

**6th ANNUAL  
ADVENT DEVOTIONS  
REDMOND PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH**

**2010**



*The artwork contained in this Advent Devotional was done by Melody Steeples and Caroline Tiffany.*

*Our thanks to all who participated in the process!*



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## Introduction

Welcome to the sixth edition of the Redmond Presbyterian Church Advent Devotional. We hope that you will find the entries inspiring and meaningful during this busy season.

Again this year our youth took an entire week. We applaud their willingness to share their thoughts about their faith with us.

And this year we have the first daily devotional coauthored by a canine member of our community. Thank you Polo (and Jeffrey too)!

Let us know if you find our little booklet helpful and inspiring. We are always looking for ways to improve. Also needed each year are those willing to share their thoughts and inspirations.

May you find this a joyous Advent season as we celebrate the true meaning of Christmas.

Your RPC Adult Spiritual Formation Commission

## The Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath comes to us from Scandinavia and Germany. It is a dramatic way of portraying a dark and waiting world that experiences the dawning light of Christ. The wreath should be in the form of a circle because it has no beginning and no end; therefore, it is a good picture of eternity and of God's everlasting love for us. The wreath is usually covered with evergreen since this is the color of life and growth. It symbolizes our growing faith in Jesus Christ. The wreath has four candles, one for each Advent Sunday. The candles for the first, second, and fourth Sundays are purple (or violet) to symbolize our penitence and preparation. The candle for the third Sunday is pink as a symbol of joy—which designates "Rejoice Ye." A large white candle is placed in the middle of the wreath. It is the Christ candle and is lighted on Christmas Eve. Families can benefit from having a personal advent wreath at home. For each Sunday of Advent, plan a 10-15 minute time to sit close to each other and to the wreath. We offer four family services in this booklet for families to use; be sure everyone has a chance to participate each week.

Sunday, November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## Service for the First Sunday of Advent (Prophecy candle)

Turn off the lights and light one of the purple candles. As it is being lit say: "Jesus says, I am the light of the world. Those who follow me will have the light of the world and never walk in darkness."

Read either Luke 1:26-38 or Matthew 1:18-25.

Sing a song together or listen to a recorded carol or hymn. Suggestions: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," "Jesus Loves Me," "Come, Thou Long-expected Jesus."

Optional with young children, read Isaiah 42:16 and/or Isaiah 9:2-7.

Close with prayer to thank God for his promise to send a Messiah. Each person may pray, if they like, for God to help them remember the true meaning of Christmas.



Sunday, November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## Children of Light, Children of the Day

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5.4-5

*But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief, for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.*

The thing I love most about advent is the light. The Star of David, the Advent Wreath, the candle as we sing Silent Night; each a striking contrast to the darkness around us. As I prepared for this devotion, the song "Masquerade" by Caedmon's Call began playing in my head. I struggled at first to understand the meaning of the lyrics, as they contrasted the light and the dark. These lyrics challenge us to assess where we stand in regard to the light. There are two points of view in the song, that of a person standing in the middle of a city with all the bright lights giving the illusion of day, and that of a person driving on a straight and narrow stretch of road through the darkness with the city out on the horizon, faintly glowing. How easy it is to be in the middle of the city, or the good things, and believe that we are living fully as children of light. But what if we step outside of the city walls and look from the outside. How does our light compare to all that is around us? And even then, as we are in the darkness looking at the glow of the city, how much more bright and powerful is a bolt of lightning, the power of God? The city glows faintly in the distance but God's light illuminates everything. This verse reminds us that we are meant to be in the light, that the darkness is foreign, and that we should prepare ourselves and live our lives in a way that reflects God's light. This Advent season I am challenging myself with the following question and I hope you will join me

Am I standing in the middle of the city, where the lights give the illusion of day, or on the road just outside the city, acknowledging all that has yet to be illuminated by God's love?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to remember that we are children of light. In a world covered in darkness we get lost in the shadows, but we know that your light is calling us out. We pray for our light to shine on this world and for your spirit to pour over us as we strive to lead your people through the night. This Advent season, may our lives be the shining star that guides them to the manger. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Jessica Ahnert

Monday, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## Who is this man?

Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11

*“When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”*

Ever since Taran was little we would read a Bible story to him every night before bed, he has now graduated to the Bible and Ellowyn now gets to use the Bible story book. She loves the New Testament stories where Jesus heals the blind man, feeds the five thousand and goes to Zacchaeus’s house. We read them over and over to her until she can recite them by heart. One day while reading her a Bible story Ellowyn asked me, “Who is Jesus?” I gave her my pat answer, “Jesus is God’s son!” She looked at me and said, “I know, but who is Jesus?”

Good question, who is Jesus? I mean, really who is he? I know he is the son of God and he died for my sins, but do I really know much about him? I can read the Bible stories about him and learn about the things he did, but what about the man? Did he like broccoli or carrots? Did he enjoy a good joke or was he always somber, filled with his purpose here on earth? Did he play ball with his siblings or wrestle with Joseph? Do I know enough about Jesus that I would recognize him if I met him on the street and had a conversation with him?

Ellowyn did not give up easily asking about Jesus, she continued to ask who is he and where is he? One day on our way to church she didn’t want to go. I told her we go to church to worship God and Jesus. Alright! Now she was going to finally see Jesus! During the service Pastor Larry stood up for the announcements and Ellowyn turned to me, “Is that Jesus?” “No,” I explained, “Jesus is everywhere!” After that day she quit asking me and I didn’t think about it again until a couple months later. I was driving her home from preschool when from the back she announced triumphantly, “Jesus is God’s son and he lives in our hearts!”

How simple, yet that statement says so much. What more do we really need to know? As we approach the birth of God’s son I don’t need to worry about who Jesus is or what he was like while here on earth. I just need to know he is God’s one and only son who died for my sins so that I may one day spend eternity in heaven with him and then really get to know him!

Prayer: Dear God, Jesus is your son and he lives in my heart. I pray for the simple faith and trust of a child as I humbly approach the Birthday celebration of your son. Help me to remember that he lives in my heart only through his great sacrifice. Help me to put him first and to remember he is the reason for this season.

Bethany Williamson

Tuesday, November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## Psalm 138

*1. I give thee thanks. O Lord, with my whole heart, before the gods I sing thy praise; 2. I bow down toward thy holy temple and give thanks to thy name for thy steadfast love and thy faithfulness; for thou hast exalted above everything thy name and thy word. 3. On the day I called, thou didst answer me, my strength of soul thou didst increase. 4. All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O Lord, for they have heard the words of thy mouth; 5. And they shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord. 6. For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he knows from afar. 7. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou dost preserve my life; thou dost stretch out thy hand against the wrath of my enemies, and thy right hand delivers me. 8. The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; thy steadfast love endures forever. Do not forsake the work of thy hands.*

My dear friend Mary Parker always began a prayer with, "Thank you, Lord, for this beautiful day!" It did not matter if the weather was terrible, nor was it a concern that her tumor-ravaged body restricted her observation of the physical world to seeing with one eye, no hearing, minimal mobility in her hands and feet, and slurred speech. The Lord was busy fulfilling His purpose in her to share His love with all who knew her. For many years in her limited life Mary volunteered at John Hyson School, a Presbyterian Mission School in New Mexico. She taught art and poetry to young children, who saw her with their hearts and not as she appeared to many adults. At this busy time of the year, Mary would have us all remember that Love is the greatest gift, one made incarnate in our savior Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for this beautiful day! Let your love be the gift we give to others this Christmas. Amen

Katie Schmidt

Wednesday, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010

## **Psalm 119:10 — The Glories of God's Law**

*“With my whole heart I seek you;  
Do not let me stray from your commandments.”*

If I break a commandment, suppose I steal something, am I to blame for doing it? Or is God to blame for not stopping me?

In our secular culture, the answer is clear. No one is to blame for anything. Everyone has an excuse. If anything is to blame, it is the System – whatever that means . . . In *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo, Jean Valjean is imprisoned for 19 years – five for stealing bread for his starving sister and her family and fourteen for numerous escape attempts. Who is to blame for his wasted years? Jean or the system that forced him to steal?

As a young man I lived by a code of ethics that was based on what I call “What would my Mother do?” By this code, I knew what was wrong. If it was convenient I followed it; if not, my Mother was to blame.

Early in my married life, my code of ethics shifted to “What would Jane do?” In reading an earlier devotional from several years ago, you will remember that I said that Jane is the most honest and straightforward person that I know. In this case, the bar was definitely higher, but I still strayed and in those cases, it was her fault. It is always nice and convenient to have someone to blame.

Recently I noticed a shift in my ‘code’. Finally after 55 plus “a bit” years on this Earth, I now say “What would God have me do?” The compass is now facing true North. In thinking about this Reading, I believe that the Psalmist has hit the nail on the head: “God, please don’t let me stray . . .” Now I look into my heart and seek God’s guidance. Somehow blame just doesn’t seem to be part of the equation anymore. Maybe this means that I am (finally) growing up. All I can say is that it is about time.

Prayer: Abba: Grant me the courage to act upon what is right. Everything is known to you. I don’t have to explain – I have only to ask your forgiveness in doubting. Amen.

Dave Wickert

Thursday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010

## While you are waiting

Scripture: *“Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.”*

2Peter 3:14-15a

I have always welcomed the idea of Advent as a time of waiting. Not ordinary waiting. Not waiting for the light to change or the meeting to begin. This is waiting for something amazing. This is waiting for something big – God’s promise for a new life. We are being asked to be active in our waiting, to be fully present.

I consider myself to be a person who knows how to handle some wait time. I don’t mind arriving early for a meeting or appointment because I am prepared. I might have a book, my perpetual To Do list, or if all else fails, there is my multi-tasking phone. But these are time fillers, distractions. They don’t help me to live in the moment, to “strive to be found by him at peace”. I wonder what would happen, if during this season of waiting, I left the books and lists behind and used those times of waiting to consider what God is offering. I wonder if I might feel more prepared to welcome the good news of the season. I wonder if I might find that peace.

During this season of Advent, would you join me in putting away the distractions and paying attention?

Prayer: Dear Lord of patience, peace, and salvation,  
Speak to us in these moments of waiting during this season of Advent  
and into the year ahead.

Amen

Juliann Phillips

Friday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010

## Reflections on Psalms 16 and 17

Scripture: Psalm 16, 17

Ps 16 v.1 *"Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge."*

Where are we to go beloved in our hour of distress but to the Lord. He has never failed us or left us alone. In the darkest hour of our pain and alienation that still small voice speaks to us to comfort and alleviate our fears, and those wounded hands carry us when we can go no further.

Ps 17 v. 8 *"hide me in the shadow of your wings"*

Though the encroaching darkness appears to descend upon us, it is just the shadow of our Lord. Even within the night, we are still wrapped by those wings.

PM Psalm 22

v 24 *"For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him."*

Our loving father attends his ear to those who suffer. Who could ask for a more empathetic and compassionate Savior.

Prayer: Father, in this advent season, make your presence known to those who suffer, are alone, homeless, and have no hope for tomorrow.

Patricia Tsybulnik

Saturday, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## My Magnificat

Scripture: Luke 1:39-56

*My soul glorifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful of the humble state of His servant.  
From now on all generations shall call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is His name.  
His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation.  
He has performed mighty deeds with His arm.  
He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.  
He has brought down rulers from their thrones,  
but has lifted up the humble.  
He has filled the hungry with good things,  
but has sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped His servant Israel,  
Remembering to be merciful to Abraham and His descendents forever,  
Even as he said to our fathers.*

These verses, the “Magnificat,” are among the most beloved in the New Testament. After Mary learns she is the mother of Jesus Christ, she visits her cousin Elizabeth, who is pregnant with John the Baptist. Elizabeth praises Mary for her faith, and Mary breaks into this song of humility, mercy, and glory to our Lord.

I learned my favorite song of praise and glory, or my “Magnificat,” at Sunday School in the 1970s, in a small Presbyterian church among the Western Illinois cornfields. Most often I sing or hum when I’m shuttling kids to and from events, but it’s there too at my everyday tasks like working in the kitchen or standing in line at the post office.

My Magnificat is a song of togetherness written by a Roman Catholic priest in Chicago during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. This last verse is my favorite.

“They’ll Know We Are Christians By Our Love,” by Peter Scholtes

All praise to the Father from whom all things come  
And all praise to Christ Jesus His only son  
And all praise to the spirit who makes us one.

And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love.  
Yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love.

Prayer: Dear Father in Heaven, My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. Amen.

Jackie Riddell

Sunday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## Service for the Second Sunday of Advent (Bethlehem candle)

Light the first Advent candle.

Turn off the lights and light another of the purple candles. As it is being lit say: "I light this candle on the second Sunday in Advent to remind us to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child, Jesus."

All recite: "Jesus says, I am the light of the world. Those who follow me will have the light of the world and will never walk in darkness."

Read: Luke 1:39-56.

Sing or listen to a song. Suggestions: "O Little Town of Bethlehem," "Away in the Manger," or "Silent Night."

Read Micah 5:2-4.

Close with prayer to thank God that Jesus came into our world so that we could have a restored relationship with God. Help us to love God and each other more.



Sunday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## God Hears and He Answers Prayer

Scripture: Luke 1: 57-68

In our busy lives we usually want instant or fast gratification when we pray. We know God answers prayer but we want it now. Zachariah and Elizabeth wanted their child for years and finally they thought they were too old. Yet God had even a bigger plan for them and their son, who was to be a vital part in a much larger event than they could even imagine. Their neighbors and friends, and Christians for all time would be affected by this blessing. Their son was born in the Hill Country of Judea and that conjures up a mental picture of a beautiful place: the kind all of us enjoy in our mind's eye. It would be the kind of place where we could slow down, experience peace, and listen for God.

Have you ever hugged a tree and felt the power flow through you? Do you take time to find a comforting place to sit and pray, and then listen for God to answer in the quiet? For me it may not be in words but a feeling of a direction I should consider. The title of this comes from the old song, "*God hears and he answers prayer, cast on Jesus your every care, trust in his promises, they cannot fail....*"

Prayer: Father we thank thee for the events that you gave the world to help us find our way to you. In the beauty of this Christmas season, help us to slow down, to listen and to trust, and enjoy peace. May the Christmas music reach the depths of our souls. And Lord we continually pray for your help in our world where so much is beyond our comprehension. We love you Lord. Amen.

Bertie Glass

Monday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## **The Day Will Come**

Scripture: Amos 7:1-9

Amos, a layman, was the first of the prophets to put his message into writing. As such we have in this bible book the early emphasis elevating social mores above ritual sacrifices and transcending the narrow vision his countrymen had of the Lord as the God of Israel only. The second half of the book is in the form of 5 visions of which we have 3 visions in these few verses. God is patient with his people and provides for them (us). Calamities, here locusts and an enormous fire, can be a signs of his displeasure with the dissembling ways of his people. His plumb line measures society and finds it crooked.

Amos was speaking to an agricultural milieu which depended for life and sustenance on the 'latter' harvest because the first harvest belonged to the Ruler. Amos's short messages addressed to the people, rather than to the King, warn of disasters, natural and societal, when society wanders, strays, and forgets God's ways and the purpose of life itself as symbolized in Sodom and Gomorrah, the Exodus and the gift of the Land to God's people.

Today these verses speak to us in life as we contemplate the meaning of another short message centuries after Amos, the story of Christmas, the birth of a Savior and the renewal of an old faith. Again Society (that's us) is being measured by God's plumb bob.

Prayer: Lord, we pray that the Amos's of today may awaken us to your Christmas story and its meaning for our lives today. Amen

Jim Glass

Tuesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## I am no Prophet

Scripture: Amos 7:10-17

Amos is accused of prophesying at the royal shrine of the Northern Kingdom, Beth-el, the King's Chapel of that day. Surprising to prophesize judgment in someone else's country; go and preach to your own people, Amos is told by the head Priest of Jeroboam, the king. But Amos replies, I am not a Preacher; I am a shepherd and a fig gatherer. Amos continues to answer Amaziah by saying, the Lord has sent me to you. Not a very politic statement for one admittedly not trained in the prophet's school. Somehow Amos's message of justice and help for the poor do not seem to resonate in his day. Amos wrote 2,800 years ago, but his prophecy reads like a Twitter alert. He's a good example of how in the Bible "prophecy" is more about forth-telling the truth about the present than fore-telling events in the future.

David, too, was called by God from tending sheep: 2 Samuel 7:8 says: *"... Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel"*.

Later in history comes the story of Christmas and the arrival of a carpenter as "the son of God". The first Christmas is variously celebrated by Herod, the king; by the Magi from the East and by the shepherds. Our Christmas is to tell the Old Story in a New and exciting Way. Amos left an old life to live a dangerous life in another land and to serve the Lord and the Lord's people.

Christmas reminds us to do the same; leave the land of selfishness and go to the land of service.

Prayer: Lord, even today you call us to share and give of ourselves to your people and service. Amen.

Jim Glass

Wednesday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## Uniting the Head with the Heart

Scripture: Psalm 119:25-48

Growing up in a large Presbyterian Church in San Diego, I mostly received the message that knowing God meant increasing my intellectual knowledge. I “memorized” verses (for sticker prizes in Junior Sunday School), attended “studies” as a youth and observed my lawyer/elder/teacher father host a Bible study in our home for many years. I cherish this background and still commit myself to encouraging a thoughtful faith in those who wish to follow Christ. My work as a professor and church adult spiritual formation commission member still resonates deeply in me. Many of the verses in this Advent Scripture reading emphasize how the *understanding* of God’s laws help us to be faithful to the One who created us.

But in meditating on this Scripture and in noticing my own faith development, I am struck with the words that are not so much focused on the “head” but on the “heart.” Hear some of the *feeling* words in Psalm 119: “grief, cleave, shame, enlarge my heart, delight, incline, revive, reverence, reproach, dread, long, wait, love, seek, trust.” These words connote emotions and passions and relationships. They also explain to me how music is such a powerful vehicle for me to be connected to God, as my heart and mind simultaneously engage in worship. So do a quick reflection....do Christmas carols play a significant part in your celebration of this time of year; if so, why?

Activities and memories of the Advent Season and Christmastime often touch more of the emotional than intellectual parts of us. That is why this season can be a very powerful time of year. We can place unrealistic hopes onto these days or long for a past that appeared to be so much better. Yet, this Scripture prompts us to be renewed RIGHT NOW, today, this Wednesday. God meets us where we need—in our minds as well as in our hearts.

Prayer: Oh Lord, revive me today according to Thy word, in my mind and in my heart. Amen.

Claudia Grauf-Grounds

Thursday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## **A Call to Remember**

Scripture: Revelation 2: 8-17 (emphasis on 12-17)

Fifteen years ago we were on a Smithsonian Odyssey Tour to Greece, the Greek Islands and Turkey. We climbed and investigated EVERY archeological site extant, don't think we missed one!

John's letter to the church in Pergamum brought back one of the most significant memories of that trip! After mentioning their faithful witness to their faith in most instances, he takes them to task for accommodating themselves to the Roman culture and to the eating of food previously offered to the Roman idols. He reminds them that worship belongs only to their Lord and to their Lord alone.

We spent an entire day high on the hill exploring the spectacular site of the Temple of Trajan, the Pergamom Acropolis, and the steep amphitheater that seated thousands. It was a beautiful sunny day with a clear blue sky that emphasized the stark white beauty of the graceful Doric columns rising up to the skies. It was a glorious sight and our group gazed in awe. Then...flowing up from the valley below came the call for the afternoon prayer...musical, haunting, and other worldly, transporting us into a long ago time. The following silence of the group truly expressed our wonder. That magical moment symbolized the meaning of worship to all the faiths gathered there. I will not soon forget it and will always treasure that experience.

Prayer: Our Lord, help us to be still and listen. Give us eyes to see how you are alive forever. Give us the wisdom to seek your meaning for our time. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

Barbara J. Knopf

Friday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## Be Strong and Take Heart

Scripture: Psalm 31

At first glance, Psalm 31 doesn't seem to be about Advent or Christmas or anything very happy. David seeks refuge in God because his enemies are after him. He asks God to rescue him; he asks God to be merciful; he is under a lot of stress and sadness (vv. 9-11).

Yet even with all the persecution, David remembers the Lord. He is reminded of God's mercy and greatness: "I trust in you, O Lord" (v. 14); "How great is your goodness" (v. 19), "...he showed his wonderful love to me..." (v. 21).

We suffer persecution from "the enemy" every day—stress over money, jobs, our relationships; our lives are difficult with many challenges. But we have a savior, and we remember and celebrate His coming to earth this season. We remember his coming in the flesh the first time and we celebrate the first inroads in overcoming the enemy through the Incarnation.

But in Advent we are also looking forward to His coming again, for the Final Triumph over the enemy. And now, in the in-between time, what some theologians call "the already and the not-yet," we have hope. We set our anchor in God's promised return. We can rest in that promise because we have experienced God's first kept promise of the coming of the Messiah! So take heart and be encouraged this season by God's words, here written by David and paraphrased in *The Message*:

*"Be brave. Be strong. Don't give up. Expect God to get here soon."*  
(Ps. 31:24)

Prayer: Father, during this holy season of anticipation of the coming of your Son, Jesus, quiet our hearts as we look to you for strength and rest in your love. Amen.

Nancy Anderson

Saturday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## Love the Lord Your God

Scripture: Matthew 22.37-38

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment.*

Moses first shared this verse with the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6.4-5. In this passage, Jesus tells the people that everything they do should reflect their love for God. During the Word on Wednesdays (WOW) the children explored this passage. We looked for and thought of ways to show God we love him by completing the following phrase:

I love God when I \_\_\_\_\_.

Here are a few that we came up with: when we read our bibles, when we care for each other, when we pick up trash, when we help someone who is sick. What can you come up with? During a season that is so busy and full, what are some simple things (some of which you may already be doing!) which show God that you love him with everything you have: heart, mind and soul?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your love and the many ways we can reflect this love through our lives. Help us to love you with all that we have, with our heart, soul, mind and strength. May we recognize your love for us through the gift of your son and may we eagerly share this love with others. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Jessica Ahnert

Sunday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## Service for the Third Sunday in Advent (Shepherds candle)

Light the first two candles.

Turn off the lights and light the pink candle. As it is being lit say: "I light this candle on the third Sunday in Advent to remind us to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child, Jesus."

All recite: "Jesus says, I am the light of the world. Those who follow me will have the light of the world and will never walk in darkness."

Read: Luke 2:1-4.

Sing or listen to a song. Suggestions: "Joy to the World," "O Come, All Ye Faithful," or "While Shepherds Watched their Flocks by Night."

Read Isaiah 11:1-2.

Prayers: Ask God to help you to slow down and appreciate the unique things of the Christmas season.



Sunday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## With Every Bit of My Being

Scripture: Psalm 63

Psalm 63 starts out like this. *"You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water."* What an intro. *"My whole being longs for you"* I mean how passionate is that?

When I was a kid I was obsessed with Hulk Hogan, in fact all of my friends were because he was awesome. A big, buff, blond dude who battled for the good guys and could rip his shirt in half whenever he wanted... who wouldn't like that? He was the best wrestler by far and we all tried to impersonate him at school (I mean talk like him, not fight like him). They even made this little action figure of him and I just had to have it. I would ask my mom if I could have it and she would say not right now. Not right now is a phrase that can rock my world sometimes and this just happened to be one of those times. I wanted that Hulk Hogan action figure so bad but it just felt like I wasn't going to get him. Then Christmas rolled around and there was this present under the tree. A present shaped like the packaging that action figures always come in. When I saw that present I ran to it and made it the first one that I opened, and you know what it was? It was a pair of socks... Just kidding, it was the Hulk Hogan action figure. I lost it. I ran around the house yelling cause I was so excited. I wanted this action figure so bad and now I finally had it.

Now I really wanted that action figure but I wouldn't say that my being longed for it. Our whole being longing for God is a passion that can feel out of reach sometimes but is one that we should strive for on a daily basis. Our world can be distracting with popular media, cell phones, computers, Facebook, Twitter and many other things. Now throw on top of that, the hustle and bustle of the holiday season and you have a recipe for a huge distraction for our passionate longing for God. Take some time out today, maybe right now, and spend a moment in prayer seeking God. Dig down deep into who you are at the core and realize how much you need God.

Prayer: Dear God, I pray that my passion for you would over take my heart. I pray that my whole being would cry out for you. Lord be my everything.  
Amen

Jeff Dennis

Monday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## **In This Busy Life**

Scripture: Psalm 41

Sometimes life gives you too much to do. Or, in my case, I give my life too much to do. Between school, homework, dance, and church, I have found myself in a place where I never stop. But even in this busy life, the Lord is still protecting me. When I cry out to Him, He always responds. If I am down, my God is with me showing me that I am not alone. Psalm 41 reminds me that even when I am overwhelmed, God is there with me giving me a little shove from behind to keep walking forward. I am in his presence forever and that is where I find my joy.

Prayer: Lord, I cannot accomplish what you have planned for me alone. Please help me turn to you during all of the good and all of the bad. I am so excited to live out this journey you have planned for me. You are amazing and I am forever thankful for your love. Amen

Andrea Ducharme

Tuesday, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## A Moment Least Expected

Scripture: Matthew 24: 32-44

*“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you must always be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”*

When I read this text I think of all the times that I disobeyed my parents' rules, but I did it knowing that my parents would not be home in time to catch me. In this chapter Jesus talks about the end of the age and all the signs that signify it. He goes on later in the text to talk about the differences between a wise and faithful servant and the sinful servant. The wise servant is doing his duties when his master comes home so his master sees him being faithful and thus trusts him with more important duties. The sinful servant beats his fellow servant and drinks and his master comes home at a time he does not expect catching him in the act of sinning, therefore the servant is thrown out. Are you being the faithful servant, or the sinful one?

Prayer: Dear God, please just help us to be a faithful servant to you. I hope that when the end of the age comes we are the ones that are taken, and not the ones left behind. Please just let us be reminded of the fact that even though our parents aren't always watching, you are. Amen.

Joey Weinmeister

Wednesday, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## Never Ending

Scripture: Revelation 4: 1-8

*"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty— the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come."* (Revelation 4:8)

It was just about a year and half ago that I realized who God was. I was sitting on a worn out blanket on a dewy grass hill overlooking the most breathtaking scene anyone could ever take in; the sparkling Columbia River at Creation, Christian music festival, at the Gorge. I stood, listening to The David Crowder Band sing "Neverending". The song goes: "Always You were, You are never ending." All of the sudden, I was aware of something greater than me. It was surrounding me. It was inside me. It was everywhere. I got the wonderful sensation of goose bumps and I felt suddenly renewed. It was then that I realized God is far greater than I could ever even begin to imagine. Upon reading this passage, I was brought back to that moment and I knew that even though it was just a couple seconds out of my life, it meant something outstanding. God really is forever. He is always. He is never ending.

Prayer: Dear God, it is in the smallest of moments we are reminded of how great You really are. Thank you for those moments. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Hannah Linsky

Thursday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## **Trusting God in Difficult Situations**

Scripture: Psalm 60

Here in the United States, we live in an individualist society that teaches everyone that they can achieve anything, no matter what the challenge is. This idea creates a society in which many of us learn to trust ourselves above all others, because so often we see people do things that break our trust. So many times before we make big decisions or attempt to solve a problem, we ultimately listen to ourselves and shut others out.

In this Psalm, David calls out for God's help, as he asks for God to "Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless." Asking God for help is something that many times we forget to do, or we simply don't listen. Sometimes just praying, and asking for God's help can help improve a situation or help guide you to the right choice. We become so wrapped up in our concrete world that we simply forget that God has the power to help guide us, even though he is capable of mighty things.

Prayer: Lord, please help us to let go, and to trust in you even when we are very opinionated. Sometimes we forget your awesome power, and instead focus on the material world around us. Please give us the wisdom to come to you in times of need and any other time. Amen.

Mitchell Stolarczuk

Friday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## Worshipping with Music

Scripture: Revelation 5: 6-14

*"Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever and ever!'"* Rev. 5: 13

One of the best parts about worshipping our Father is when we get to do it with music. I love to hear the sound of voices, high and low, loud and soft, crying out to our God in unison. I can just imagine Jesus sitting above, hands behind his head, eyes closed, soaking in the praise of his followers - can you even picture a better sound, a more worthy compliment? One of the final lines in the classic song "God of Wonders" goes like this:

"God of wonders, beyond our galaxy, you are holy, you are holy,

Precious Lord, reveal your heart to me, you are holy, you are holy"

And behind those lovely words, a chorus of voices chant "Holy, holy, holy", so soft, so beautiful, and I just imagine the angels singing. I can just see all the tribes and nations singing in unison. What a magnificent, insane day that will be when the whole earth sings His glory... So lets warm up our pipes now! Lets not waste our breath! The day is near.. Lets be ready to sing!

Prayer: Father, let us dwell on your amazing power, let us sing of your love forever! You are so good. Let us sing your praises all day.

Melina Dennis

Saturday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## God Knows Me: A Reflection on Psalm 139

Scripture: Psalm 139

When I am worried or struggling with a problem, I pray. It's the first thing I do. But when I am rejoicing, is my first thought to do the same? To be completely honest, not always. And for that, I feel ashamed. Sitting in our service and confessing our sins in silence, very often my regret is for not sharing my triumphs with the Lord or giving Him the glory.

Having read Psalm 139, though, I felt some of this burden lifted. God knows me at all times. He knows what I'm going through; He understands what I've been experiencing. I may not always vocalize my joys (and sometimes, concerns), but He "hears" me, nonetheless. This psalm evoked a sense of calming for me – that even if I fail in my (only too-human) endeavors to be Christ-like, God knows what is present in my heart.

I realize this could be a bit daunting, maybe scary, especially when my heart is filled with anger, contempt, or frustration. But verse 10 says, "even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast." So, even when I am struggling and resisting His presence, God is still there for me – not judging, but waiting to guide me back to Him.

These days, our society (especially here in my beloved Pacific Northwest) has moved farther and farther away from God and faith. I worry constantly about family members and friends who have little or no faith. But although verses 19-22 are vehement, stringent admonitions of non-believers, I prefer to dwell on the final two verses. If God knows my heart and can guide me back to Him, won't he know theirs and guide them back?

Psalm 139 centers me in the chaos that surrounds my everyday life and the preparations to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. When I panic that I've forgotten a gift promised to a child, or that the house isn't clean enough to have guests over, or that the Christmas cards haven't been addressed or mailed before Christmas, I can take a deep breath and stop. I can thank God that He is with me and that I am always with Him; I will acknowledge Him and His hold on my life.

Prayer: Dear Lord, You see everything and know everything, even when I don't say it. Please help me to better articulate my fears, concerns and, especially, my joys; to offer you my thanks as much as I lay down my burdens upon you. Thank you for your everlasting, omnipresent hand of guidance and help me to better follow you. In Your Son, Jesus Christ's, name, I thank you. Amen.

Cathy Tiffany

Sunday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## Service for the Fourth Sunday in Advent (Angel's candle)

Light the first three candles.

Turn off the lights and light the last purple candle. As it is being lit say: "I light this candle on the fourth Sunday in Advent to remind us to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child, Jesus."

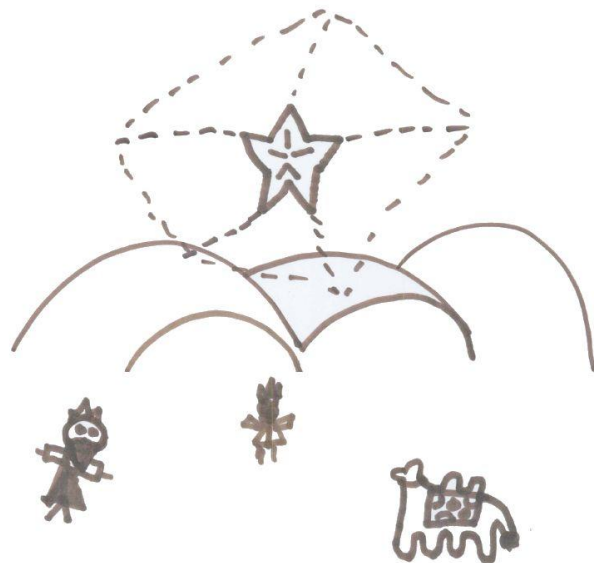
All recite: "Jesus says, I am the light of the world. Those who follow me will have the light of the world and will never walk in darkness."

Read: Luke 2:15-20.

Sing or listen to a song. Suggestions: "What Child is This?", "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," or "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear."

Read (optional with young children) Psalm 72:2-14.

Prayer: Thank God for loving us so much. Ask God to help you praise like the shepherds did.



Sunday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## **Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.**

Scripture: John 3:19-21

*“And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”*

Did you notice that evil deeds reflect back on the evil doers?

Good deeds are not a reflection on the good doer, but are a reflection of what has been done “in God.” When in the Light, the emphasis is on God!

In the early 1990's a favorite family Christmas Eve tradition of ours was to drive around looking at Christmas lights on our way to midnight services. We would leave the house about two hours early and just drive around the neighborhood looking at the lights and decorations as we gradually got closer and closer to the Church. We lived outside of Philadelphia and the cold evenings, with maybe some light snow on the ground, made the experience just that much nicer. All of the colors and bright lights seemed to draw you from house to house as you moved from street to street.

Then one year we wandered into a section that had gotten a new idea. The whole neighborhood got together and started putting out lunch bags with sand and small candles and lined the streets. An amazing explosion of light happened. Just like an overfilled tree jumps out at you, imagine a section with street after street, after street with not just individual homes lit up, but also these simple candles lining the street, joining the community together and lighting the ‘way.’

Prayer: “Heavenly Father, Thank you Christmas – a time for us to reflect on your gifts to us. Thank you for this time of year as our friends, families and our community are drawn together, and lit up! But, most of all, Thank you for the light of Jesus. May he shine on us together that we might see you better. Amen.”

Dave Wickert

Monday, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## Sadness and Joy

Scripture: Luke 1.26-38

*Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."*

Can you imagine finding out such amazing news, and not being able to tell anyone? People talk about how Mary must have been scared when the angel told her the news, but I have always wondered if she wasn't a bit excited. What a task for a young woman to take on, what a wonderful purpose to have! Mary's response to the angel's message shows a strong and faith-filled young woman; she is God's servant and will do what he asks and yet she knows that telling people will make her and her future husband outcasts.

The joy and sadness of Mary's situation permeates the season of Advent. We are filled with the joy of Jesus' arrival and God's gift of love, but as second-coming Christians, we know the pain that he went through to free us from our sin. How sad, yet how exciting! As we approach the day of celebration, may we have the courage to be excited about God's purpose for our lives and the strength to embrace both the sadness and the joy this Advent season.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Help us to face this season as Mary faced her journey. May we be aware of the sadness and profound gravity of Jesus' journey and yet filled with the joy of your love. May we rest in the peace that Mary has gone before us in this struggle and found a way to share her joy with the world, just as we are called to share our joy. Make us mindful of the ways that you are calling us to share your love with those around us and give us the confidence to pray as Mary did, saying "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." In Jesus' name, Amen.

Jessica Ahnert

Tuesday, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010

## **Building Christmas Memories and Family Traditions**

Scripture: Luke 2: 1-7

Traditions and memories are the way we share with our children the joys of that wondrous Christmas Eve when God came to us in the form of the infant Jesus in the manger.

At our family gathering for Christmas, we have a tradition of reading Advent Bible verses. Each family member gets to choose the passage they want to read. The passages are prophecies of the coming Messiah from the Old Testament and stories of the birth of Jesus from the New Testament.

This tradition started in Del's childhood home in California. Christmas Eve the three boys would help decorate the Christmas tree. His Dad would read Luke 2: 1-7 and the family would sing carols. Years later the tradition continued with the Taylor Christmas reunions. All of Del's brothers and their families would gather at each other's homes during the years our children were growing up to read the Christmas story and sing carols around the piano.

Our three children are grown now and married with homes of their own. We have the same tradition with a little twist. All of us want to participate in the Christmas readings! There is always lots of fun in the selection process as our son Alex and his wife Jessica, our daughter Jeannette and her husband Dan, our son Patrick, and Del and I, choose the verses we want to read that year. This is followed with a gift exchange. We close the gathering with Patrick's wife Melissa reading "The Night Before Christmas" and the whole family singing Christmas Carols.

The new tradition of our family all sharing the reading of the Advent scriptures at our holiday gathering floods our mind with wonderful Christmas memories. Holiday celebrations can give each family member a time to share their religious heritage, Christmas memories and continue family traditions.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, Help us to take in the joy of your coming on that Christmas Eve in the form of the Christ child. You grew up to be Christ the King and with your grace became Christ our personal Savior. Amen.

Barbara and Delmer Taylor

Wednesday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010

## **Psalm 113**

On reflecting upon this Psalm, the Lord is high above in the heavens and he created the sun and the earth. He created many beautiful things such as the mountains, the ocean, and the sky. He looks down upon us every day and gives us encouragement and life. Many things in life are difficult but if you know He is up there in the heavens, you can have strength. The Lord can help you in many ways. You might be poor or rich. He reaches out and touches you in many different ways if you believe in him. Just be thankful for what you have. As the sun comes up, you know that the Lord will be there with you every day if you have difficulties and problems. He reaches out and touches you with both of his loving hands reaching down through the clouds and touching you in a way to inspire you and encourage you to carry on in your life. As the Advent season approaches, might you reach out to your fellow man or woman, and give them encouragement, strength, and positive feedback in their life.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for all that you do for all of us, being there and encouraging us, listening to us with all of our prayers and our problems. May you always have a listening ear to all of us.

Jeffrey Kuebler and his guide dog Polo

Thursday, December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010

## Complexity Simplified

Scripture: Psalm 46

This Psalm was written as a song for the director of music so immediately, it grabs my attention. It starts by reminding us of the power and magnitude of our glorious helper, a theme many of our praise and worship songs reiterate today. I'm continually overjoyed that God is our refuge and strength and love to sing His praises and about the joy of salvation. And yet, in the midst of singing of His eternal might and glory, He throws us a wrinkle in verse 10: "Be still and know that I am God."

How many times in our lives are we overcome with stress, grief, sadness, pain and sorrow? How many times are we caught up in the busy, hectic, 24/7, computerized, cell phone, never alone world of today and just become weary and worn?

God gives us a clue here that we should just stop and listen for His voice. In one translation, the phrase is not "Be still" but "Cease striving." I often need to slow down and spend some alone time with God. When I do, I *always* hear His voice. One of the first rules backstage at a performance is that if you can see the audience, they can see you. If we look around, we see God everywhere. This means He sees us in all we do as well. Let go of striving and find the simplicity of simply abiding in Him.

In the hustle and bustle and craziness of this holiday season, make sure to take some time everyday to cease striving, be still and just know that God sees us and is always with us. Jesus said: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Let go and let God.

His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me.....

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, help us to seize each quiet moment during the day to listen for Your voice. Help us not to rush through our prayers with a list of requests but instead with the quiet acceptance that you are always with us and it's in the stillness that we know Your will. Amen.

Bill Phillips

Friday, December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## **“When I Did Not Know”**

Scripture: Psalm 146

*“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son...” Hebrews 1:1-2*

As a young boy I was thrilled with the magic of Christmas. I delighted in the colored lights on the neighborhood houses, the Santa Claus displays on roof tops, the sugar cookies on the coffee table, the tinsel covered tree in our living room, the laughter of loved ones at family gatherings, and the genuine warmth I experienced from complete strangers. I liked the special quality of caring that set this time of year apart from all others. There was something about the season which spoke to a deep need inside of me, a yearning for connection and belonging.

It wasn't until I was in high school that I came to understand that the child born in Bethlehem was the key force behind all this holiday goodwill. This realization came together for me when I became a Christian. My discovery was somewhat like solving for “X” in an Algebraic equation. When I met Jesus I discovered the one responsible for all the wonder in the Christmas that I felt as a child. When I turned to Jesus, my eyes were opened to the real power behind all the warmth and caring I saw in my early years.

The Psalmist repeatedly points our eyes to the praiseworthy acts of God. Consider some of these descriptions of what God does: “The Lord builds up,” “gathers outcasts,” “..determines,” “..gives names,” “..lifts up,” “..takes delight,” “..blesses your children,” “..fills you,” and “..sends out his word.” In the New Testament all these wonderful acts of God are embodied in the child born in Bethlehem.

I suppose that there are many children-- and adults--in our day do not know the one who inspires much of the caring and hope during Christmas? There are, no doubt, countless people who have never been introduced to the One behind all manifestations of goodness in this magical season.

Prayer: O Lord, we rejoice on this night as we celebrate the quiet way you came into this world in person. When people are touched by the warmth and joy and hope of this season, may their eyes be opened to your Son. May we be among those who tell them about your love for them in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Larry Grounds



## Advent Events at RPC

- Nov. 21<sup>st</sup> – **Alternative Gift Market**, after both worship services  
Upper Room – start your Christmas shopping early and support ministries such as Mary’s Place, Hopelink, Heifer Project, YWCA and 10,000 Villages.
- Nov. 27<sup>th</sup> – **Decorate the Sanctuary for Advent**, 9:30AM  
Help decorate the church for Advent.
- Dec. 5<sup>th</sup> – **All-Church Christmas Open House**, 2:00-5:00PM  
17940 NE 22<sup>nd</sup> Way, Redmond, 98052  
An informal gathering at the home of our pastor’s family. Hot cider and shared refreshments.
- Dec. 8<sup>th</sup> – **KeenAgers Christmas Lunch**, 11:30AM  
Emerald Heights in the Emerald Room.
- Dec. 12<sup>th</sup> – **Christmas Songfest**, 3:00PM Sanctuary  
Children’s Pageant, Youth, Praise Team, RPC Choir, Kris and Steve McGaw, the singing of carols. Refreshments to follow in the Upper Room.
- Dec. 19<sup>th</sup> – **Christmas Is All in Your Heart**, 3:00PM Sanctuary  
A concert of original Christmas music by Bill Phillips, accompanied by the extended Phillips family.
- Dec. 19<sup>th</sup> – **The Hall Christmas Party**, 7:00PM in Youth Room  
(9-12 grades)
- Dec. 22<sup>nd</sup> – **Ascent Christmas Party**, 7:00PM in Youth Room  
(7-8 grades)
- Dec. 24<sup>th</sup> – **Candlelight Christmas Eve Services**  
5:00PM – Worship Service with Bill Phillips and the Praise Team  
7:00PM – Worship Service with RPC Choir  
(Children’s story and carol singing at both services.)
- Dec. 26<sup>th</sup> – **One Worship Service and Children’s Church** 10:00AM