addition. Would the boy look more like his mother or me? (Thank goodness, he looks more like his mother today!) What kind of character would this boy embody? What accomplishments awaited him? Modern technology couldn’t give answers to these. Ultrasounds only go so far.

Angels, on the other hand, appear to give more detail!

Gabriel, perhaps the most sacred sonographer in history, appears to the virgin Mary, revealing that a boy is on the way. But this boy is none other than the long awaited, promised Messiah ... the very Son of God ... Jesus! Gabriel declares His greatness. He testifies to His coming kingdom. For Mary, not only was a baby boy on the way; God Himself was on the way!

What news! Like Mary, may we ever be captivated by Gabriel’s wonder-filled announcement.



Matt Holtzman
PASTOR FOR ENGAGEMENT
AND CARE

DAY

12

Thursday, December 10

LUKE 1:34–38

Something mysterious is happening. Something impossible to understand and almost too incredible to believe. Mary is bewildered. An angel, Gabriel, has just appeared to her and announced that she will bear a child, that she is to name him Jesus, that He will be called the Son of the Most High, and that He will reign on David’s throne over the people of Israel in a never-ending kingdom.

What? How? Gabriel graciously explains: The awesome power of the Most High will gently overshadow her and bring to pass this incredible mystery—conceiving the Son of God in her.

It’s impossible. But Gabriel continues: Even Elizabeth, who for decades has been waiting, hoping, questioning, doubting, despairing, conceding that she will never have a child, is six months pregnant!

It’s proof that God can do the impossible. It’s proof that His promises are sure. It’s proof that “no word from God will ever fail” (verse 37). It’s an invitation: Will you take God at His word, despite the odds, despite the circumstances, despite past experiences and disappointments, in the face of the seemingly impossible?

Mary’s response: “I am the Lord’s servant. May Your word to me be fulfilled” (verse 38). What is your response?



Andy Morrison
COLLEGE MINISTRIES DIRECTOR

DAY Friday, December 11

13 ISAIAH 40: 1-11

For several years, there was a series of billboards with messages from God. One said, “That love thy neighbor thing ... I meant that!” Another said, “Let’s meet at my house Sunday before the game.” But one said, “Don’t make me come down there!” It was a threat from an offended God and we humans better be careful. I think the billboard was trying to use humor to get us to think about what it means to trifle with a Holy God. That’s not a bad thing, but there’s a lot more God has to say to us. Today’s passage from Isaiah assures us that God’s wrath is not on the way down. Rather,

as John Calvin says of Isaiah 40:1, “... God’s grace will burst forth from the darkness.”

The coming of God in Christ answers our deepest yearnings for God to be not just with us but also for us. Isaiah tells us that the strong God who comes will be like a shepherd, tenderly caring for each lamb in his flock. When we feel beat up by life ... by the things that have been done to us as well as by the shameful things we have done, it is good to rest in the comfort of God’s grace that bursts into our lives when Jesus comes.

Junior McGarrahan
PASTOR FOR ADULT EDUCATION



DAY Saturday, December 12

14 PSALM 33:6-9

We often take God’s greatness and bigness to mean that He is a God who is too big to be worried about our smallness. Our small problems, small challenges, small desires and small longings seem so minor and unimportant compared to Him. After all, He’s got bigger fish to fry, right? We see in verse 6 that all God has to do is open His mouth and simple words can create an entire universe. He is big, and we are small, and yet, He deemed us important enough to come and inhabit our world to show us His character and save us from ourselves and from sin. Not only that He called us into a relationship that is personal and not

removed. He is a God who is so much greater than us and yet loves us individually and personally.

Much like God, the sun is huge, and powerful, and far greater than us. And yet, the same sun that warms and lights our entire solar system is the same sun that gently warms our skin on cool days.

In this Advent season, may we praise God for His greatness and bigness while we also bask in the rays of a God who desires to be with us each individually and who cares about us, smallness and all.

Nathan Richards
DIRECTOR OF FAMILY
MINISTRIES



LIFT UP YOUR HEADS

Georg Weissel

1. Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates;
 2. Fling wide the portals of your heart;
 3. Re-deem-er, come! I open wide
 4. So come, my Sov-ereign, enter in!

be-hold, the King of glo-ry waits;
 make it a tem-ple, set a part
 my heart to you: here, Lord, a bide!
 Let new and no-bler life be-gin!

the King of kings is draw-ing near;
 from earth-ly use for hea-ven's em-ploy,
 Let me your in-ner pres-ence feel:
 Your Ho-ly Spir-it guide us on,

the Sav-ior with of the world is here!
 a-dorned with prayer and love and joy.
 your grace and love in me re-veal
 un-til the glo-rious crown be-won.





COLOR

THE WONDER OF CHRISTMAS

Break out your colored pens, pencils or markers! It's time to color!

third sunday of advent

DAY 15

Sunday, December 13

JOHN 1:6-18

A wife left her husband, frustrated and desperate. This marriage wasn't working. He found out where she was staying and began sending her gifts. Every day another card, another bouquet, another chocolate. Nothing. No response. Then he went. His heart in this throat, he knocked on the door. It opened, and she immediately melted into his arms with tears. He asked her why the gifts didn't bring her back. What was different now? "The gifts didn't matter," she said. "What matters is that you came."

The bold witness of Scripture is this: in the fullness of time, when the moment was just right, against all odds and across an infinite expanse, God came. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Light didn't stay light. Word didn't stay word. Truth didn't stay truth. Grace didn't stay grace. The Light, the Word, the Grace, the Truth took on flesh to dwell with us. God came to us. This is the Wonder of Christmas.



Tim McConnell
LEAD PASTOR



advent candle: love

1 JOHN 4: 7-11

In William Blatty's book, *The Exorcist*, two priests performing an exorcism have a conversation about faith. The younger priest asks the older priest if he really believes all this supernatural God stuff. The older priest says that he does indeed, and the young priest is puzzled. So, the older priest kindly responds to his colleague's faith crisis saying, "I don't think people have as much trouble believing in God as they do in believing that God loves them." There is a lot of truth in that. In our sober, reflective moments some wonder how a God who is holy and creator of all that is could even think about them with any kind of favor, let alone with love.

But the wonder of this season is that God does more than give us a passing glance. He declares His love for us, but we all know saying doesn't make it so. What makes it so? How do we know that God really loves us? The apostle John tells us we know because God sent His one son into the world so that we might live through Him. God acted on His love and because of that we are free from the burden of our sin and our brokenness is healed. Let us immerse ourselves in the wonder of His self-giving love.



Watch and share videos from our pastors and staff on our Facebook by following [@firstprescos](#). Scan this QR code to begin watching.

DAY

16

Monday, December 14

1 PETER 2:1-21

When our daughter, Kara Elise, was born, I held her, all swaddled up, within the first minutes after her birth. Instinctively, I started to sing softly to her, “I love my little Kara, I do ...” Two generations later, that song is now sung to our grandkids.

We’re a family! We have an identity ... and we have a song. The family of God has a song too—“Jesus loves me, this I know...” One of God’s greatest gifts is that of knowing who we are, and to whom we belong. Our identity is of incomprehensible magnitude ... and tender intimacy. No better words are suited to such mystery than this 15th century poem:

“There is no rose of such virtue
As is the rose that bare Jesu.
For in this rose containèd was
Heaven and earth in little space.”

God, in His unfathomable mercy, has allowed us to be in relationship with Him. The King of the universe has come as a little baby ... accessible, vulnerable, irresistible ... drawing us into identity with Him, calling us to be “a people belonging to God, that we may declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light” (I Peter 2:9). Once we were walking in darkness, now we are children of Light. Once we were not a people, now we are the people of God.



Jim DeJarnette
MINISTER OF WORSHIP AND MUSIC

DAY

17

Tuesday, December 15

EZEKIEL 37:24-28

The “Shekinah Glory” of God is the visible manifestation of God on earth. There has never been a period of more intense “shekinah” than when Jesus walked among us. In Christ, God came to us. God made His dwelling place with us. John writes, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

It was always God’s intent and delight to have a people and be with them in close proximity. Our passage contains a proclamation from God that “My dwelling place will be with them ...” The Hebraic root for “dwelling place” is a brother to the root for “shekinah.” When God dwells with His people, His glory is palpable beyond telling. As we approach the consummation of Advent in the birth of God into the world, we approach God’s “Shekinah Glory” drawing near, a glory that intends to stick around, to “dwell.” We are His people and He is our God. We delight in His nearness; we welcome His presence. We lie down at night and rise up in the morning wrapped in the swaddling clothes of the Messiah’s glory, His nearness, His dwelling. Emmanuel, God is with us.



Michael Thornton
PASTOR OF DISCIPLESHIP

DAY

18

Wednesday, December 16

LUKE 1:39-45

So often I pray and feel blessed when I see my desired outcome from that prayer. I pray for provision and am given provision and then feel blessed. I pray for peace in a conflict, see peace and feel blessed.

What I don't often think about though, is the simple blessing it is to have trust in the in-between. The blessing it is to know that God is working now, not just when I see the result. Mary was called blessed not just because she was pregnant with Jesus, but because she was blessed in the before time, waiting time, when she trusted in the Lord that He would do what He promised.

Advent is a season of preparing and waiting. As we lean into this season, let us be marked as blessed as we trust that God is at work to fulfill His promises. We are blessed in the waiting, as well as the result.



Nathan Richards
DIRECTOR OF FAMILY
MINISTRIES

DAY

19

Thursday, December 17

JOHN 8:12

I remember opening beautifully wrapped Christmas packages as a child, excitedly anticipating the contents within. I also remember occasional disappointment upon discovering gifts like underwear or Soap on a Rope (an annual gift from my grandmother, who sold Avon products!), that seemed somewhat less than the wrapping had promised.

Christ's entrance into our world provides the opposite experience. Though Jesus' birth was shrouded in humble wrapping, no gift has ever been more beautifully suited to our needs. James Boice wrote, "If the birth of Christ is to teach us anything, it is to teach that God can choose to hide the greatest of gifts in the poorest of packages."

Jesus declared in today's passage that His light provides life. Do you want to cultivate a sense of wonder this Christmas season? Take time to reflect upon what Christ's coming illuminates, and how your life is forever changed because of it:

You are not alone. You are loved.

You can see God's character through Christ. The One who came to save you provides grace greater than your sins. What a great gift you've been given! How can you offer thanks to God today and throughout this season?



John Goodale
PASTOR OF CARING MINISTRIES

DAY 20

Friday, December 18

REVELATION 21:1-5

The wonder of our God is that relationships are paramount. God's heavenly relationship with His people is recorded in the language of Revelation 21:3: "God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will ... be their God." Our God is not a distant, detached God, but rather a God committed to restoring and consummating His relationship with His people.

The wonder of Jesus, God become flesh, is also that relationships are paramount: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Amazing, did you catch that, "among us." We are fallen, and we are broken, but the Lord did not leave us or give up on us. He came to us, and loves us.

In heaven God says in Revelation 21:5, "I am making everything new." On earth, through the incarnation, Jesus Christ, we are being made new. "If anyone is in Christ ... the old has gone the new has come." The incarnate "Word become flesh" has not given up on you, He is with you and not finished with you.

The wonder of this declaration of heaven, "God's dwelling place is among his people ... he will dwell with them" is the miracle of an incarnation on earth, "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."



Pat Hartsock
ASSISTING MINISTER OF CARE

DAY 21

Tuesday, December 19

GALATIANS 4:4-7

Sometimes we wonder where wonder went. Beauty and mystery are intangibles that seem to have no functional value for us. But as we wander through the wonders of Advent, we are astonished that God pours forth His wonders without end.

In this passage, Paul tells us what we already know—we were made captives to things that trap us and make us feel helpless. But wonder of wonders, we have been set free! In the words of infomercials, "But wait! There's more!" We are not freed to just go it alone ... we have been adopted as children into the family of God. We belong, body and soul to Him, and by the Spirit that is within us, we can call him "Abba! Father!"

Our redemption in Christ is a new birth in which we recognize our Father and begin to learn to call on Him with baby language for that is part of what "Abba" means. It's not just intimate language, it's also language that shows we are learning to be God's child ... just babies learning to say His name. And He responds with love and affection, giving us all we need in order to grow to know and love Him even more. That's wonder-ful!



Junior McGarrah
PASTOR FOR ADULT EDUCATION

O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL

John Wade 1743

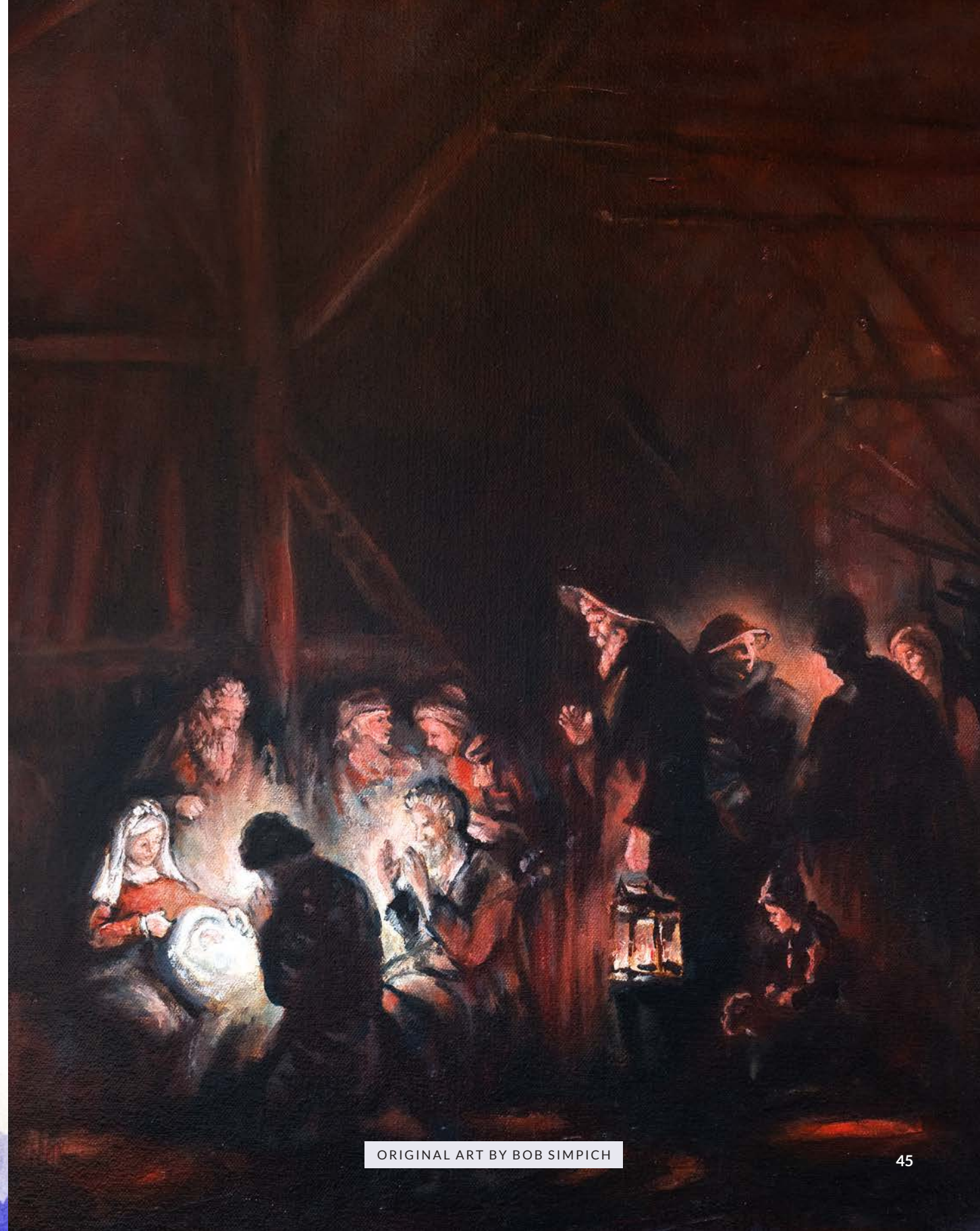
1. O come, all ye faithful, joy - ful and tri - um - phant,
2. Sing, choirs of an - gels, sing in ex - ul - ta - tion,
3. Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this hap - py morn - ing,

O come ye, O come ye to Beth - le - hem;
sing, all ye to Je - sus, the cit - i - zens be of heav - en - a - bove;
Je - sus, thee glo - ry be of all glo - ry given;

come and be - hold God, him, born the King of an - gels;
glo - ry of the Fa - ther, all ther, now in flesh ap - pear - est;
Word of the the, ther, now in flesh ap - pear - ing;

O come, let us a - dore Him, O come, let us a - dore Him,

O come, let us a - dore Him, Christ, the Lord.



ORIGINAL ART BY BOB SIMPICH

mary's song

LUKE 1:46-56

my soul
GLORIFIES
the lord

⁴⁶ **And Mary said:**

“My soul glorifies the Lord

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,

from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering to be merciful

⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,

just as he promised our ancestors.”

⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about
three months and then returned home.

fourth sunday of advent

DAY 22

Sunday, December 20

LUKE 1:46-55

It was May 26, 1996. Standing there, knees knocking, I was peering down the aisle toward the back of the church. All the people there—good people, nice people, family and friends—they meant nothing to me. They were only in the way of what I longed to see. Then, there she was. My fiancé. My bride. My wife, Abigail, as beautiful as I had ever seen, walking toward me to become my beloved for life.

After the anticipation and hope, after the longing and patient expectation, Jesus our Savior finally arrives. For Mary, it caused her heart to nearly burst. Now it isn't a dream or a promise. Now it isn't a plan or a prophecy. Now it is a child, a man, a Savior. God has done great things. Holy is His name. "And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior'" (Luke 1:46-47). To look on the baby Jesus is to fill the soul to bursting with fulfillment and joy. God has done it! This is the Wonder of Christmas.



Tim McConnell
LEAD PASTOR



advent candle: joy

HABAKKUK 3:17-18

Sometimes we have difficulty explaining just exactly what joy is. We want to say it's not quite like happiness, which seems to depend on our circumstances, but joy sure feels a lot like happiness, doesn't it? One comic said, "Without pain, how could we know joy?" This is an old argument ...and could be plumbed for centuries but suffice it to say that the existence of broccoli does not, in any way, affect the taste of chocolate." We discover, however, that joy doesn't come from the absence of suffering but rather from the presence of our God who is with us in suffering and in abundant times as well. The sorrow of suffering is temporary, but the joy of the Lord is eternal.

In this fourth week of Advent, our faces light up with joy because the coming of God into our lives is almost here. This is when we anticipate the Christmas story where Mary rejoices in God her Savior. Her joy comes from knowing that God is active in her life. She knows that will be her future because she knows the past of God's people. She has joy because God's promise to her is guaranteed by His mercy and justice that she has seen in action. Joy is a wonder because we know God is near.



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DAY

23

Monday, December 21

PSALM 111

Psalm 111 is an acrostic psalm, where each phrase begins with a letter from the Hebrew alphabet. Like the alphabet song that we memorized as kids, it's as though the psalmist wants us to recite his wondrous deeds from memory—as easily as the alphabet.

We all need help remembering, especially when times are hard, we feel lost or when He seems distant. During times of uncertainty, it's easy to forget the times that God did show up, when He did provide, when He did keep His promises. We're just a few days from Christmas, when we remember God's best-kept promise of all—the birth of Jesus to rescue us and restore our relationship with Him. But much like the people of Israel who'd been waiting for the promise of the Messiah to be fulfilled for centuries, maybe you've been waiting for God, feeling forgotten, and have a hard time remembering the goodness of God in this season.

Let this song help you remember. Use Psalm 111 as a prayer and primer for remembering the goodness and wonderful deeds of God in your life, and as encouragement that He will come through again!

“He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and compassionate” (Psalm 111:4). Won't you sing with me?



Andy Morrison
COLLEGE MINISTRIES DIRECTOR

DAY

24

Tuesday, December 22

MICAH 5:2-4

Have you ever felt insignificant? Most of us have, at one time or another. We may feel vulnerable or forgotten. Our passage today speaks to a people who felt this way. God's people felt small (verse 2) and even experienced abandonment for a time (verse 3). But God's promise to them was that He would call one of them to lead His people (verse 2). And what would be the character of this future ruler?

The one who would come from them and lead would have ancient roots (verse 2), and he would lead as a shepherd (verse 4). Having origins “from ancient times” would mean that he was established and trustworthy. Our passage promises that this shepherd-ruler would lead God's people with God's strength. He would point to the beauty and majesty of the Lord. Under his leadership, God's people would be able to live in safety.

As you think about your life, where do you feel a need for God's leadership? Do you long for His protection, for His strength, for His wisdom, for His peace? Spend some time with the Lord, inviting Him to shepherd your soul.



Lydia Lockhart
PASTOR OF MISSION ENGAGEMENT



DAY
25

Wednesday, December 23

PSALM 139:13-18

Where do babies come from?

These days, we can offer pretty robust answers to this question using terms like zygote, blastocyst, embryo, and fetus. You can read up on the science of pregnancy, the formation of organs, and the way baby and mother change over the course of those nine months. However, knowing about the mechanics of pregnancy doesn't rob it of any of its significance or wonder. I can remember sitting with my wife during sonograms, both of us unable to pull our eyes away from the screen as we were introduced to each of our boys through that amazing technology. In those moments, we could do little more than smile, laugh and well up with tears.

The good news of the incarnation is that God has drawn close to us. He not only stitched each of us together in the womb, but His desire to be in relationship with us was so great that the author of biological life became biological life. This knowledge is not quaint, it is not nice, it cannot be condensed to an artist's depiction on a greeting card. It changes everything! When we consider the incarnation, we are left awe-struck. We are filled with wonder at both the intimate complexity and grandeur of God's love for us in Christ!



Greg Hartnett
PASTOR OF EVANGELISM
AND YOUNG ADULTS

christmas eve

DAY 26

Thursday, December 24

MATTHEW 1:18-25

When I was 7 years old, my baby brother was born on Christmas Day. Can you imagine a more wonderful gift for a 7-year-old little girl? A doll for Christmas would have been great, but a real baby?! It was the best present ever! My parents had the name for my brother all picked out, but when he came on Christmas day, they added an extra middle name, "Christopher." A Christmas baby deserves a Christmas name. Christopher means "Christ-bearer." My parents desired that this little one might bear Christ in his life. Names have meaning. What does your name mean? The angel told Joseph what to name Mary's child, "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." In Jesus' name, the mission of God was revealed. Jesus came to save us from our sin. This baby Savior was God's greatest gift to humankind, and in His name, we find our salvation. During this beautiful season of Christmas when you offer prayer in Jesus' name—whether it's before you fall asleep at night, in the early morning chill of a winter day, or at Christmas Eve dinner—remember that you are praying the only name with the power to save a broken humanity.



Jennifer Holz
EXECUTIVE PASTOR



the christ candle

LUKE 2: 1-15

All during this Advent season, we have been lighting candles that shine in the darkness, reminding us that Jesus, the Light of the World, is coming. And now He's here! Those candles have been pointing us to Jesus, but they also are symbols of all the things we want to be a part of our lives: faith, hope, love and joy. We are tempted to try to make those things happen by managing our lives in just the right way. And those efforts might work for a while. More often than not, we experience frustration. We can't create faith, hope, love and joy to any lasting degree on our own.

Everyone loves fireplaces ... the crackling of the burning wood, the aroma of the burning embers. A gas fireplace puts out heat and light but the things that make a fireplace enjoyable are missing. There's no wood. Likewise, trying to put faith, hope, love and joy into your life by working hard to do it is flat and often artificial. Just as wood makes a full-fledged fire, so Christ is central to all those things we seek at Christmas. On this Holy Night, wonder at the gifts of faith, hope, love and joy that Jesus gives you and be thankful that they will never flicker out.



ORIGINAL ART BY BOB SIMPICH

JOY TO THE WORLD

Isaac Watts 1719

Lowell Mason

1. Joy to the world! the Lord is come; let earth re-
 2. Joy to the earth! the Sav-ior reigns; let all their
 3. No more let sins and sor-rows nor thorns in-
 4. He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the

ceive her King; let ev-ery heart pre-
 songs em-ploy; while fields and floods, rocks,
 fest the ground; he comes to make his
 nat-ions prove the the- glo-ries of his

pare him room, and heaven and na- ture sing, and
 hills, and plains re-peat the sound- ing joy, re-
 bless- ings flow far as the curse is found, far
 right- eous- ness, and won- ders of his love, and

and heaven and na- ture

heaven and na- ture sing, and heaven, and heaven and na- ture sing.
 peat the sound- ing joy, re-peat, re-peat the sound- ing joy.
 as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found.
 won- ders of his love, and won- ders, won- ders of his love.

sing and heaven and na- ture sing,

christmas day

Dear church family,

The Wonder of Christmas 2020. I hope you have lingered over these pages and felt it. With images, stories, devotions, recipes and songs, we wanted to give you a gift and an opportunity to feel the Wonder of Christmas at the end of 2020.

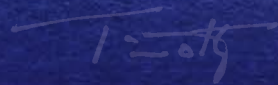
The week after Christmas is a quiet lull. Between December 25 and January 1, a quietness sets in on my life and I find myself reflecting on the year that has been. This year, 2020, has been more difficult than most. The plans I had for 2020 were not the way it played out, not in the slightest! But the life we lived together in 2020, that was rich. I remember Vision Sunday and all our dreams. Then I remember COVID-19 and the surprise of an online-only First Pres. I remember Easter on the rooftops and messages preached from mountains. There were times of triumph with some of the most creative experiences I have ever seen, and there were some moments of aching isolation and fear. Racial divisions threatened our community, but we dug to deeper levels of love and understanding. Election year politics tugged at emotions, but we lifted our heads to a Kingdom greater than parties or politics. We focused on the life of Jesus, retold The Beautiful Story, and opened our hearts to the Wonder of Christmas.

No, it was not the year I planned. "My plans aren't your plans, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8 CEB). It was not the year we planned, but it was in many ways the year we needed. God's plans are the best plans. Through it all, He has been faithful.

What a wonderful God. Let's open our hearts, in Wonder, to all He has planned for us.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Yours in Christ,



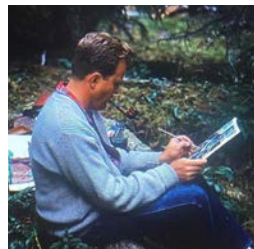
Tim



OH
COME,
LET US
ADORE
HIM

ABOUT THE ARTIST

BOB SIMPICH



Bob Simpich loved God and he loved painting, and his artwork was an expression of his undying faith. With his wife Jan, he attended First Pres for more than 60 years and prior to his death at age 94 in August, there were four generations of the Simpich family worshipping at First Pres.

“My dad was truly a man of faith,” said David Simpich. “It was his motivating life force, and he influenced a lot of people with his faith. In the six years since my mom died, he would start every day with his Bible study. His faith was his passion and he expressed that with his painting. He communed with God during his process of painting and expressed his devotion to God in that way.”

Bob’s last painting was of Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus and he finished it prior to Christmas 2019 despite failing health and having to carry his oxygen up and down the stairs of his house—with David’s assistance.

Bob led a Bible study and taught Sunday school for many years at First Pres.

“First Pres meant everything to him,” said Roy Strickler, a longtime friend. “He loved the church and loved going there. He was a man of the Scriptures. He knew his Bible front and back and sideways. That’s how I’ll remember him—and as a very kind person. Firm, but kind.”

Bob was an elder at First Pres, and his artwork has hung all around the church. For years, he was always ready to make beauty to glorify God and bless the church.

“His greatest earthly joy,” David said, “was sharing his art with people.”

ORIGINAL ART BY BOB SIMPICH

CHRISTMAS DAY SNAPSHOT



Where did I spend Christmas Day?



What was the weather like?



Who did I celebrate Christmas with?



What tradition means the most to me this year?



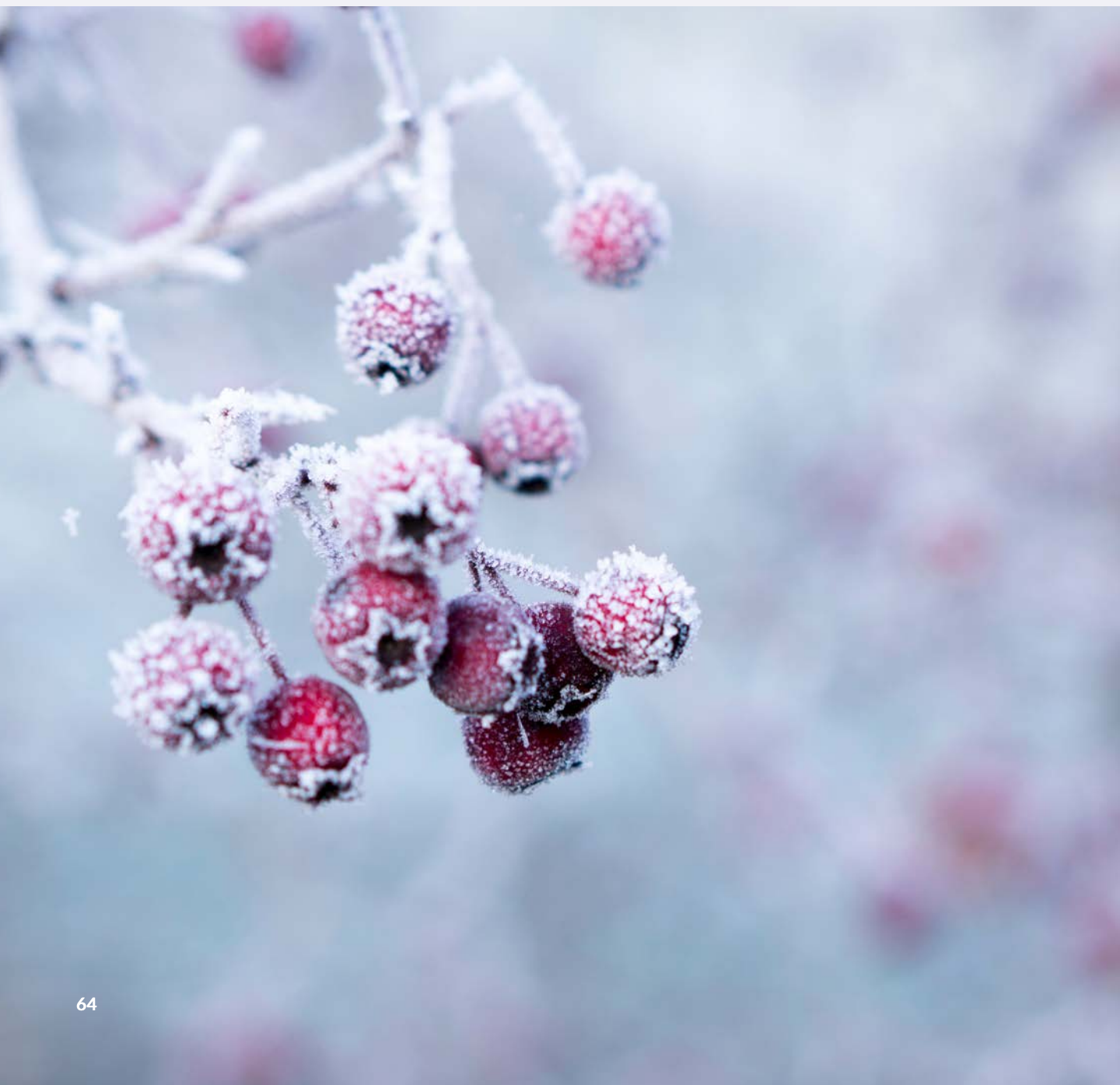
My favorite Advent Scripture:



My favorite Christmas song this year:



A YEAR IN
REVIEW



How did I see God at work in 2020?

Unexpected joy:

Unexpected sorrow:

Grateful for:

I'm most proud of:

Prayer for 2021:

GIVE THE GIFT OF

SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT

THIS CHRISTMAS

Finding a meaningful Christmas gift for a loved one can be a challenge, but Something Significant for Christmas is here to take off the pressure. By purchasing a gift, you will not only bless and further the ministry of our local and global mission engagement partners, you will also be sharing the hope of Christ with those receiving gifts.



Complete Your Order Online
my.firstprescos.org/Significant

How it Works



Browse the gift catalog online by visiting my.firstprescos.org/Significant



Order your gift online, or complete and mail in or drop off the order form in the mailed Something Significant for Christmas gift catalog.



Give your recipients a gift card in their honor that can be wrapped or put into a stocking! Each gift card shows the impact of their gift to help local and global partners be Light and Life.

Something Significant for Christmas



Gift
Catalog
2020



LIGHT AND LIFE
FOR THE CITY