



Advent Devotionals 2022

**First United Methodist Church
of Festus/Crystal City**

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Pastor Tish Green and Pastor Adam Kaul

Written by the people of First UMC.

Week 1—Prophet

November 28 - Pastor Tish Green

On Sunday we lit the candle of the Prophet. A prophet has the spiritual gift of sight. They can clearly see the shortcomings of this world but can also envision the world as it could be, as it should be. The prophet's role is to proclaim the new vision to the people and invite them to join God in bringing that vision of possibilities to pass.

Jesus cast a prophetic vision when he preached the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The prophet Jesus is inviting us to bring to pass God's kingdom vision - a world in which God's will is done. Let us hear the invitation today. We must **Acknowledge** our need through a poor spirit, mourning our guilt, humbly approaching God, and hungering for righteousness. **Accept** the reign of God in our own lives, receiving comfort and the filling God provides. **Act** in the ways of the kingdom with mercy, purity of heart, and making peace, undeterred by those who come against us. Then the prophet's vision of God's kingdom on earth is manifest. We will be called children of God and we will see God.



November 29—Anne Wells—Isaiah 40:31

“but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.:

When I was in college studying English language structure, I became aware of the impact of small words such as “if” or “but.” I’ve been reading Isaiah recently and noticed that the word “will” as a reference to future events is a prominent presence. Isaiah uses the word to indicate God’s plans not only for Judah in its near future but also to point to the coming of the Messiah at some point in an unspecified time. The thing about these types of the “will be” events is that there is always a period of waiting. Isaiah implies in this verse that hope brings about activity, vigorous activity. For Christians we are shown by Christ what our works are to be, and we are also told that as we work, we are to live in hope. Hundreds of years passed between Isaiah’s prophecy and that birth in Bethlehem, yet they were years of daily life and of hope in the coming Messiah. For me Advent is a shorter variation of that long wait. It’s a time to pray, to meditate, and to continue to seek God’s guidance for each day’s activity as I move with hope towards that sacred day of remembering God’s greatest gift, the birth of Jesus Christ.



November 30--Pastor Adam

John Wesley, the Founder of the Methodist church was once on board a trip traveling to the Americas to begin his journey in the new world in the year 1735. On board this ship were his fellow Englishmen and the German Moravians. When a storm began to ravage the ship John and his fellow Englishmen began to tremble in fear, while the Moravians sang joyfully and cheerfully, unfazed by the storm tearing apart their ship. Eventually the seas calmed and waves died. John went to the Moravians and asked why they didn’t have fear. Wesley wrote, “The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards, ‘Was you not afraid?’ He answered, ‘I thank God, no.’ I asked, ‘But were not your women and children afraid?’ He replied, mildly, ‘No; our women and children are not afraid to die.’ From them I went to their crying, trembling neighbours, and pointed out to them the difference in the hour of trial, between him that feareth God, and him that feareth him not. ”

Consider this Moravian experience along with the storm stories in Matthew 8:23–27, Mark 4:35–41, and Luke 8:22–25 . Where in your life do you need a bit of Moravian Wisdom? Where could you use unity in the midst of a storm?

December 1—Mark Landau

We are celebrating the birth of our Lord Savior, Jesus Christ, and preparing for his return.

His birth was a miraculous event. Angels appeared and his birth drew people from all over the world.

Satan despised Jesus. Kings were afraid and Jews were jealous of His power to bring people together with peace, love and healing.

The preparation for His return should always be in a Christian's heart. Christians must spread the GOOD NEWS of Jesus to anyone willing to listen. Christians must help those in need. Christians must pray for strength, peace, love and joy for all people. And Christians must be patient.

By doing this we are creating the kingdom of God right here on earth. Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to us to help us. We should accept his help and spread the love of Jesus to all we see. We should be the light of Christ and pass the joy in our hearts to all we meet.

May the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ live in your heart, mind, soul and strength.

December 2—GOD Grief -Kayla Patek

Grief and the holidays are like oil and water: they don't pair well together at all. At only 28—and ever since I was 10 years old—I've had many experiences with the worst emotion of all...grief. My older sister, Jessica, passed away following a car wreck in 2004. In 2015, I lost a wonderful friend and talented softball player, Missy, to colon cancer. She was only 20 years old. The most recent—and heart-breaking—of all the sorrow I've endured was losing my grandpa, Linn. He was my fishing buddy. He loved it when I went horseback riding (he videotaped EVERY lesson), and more. Both of us loved Steve Irwin, the Crocodile Hunter from Australia.

Like the Irwins, our family has endured the tragedy of loss. Grief is an emotion that is unforgiving, heartbreaking, energy-draining and more. It takes and never gives, breaks and doesn't heal, steals and won't return. It's one of many things the enemy uses against God's people. True that there are Bible verses about it: (**Matthew 5:4**) Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted, (**Psalms 34:18**) He is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit, (**Ecclesiastes 3:4**) a time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance. (**Philippians 4:13**) I can do all things through Him who gives me strength, but grief and sorrow come from the enemy.

If you allow the heartbreak to teach you, it will—God's will. I was too young to understand this when my sister died, but when I lost my friend to cancer and the best fishing partner ever, I began to see what God was teaching me. Losing Missy taught me that it doesn't matter your age—anyone can get cancer at any point in their life. Some are more common than others. Losing my videotaping, fishing-loving, kind, caring, sweet grandpa taught me that it doesn't matter how healthy you are—God will call you home when He's ready for you. It will never be when we are but when He is. God's will is hard when heartbreak happens and as Christians we question if His way is the best. Every year, Christmas—a time to celebrate the birth of Jesus—will be hard for me. A month after this joyful occasion, my best friend and caring grandpa was called home. Leaving this "Temporary Home" was a blessing for him and heartbreak for us. Carrie Underwood (my favorite Country artist) has amazing lyrics in this song and one titled "See You Again". I had to listen to it twice and I ended up in tears because of the lyrics. Music is powerful but grief is strong. (continued...)

December 2—GOD Grief -Kayla Patek (continued)

God is stronger than grief. He's blessed me with the new friends and family at First UMC. Pastors Tish and Adam are wonderful prayer partners who will guide you through any storm you're going through no matter how rough the waters get. I'm thankful for their compassion, empathy, and more. I'm blessed to be a member of this wonderful church.

December 3 - Cathie Graffeo

Wind blows

Jackets on

Leaves fly

Love endures

Masks on

Virus lingers

Time blurs

Love endures

Cook turkey

Make stuffing

Smiling faces

Love endures

Many Blessings

More to count

Life is Good

Love endures

God is Love

Love endures

For your Sunday devotions,

join in worship at First UMC!

Traditional Worship Saturday 5pm

Modern Worship Sunday 10am



Week 2—Priest

December 5 - Pastor Tish Green

On Sunday we lit the candle of the Priest. A priest makes the way for the people to be in God's presence. In the Old Testament times, before Jesus' birth, Hebrews 9 tells us that once a year the high priest would enter the inner most room of the temple and offer a sacrifice for his own sins and for the sins of the people so that they could enjoy fellowship with God again. This was a temporary reprieve and had to be repeated annually due to the impure nature of the offering.

But when Christ came, he was a high priest once and for all. He not only *brought* the sacrifice into God's heavenly temple, but Jesus Himself *was* the sacrifice. Because of His perfection, He offered Himself once and for all.

"Unlike the other high priests, [Jesus] does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their [our] sins once for all when he offered himself" (Hebrews 7:27).

Today, Jesus has made the way for us to be in God's presence. Thanks be to God! We can enter that heavenly place of worship, holy and blameless before God, because Jesus our great high priest has made the way. Now, we have been given Christ's priestly ministry as we invite others to experience God's presence through Jesus.



December 6—Anne Wells—1 John 8

"Whoever does not love does not know God for God is love."

I have many favorite poets. One of them is Christina Rossetti who lives in England and was a prominent member of the Victorian Era Pre-Raphaelite movement. She wrote a hymn that we often hear at Christmas titled "What Can I Give Him". However, she also wrote another poem about the birth of Christ titled "Love Came Down at Christmas Time". I prefer it because she uses the word love several times in the three short verses. Each time it appears, no matter where in the sentence, it is capitalized. That's because she wants the reader to know that this child that was born so long ago is God. We call him Jesus and by many other titles, but Jesus told us that "if you have seen me, you have seen the father". This is the Love we are to worship. This is the Love that we are told to follow each day. As you know, you can Google anything. I suggest that you Google this poem. It's lovely. Love did indeed come down at Christmas time.

December 7—Pastor Adam

In the Methodist Church we often describe the way we view our own personal relationship with God as the Quadrilateral. The Methodist Quadrilateral breaks down into 4 parts. Reason, tradition, experience, and scripture. Scripture is the base in which we view the other three. It's what can we see and read in the scripture before us. Reason is what can we infer through logic. What makes sense and what doesn't logically for us and the world around us. Tradition is what we have done historically as an individual or denomination and our personal response to it. Often times our response to tradition isn't always embracing but rather challenging and changing, this along with embracing are ways we bring tradition into our lives. Experience is what does our own life tell us about our relationship with God, how do our life experiences and identities shape our own personal relationship.

Draw a square on a piece of paper and break it down into 4 quadrants, one for each of the parts of the quadrilateral. Then go from quadrant to quadrant writing how you experience God in each of the different ways. What traditions speak to you or do you work against? What scripture or verses have special place in your life? How does reason fit into your own relationship with the divine? How has your own personal life experience shaped how you view your relationship with God? When you're done with this I challenge you to see how it all fits together to make you who you are today and how it shapes your relationship with God.

December 8—Julie Russell

Are you ready for Christmas ?

This is the question that we say and get asked around this time of year.

This poem spoke to me and my prayer is that it speaks to you, too.

"Ready for Christmas," she said with a sigh,
As she gave a last touch to the gifts piled high.
Then wearily she sat for a moment and read,
Till soon, very soon, she was nodding her head.
Then quietly spoke a voice in her dream!
"Ready for Christmas! What do you mean?"

She awoke with a start, and a cry of despair,
"There's so little time, and I've still to prepare!
Oh, Father, forgive me. I see what you mean:
To be ready means more than a house swept clean.
Yes, more than the giving of gifts and a tree.
It's the heart swept clean that He wants to see,
A heart that is free from bitterness, sin--
Ready for Christmas means ready for Him!"

Author unknown



December 9—Reverend Jeffrey Carr—Shepherds and Angels — Luke 2: 8-18

Why do you suppose it was shepherds living out in the fields with their sheep that were the ones visited by angels with the message of the birth of the Messiah? For centuries the scribes and Pharisees had studied the ancient texts and pondered when the Messiah would appear. Especially while Israel was a subject of the Roman Empire, these learned men who were steeped in the scriptures anticipated the One who they believed would finally come to set Israel free. Why didn't the angels appear to these faithful leaders of Judaism with the good news of the blessed birth?

In ancient times people paid great attention to class distinctions within the greater society. Certain individuals were considered to be of great importance while others were looked down upon, often with revulsion. Shepherds were in the latter category. While it sounds enchanting to us moderns when we read that "*There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks by night,*" such an occupation would have been considered crude to ancient people. Think about it for a minute: the shepherds lived out in the fields along with the animals they were guarding. To people who lived in houses or palaces such activity would have seemed uncouth and unclean.

So why *did* the angels proclaim the good news of the Messiah's birth to persons of such a low class. I believe that it was because God intends the gospel to be proclaimed to all persons, beginning with those that society considers to be of low esteem. God is no respecter of persons, instead "*God so loved the WORLD.*" God's grace reaches out to every person, regardless of their status or net worth! There is no class distinction in the kingdom of God. In fact Jesus would grow up to shock us with the news that in his kingdom the first would be last and the last would be first. This is good news indeed for every shepherd and every monarch and everyone of us in between!

December 10—Kathy Ciscell—Matthew 1:18-25

21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name of Jesus,
because He will save his people from their sins.

Growing up in the church, I never really knew anything different than God and Christmas and Easter like many of my friends did. We always knew that we celebrated Jesus' birth at Christmas and his death and resurrection at Easter time.

Many years ago, I found a Christmas card with the poem "One Solitary Life" on it and ever since then it has been one of my favorites. Paraphrasing it here:

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in a different small village where he worked in his father's carpentry shop until he was 30. He never wrote a book, held an office, went to college, visited a big city or traveled more than 200 miles from where he was born. He did none of the things that are usually associated with greatness.

Yet twenty centuries now have come and gone and today Jesus is the central figure of the human race, and the leader of mankind's progress. All the armies that have ever marched, all the navies that have ever sailed, all the parliaments that have ever sat, all the kings that have ever reigned put together, have not affected the life of mankind on this earth as powerfully as that "One Solitary Life.

Sometimes we take for granted the love and peace of the season in our own small worlds, but never forget the amazing and huge impact that Jesus our Savior has had on the human race as a whole. Lord, May we experience the love of your son Jesus as we celebrate the season of his birth. Keep us mindful that He is the reason for the season and help us to show others this as we celebrate this year. Amen.

For your Sunday devotion, attend worship this weekend!

Week 3—King

December 12—Pastor Tish Green

On Sunday we lit the candle of the King. This royal ministry establishes justice on earth. It ensures that systems and institutions are structured in ways that benefit all the people. The good monarch raises other leaders to oversee these matters of social holiness.

Jesus came to establish a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

Salvation is only brought to fulfillment in our lives and on the earth when we submit ourselves to the rule and reign of Christ as Lord. Consider today if you have given Jesus Lordship over every aspect of your life. Is there a way of acting, a relationship, an attitude, or an opinion, that you have withheld from Christ's rule? I encourage you to surrender it all to Jesus' Lordship today.

As you submit personally to Christ, how then do you operate in Christ's royal ministry in the world? Do you freely participate in systems and institutions that perpetuate injustice and benefit only the few? Or do you work in Christ's power to establish systems of governing, commerce, and education that work for what John Wesley called "social holiness"? The implications of Christ's royal ministry are vast. Let us open our hearts to His Lordship as we participate in very tangible ways to establish God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.



December 13—Ann Wells—Psalm 51:10-12

"Create a pure heart within me, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me."

As a person of faith, I have sometimes lost track of the joy of my own salvation. This advent for me is a reminder that joy is one of those things that God wants for us. I think that Christmas is often a time when many of us get so caught up in the business of celebration that we mistake all that bustle and celebration as joy, but joy is much more than that. It is a deep gladness within the soul. I can look upon the remembrance of the birth of Jesus as a time to remember the full impact of what an all-encompassing gift this baby would come to be. My salvation, my open door to the God of the universe, my guidance for reaching out to all others as I meet them, my opportunity to partake in God's eternal kingdom depends on that gift. What a reason for deep and abiding joy!

December 14—Pastor Adam

Often in life we may feel a calling to aid the Kingdom of God in a way we may not always be able to describe. We're unsure of how we fit into the Body of Christ and how exactly we belong. Rest assured that there is a place for you even if you can't articulate it. Consider 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. It speaks of a Body of Christ and its many parts. The inability to currently describe how you believe you fit has no bearing on your value to the body as a whole. You're still an essential part for the proper functioning of the whole body. But, if you're considering how you can be more involved consider doing the following.

Write down a list of what you believe you are good at.

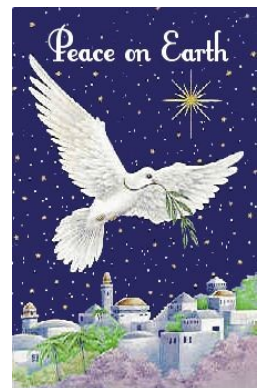
Write down a list of things you enjoy doing and bring you joy.

What about the world makes you mad? Is there something you or the body of Christ can do to assist with it?

How, if at all, do those other 3 parts intersect? How can you use your unique passion or skills to better those around me?

Lastly, ask "who do I know that can assist me in moving forward?"

If you go through the list and are still unsure that's perfectly alright. Give it some time and reevaluate and work through the list again. Assist in other areas you may be even remotely interested in, and most importantly continue to love your neighbors and be a shining light of the love of Christ to all the world.



December 15—Pastor Tish

My overall feeling through Advent is gratitude. Shall I make a list?

I am grateful for...

a church that is generous with time, talents, and resources

people with carpentry skills and vision

organized women that understand the power of a shared meal

leaders who partner to gather other believers in pursuit of God

a Council willing to say yes when possible and no when necessary

those working behind the scenes whose reward is simply having served God and God's people

youth who think deeply and love completely in the midst of life's stressors

a building cared for and kept up for ministry to the world and for those who care and keep

It is not just a feeling. It is at core of who I am. I am grateful.

Thank you God for creating me to serve just as you have designed, despite my shortcomings.

Thank you Jesus for showing me what it means to love completely. I will ever pursue your example.

Thank you Holy Spirit for guiding and empowering me to live this life with some sort of grace in anticipation of a rest that will only come when this body gives up the ghost and my spirit is free to be fully in your presence. Amen

December 16 – Libby Sandridge

Be Still.

Being still isn't usually what we think of when the season of advent is upon us. We take a deep breath and get ready to go, go, go. But is this what God wants during this time of year?

The older I become the more I realize how important it is to be still. When it starts getting darker early and the weather becomes cold I feel it is a perfect time to slow down, read our bibles, pray more, go to bed earlier and give our bodies some much needed rest. Even the animals were created to hibernate this time of year and they obey their creator. Were we not created more important than the animals?

One reason we don't like to be still is because grief, worry, anxiety, and doubts can begin to creep into our hearts and minds. (Believe me ... I know. I am one who bakes pies and paints my kitchen at 2 AM). BUT ... being still can also bring us peace and the beautiful sound of God's voice.

Another reason we don't like to be still is from fear of missing out. Society wants us to believe that being extra busy this time of year (and all year for that matter) is the cool thing to do. I have seen over the last decade people viewing busy people as more important and those who are more still and quiet as somewhat less than or not with the times. Well, God says It is the meek that shall inherit the earth not the busy, loud and proud. (Matthew 5:5)

Our God is a jealous God (Exodus 34) who is wanting our time and who is not wanting us to put anything above him. God honors us when we are still and quiet and waiting in his presence.

"Be still" in the Bible means a couple of things. It means to truly be still and rest and it also means to stop fighting battles and let God fight them for you.

"Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." - Psalm 46:10

"The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent." - Exodus 14:14

"Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will not be shaken." - Psalm 62:5-6

Let us all remember this advent season that there are no parties, no dinners, no gatherings, no events on the calendar more important than being still and spending time with God.

While we are being still in his presence our hearts will be transformed and our minds will be renewed. That's the most wonderful Christmas gift we could ever receive.

Dear Jesus,

Please calm the noise and the busyness in our lives. Help us to be still this advent season so we can focus on what you would have us do and not what society would have us do. As Christians you have set us apart so please make us an example. Make us a light unto this world and help us show our community this holiday season that it is you and you alone who are most important to us. It is in your Son's holy and wonderful name we pray. Amen

December 17—John Blocher

John 17:22 "That they may be one, even as we are one."

Each person created has a distinct personality, different from everyone else's personality. Even as we live, we try to understand the depths of our own personality as well as each other, but we cannot. The only one who can understand us completely is our Creator. God, too, has a personality personified in His Son incarnate, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

While we can never understand God's personality, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can try to constantly get closer to God through prayer, worship, study, and the acceptance of God's grace. Our goal is to become one with God and one with each other just as the Father and Son are one. Advent gives us time to reflect on this effort throughout our lives and to walk in the steps of Jesus as we celebrate His birth on earth. May our personalities become spiritual personalities reflecting the holy personality of Jesus, our Redeemer.

"Dear Holy Jesus, help me to be closer to you, to become one with you a little more everyday during this Holy season and throughout the coming year, and every year of my life. Amen."

For your Sunday devotion attend worship this weekend!

Come enjoy our 95th Annual Christmas Concert

with 40 voice choir, chamber orchestra, organ and piano.

Sunday, December 18, 4:00PM

Week 4—Emmanuel

December 19 - Pastor Tish Green

On Sunday we lit the candle of Emmanuel. Two Hebrew words combined gives us this name which literally means "God with Us." Friends, this is the crux of Christmas. It is the central core of the Gospel. It is the theme of all of Scripture. How might we be in God's presence? We could not follow enough rules to match God's holiness. We could not pull ourselves up to God's greatness. So how could we be in God's presence? How could God be with us and we with God?

Only through Christ Jesus.

Jesus. The Word made flesh. In whom the fullness of God dwelt.

Advent is a time of waiting. A reminder of what it means to be without and to wonder when and how God will appear. It gives us the opportunity to anticipate anew the coming of the Christ. May we never lose sight of the awe and wonder which is Christmas. That God demonstrates God's own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, the Word through which all things were created took on flesh, born in a manger, raised in a Jewish home, lived a life of holiness, and showed us what it means to be fully human living fully in the Holy Spirit. He prophesied a better world to come, offered Himself as a priestly sacrifice to redeem us, and now reigns in God's advancing kingdom of heaven. Soon to return, may we be found living in God's presence.

December 20—Anne Wells-Isaiah 9:6

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be upon his shoulders.
And his name will be called Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

I started singing alto in my home church choir at age 12. By 13, I would be part of the choir that sang Handel’s Messiah. The words of promise found in Isaiah are found in that oratory and are sung with an almost pounding beat through the first two phrases then the melody catches hold and soars. I remember how majestic we sounded. Each of the names given were sung with powerful emphasis. By the time we had reached the end of this motif, I felt myself convinced that Jesus Christ had spoken through this music to reassure me that he was indeed the promised Messiah especially that he was the Prince of Peace. In the midst of singing that beautiful and powerful message, I felt that peace become an indwelling. That peace that the angels would later announce to shepherds was present and all around me in that moment. During Advent season, I try to attend or listen to the Messiah on some form of media. As I hear the familiar music and words, my heart warms with peace at the music because I know this Prince of Peace, my Savior, Jesus Christ.



December 21—David Nickelson-Rueschhoff

I want to personally thank Michael, my husband, and his family for showing me what the Christmas season is all about. Never having been a 'fan' of the holidays, ever since I have been lucky enough to be a part of Michael's family, they have shown me what the true meaning of Christmas is all about - which is being with one another and loving one another. I am blessed beyond measure for being a part of the Nickelson family and truly thank God each and every day for Michael and his family continuing to show me love and what the true definition of family is about at its core. You have welcomed both me and my mom into your family with open arms and we are forever grateful for that! I love you! Merry Christmas 2022!

December 22—Carol Thoma

At the end of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol", the character Ebenezer Scrooge says, "I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year". I was thinking about that recently after I read an Advent thought that said that during this time before Christmas we need to recognize the significance of the greatest gift God gave us. God gave God to us. He gave us Himself for our salvation. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." John3:16

It was a reminder to me that maybe the best way we can "honor Christmas in our hearts" is not by finding the "perfect" gifts to give, baking the most beautiful cookies, or attending the most festive parties, but rather to give of ourselves in serving God by serving others in whatever ways we can, and not only during the Christmas season, but to remember to "try to keep it all the year".

Dear God, who came to earth as a baby in a manger to redeem us, help us to show more of your love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness not only at Christmas, but help us to honor Christmas in our hearts "all the year". Amen.

December 23—Our Christmas Affirmation—Cassandra Blanks

Advent hope moves us; Advent love leads us; Advent joy stirs us; Advent peace stills us, that we might affirm our King Jesus.

It is near the time we set flame to this Advent affirmation by lighting the Christ Candle.

We believe that Jesus is the Son of God. He was born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem of Judea. He was the long-awaited Messiah whose coming was prophesied. The same Jesus lives today in our hearts. He deserves our highest loyalty and total commitment. In Jesus Christ, our hope is fulfilled; our love is consummated; our joy is complete; and our peace is sealed.

Rejoice, a Savior is born. A Savior is born, indeed, Joy to the World!



December 24—Becky Capps—Acts 20:35

"In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: **'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'** "

Or as we know it, it is better to give than to receive. I'm sure we all have heard this saying many times over. Maybe it was some Christmas that you didn't get the gift you wanted so badly, and Mom said it. Maybe Grandpa said it when you were making a list many pages long. Or maybe you said it when you were buying gifts, expecting little, or nothing in return. But for me, when I hear this, I always think of my sister Ginny.

Picture it: Christmas, 1970ish. My dad worked hard in the steel mills in Indiana and my mom was a stay-at-home mom like most during those days. My dad had been working in the mills for a while but lacked the seniority to stay employed year-round. He had been laid off for a while and things were tight, money wise. I remember as a young child telling my mom how excited I was that Christmas was only a few weeks away. She responded by saying, "I wish it was further away." I didn't really understand at the time why she said that, but looking back, it was because there was no money for Christmas for our family of 6 with 3 of them being children under 10.

Ginny was 16 that year, the oldest child at home. She had her very first job that year. She saved Christmas that year. She bought gifts for everyone. My sister Bev and I got dolls, batons, books, a stocking full of great treats and other gifts. My brother Kenny, then only 4 years old or so, got a great fire truck, loads of toys and clothes and a great stocking. Ginny even bought for my mom (mixer, punch bowl, perfume) and dad (socks & T shirts and tools). She took care of all of us. I overheard my mom saying they were going to get Ginny something with Green Stamps. My mom was worried about it arriving in time and my dad said he would walk to Indianapolis (5-hour drive) if he had to. Ginny got a record player that year. Ginny also provided all the food for our Christmas dinner. I honestly don't know what that Christmas would have been like without her.

Now here's the best part. Every year until Ginny died when asked about her favorite Christmas, this is the one she brought up. She received many blessings by giving! Ginny always loved Christmas and was always very generous. She had hard times and sometimes she was the one who received the gifts.

The obvious take away is that when you give you are blessed in many ways. But don't forget, if you are having hard times and receive from others, you are a blessing to others who give to you. Merry Christmas to all.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year

From your friends and family at First UMC.

Join us for Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship at 4pm or 11pm.

New Year's Eve 5pm we'll worship with a full Wesley Covenant Renewal Service.

We will gather for Sunday 10am Worship December 25 and January 1.