

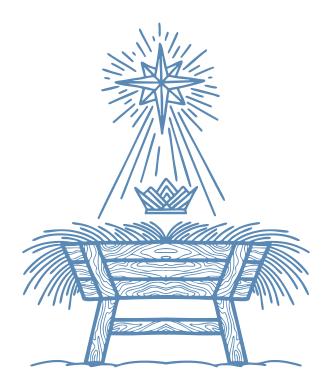
### An Advent Devotional

from



Tere at Connection, our Year of Shalom culminates with preparing to welcome Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, during the Advent season. At Advent, we engage in the spiritual practice of making room for Christ's coming anew into our lives. "On Earth, Peace" are the words the angels sang to the shepherds telling them of Christ's birth in Luke 2. This is a daily devotional to help us seek Christ and his peace during this season. Our companions are peacemakers throughout history and from around the globe. Each day you are invited to light a candle or sit by your favorite window, take a deep breath, read a Scripture (all are from the Common English Bible), meet a peacemaker, and pray for peace. Come, let us welcome the Prince of Peace together.

- Pastors Dawn and Joe



### November 30: First Sunday of Advent

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We will light the first candle of Advent, the candle of Hope. Take a gift tag to help child in our community, and hang an ornament on our sanctuary tree.					о петр	



Let those who plant with tears reap the harvest with joyful shouts.

Let those who go out, crying and carrying their seed, come home with joyful shouts, carrying bales of grain! – Psalm 126:5,6



#### **MEET:**

Due to the AIDS epidemic in Zimbabwe, **Chido Govera** became an orphan at the age of 7. She had the option either to quit school to work in the fields to provide for her brother and grandmother, or become a child bride. She quit school. When a woman from her local church saw Chido working, she took her under her wing and showed her how to colonize mushrooms. She became so good at it, she began to teach other orphaned children how to do it. Now as a young woman, she has taught over 1000 people how to grow mushrooms! She started a foundation to spread the education and entrepreneurial skills needed to help many others. Her autobiography, *The Future of Hope*, tells her story and explains her drive to save others from the despair she experienced. "The hope of helping makes me stronger," she says.

#### **PRAY:**

Tender Savior, we await your coming again. Come and be near all who despair, and grow hope in them, and me. Amen.

#### ACT:

Check out the mushrooms in your grocery store and marvel at what hope in God can do. Maybe sauté some with a friend.

### December 2: St. Francis of Assisi



#### **READ:**

The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. It educates us so that we can live sensible, ethical, and godly lives right now by rejecting ungodly lives and the desires of this world. At the same time, we wait for the blessed hope and the glorious appearance of our great God and savior Jesus Christ. – Titus 2:11-13

#### **MEET:**

The man history knows as **St. Francis of Assisi** was a carefree, wealthy young man who became a prisoner of war. His father rescued him, and Francis spent over a year recovering from an illness he contracted while imprisoned. He struggled with his faith during this time. Towards the end of his recovery, he saw a man with leprosy while out on a walk. He gave the man his cloak and kissed him. His conversion to Christ began in that moment, when Francis began to see people who live in poverty as Christ living among us. Francis soon gave up all of his wealth and began the Franciscan movement for caring for the poor in Jesus' name. He intervened in interreligious conflicts, developed places of hospitality for those in need, and became one of the most well-known leaders in Christian history.

#### PRAY:

Jesus, give us eyes to see you coming among us, and to not look away from our neighbors who are poor. Amen.

#### ACT:

Look over your winter clothes to see if there's something you could give to our Hope of the



Certainly the faithful love of the Lord hasn't ended; certainly God's compassion isn't through! God's mercies are renewed every morning. Great is your faithfulness. I think: The Lord is my portion! Therefore, I'll wait for him. The Lord is good to those who hope in him, to the person who seeks him.

- Lamentations 3:22-25

#### **MEET:**

Judith Jenya, now in her eighties, remembers she was a second grader living in California when her parents invited a family who had survived a Holocaust concentration camp to live with them. Their Judaism taught her the importance of *tikkun olam*, a Hebrew phrase which means "to repair the world." The experience of being a friend to children who had endured so much shaped Judith's life. She grew up to found the Global Children's Organization, which serves thousands of children in various summer camps in places where children have endured war, like Croatia. These camps, she says, "give them hope despite the shattered world around them." Judith is still advocating tirelessly for the well-being of children around the world.

#### PRAY:

Faithful God, how did you dare to come among us as a child? Strengthen those who are repairing the world for our children, and count me among them, I pray. Amen.

#### ACT:

Write a note for Christma	•	our life going tl	hrough a hard	time to encoura	ge them as they wait





#### **READ:**

But me! I will keep watch for the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.

Do not rejoice over me, my enemy, because when I fall, I will rise; if I sit in darkness, the Lord is my light.

- Micah 7:7-8

#### **MEET:**

Bernice King was five years old when her father, the late civil rights leader, was assassinated. She didn't comprehend the depth of her loss until as a teen, when she watched a documentary about him at a church youth retreat. The grief hit her and she was inconsolable. A minister at the retreat told her it was okay to feel all she was feeling, and that coming to terms with her father's death would be the stepping stone on which she would build her life. From that point, Bernice began to walk in her father's footsteps. She became the first female leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and now, she is the CEO of the King Center. Her life's focus is to ensure that her father's nonviolent philosophy and methodology is applied to our world's current challenges. Preaching at a recent General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), King said, "Refuse to be disheartened, discouraged, or distracted from God's calling on your life."

#### PRAY:

Sovereign Lord, give me tenacious hope despite everything. Bless me with the holy ability to see light when it's dark. Amen.

#### ACT:

Reach out to someone dealing with grief this season. Invite them to lunch or to church with you. Even better, both!



It's impossible for God to lie. So we who have taken refuge in God can be encouraged to grasp the hope that is lying in front of us. This hope is a safe and secure anchor for our whole being.

- Hebrews 6:18-19



#### **MEET:**

Sadako Sasaki was a 12-year-old girl the world will never forget. She survived the World War 2 bombing of Hiroshima, Japan, only to develop leukemia from it ten years later. While she was in the hospital, she set a goal of making one thousand origami peace cranes. Her classmates stepped in to help. After her death, they advocated for a memorial for all the children who died as a result of the bombing. A statue of Sadako holding a paper crane was installed at the memorial with a plaque that reads: "This is our cry. This is our prayer. Peace on Earth." People from all over the world bring paper cranes to add their prayers to Sadako's. Our congregation made dozens of cranes for our pastors to present on our behalf this past summer. Hiroshima as a city has made its purpose to insist it is possible to live in a world without nuclear weapons. They are unwavering in working towards peace for all of us.

#### **PRAY:**

Merciful Savior, this is my hope: This is my cry. This is my prayer. Peace on earth! Amen.

#### ACT:

Make something, maybe a paper crane or a crayon drawing, to express your hope in God.



TODAY WE REFLECT QUIETLY, USING THE PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS. READ THE PRAYER, THEN KEEP TWO MINUTES OF SILENT MEDITATION, MAKING ROOM IN YOUR MIND FOR PEACE.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

### December 7: Second Sunday of Advent

•	Worship	at 9 and	11am
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#### **READ:**

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because the Lord has anointed me.

He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,

- to proclaim release to the prisoners
- and recovery of sight to the blind,
- to liberate the oppressed,
- and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Isaiah 61:1-3



#### **MEET:**

Pashtani Durrani grew up in an Afghan refugee camp in Pakistan from birth to age 19. Her father established a school for girls within the camp. He taught the girls: "you may need to go a day without food, but you must never go a day without learning." Pashtani was able to return to Afghanistan as an adult and establish a digital learning community for girls there. After the takeover of the Taliban in 2021, she was forced into exile in the United States. Yet she is still operating the schools covertly in six Afghan regions and creatively finding ways to advocate for girls' education. One of her students writes, "Pashtani reminds me I still matter."

#### PRAY:

God of freedom, send your power to those held captive everywhere. In the name of Jesus, our ultimate liberator for whom we wait, Amen.

#### ACT:

Learn more about our church's ministry with refugees at cwsglobal.org/learn/migration-asylum-and-refuge/

The mountains may shift,

- and the hills may be shaken,
- but my faithful love won't shift from you,
- and my covenant of peace won't be shaken,
- says the Lord, the one who pities you. Isaiah 54:10

#### **MEET:**

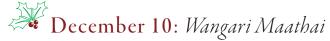
Rev. Dustin Mailman didn't grow up in church; in fact, he was very suspicious of it because he had seen church people be cruel to his young mom who had him as a teen. But a friend invited Dustin to church camp one summer and he went. His life was transformed by the genuine love of Jesus that he experienced there. Still, he never forgot what it was like to be on the outside of church. He became an advocate for those who needed a way in. After becoming an ordained minister, his first job as a pastor is in a tiny church in an economically impoverished neighborhood in Asheville, North Carolina. As Dustin got to know his neighbors, he discovered that many had been incarcerated and were unable to obtain employment because of their criminal records. Dustin, who loves a good cup of coffee, wondered if an empty Sunday school classroom at the church could become a coffee roasting business that employed these neighbors. Soon, Deep Time Coffee was born, and dozens of people returning from incarceration have found employment- and esteem- there. During the recent flooding in their community, Deep Time has served thousands of cups of coffee, providing purpose for the employees and a moment of peace for their neighbors.

#### PRAY:

Unwavering Savior, thank you for your unchanging love and persistent peace that finds a way. Amen.

#### ACT:

Consider how you might give someone around you a second chance. Maybe think about it over a high-quality cup of coffee.



#### **READ:**

A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse;

a branch will sprout from his roots.

The Lord's spirit will rest upon him,

- a spirit of wisdom and understanding,
- a spirit of planning and strength,
- a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.

The earth will surely be filled with the knowledge of the Lord,

just as the water covers the sea.

On that day, the root of Jesse will stand as a signal to the peoples. The nations will seek him out, and his dwelling will be glorious. – Isaiah 11:1-2, 9-10

#### MEET:

Wangari Maathai was the first woman in East Africa to obtain a doctorate, getting a Ph.D. from the University of Nairobi, Kenya, and becoming chair of their department of veterinary medicine. Her students told her of their hardships in rural Kenya, where a lack of conservation of natural resources was drying up streams, causing ripple effects. In response, Professor Maathai formed the Green Belt Movement, facilitating the planting of thousands of trees across the country. The movement was so effective that it caused tensions with corrupt politicians who had privatized public lands. Prof. Maathai was harassed, threatened, beaten, and jailed by officials in the Kenyan government. Nevertheless, she persisted. "I will be a hummingbird," she often said. "Even if my efforts seem small, I will continue in them." In 2004, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Even after her death, the Green Belt Movement continues, with an estimated 52 million trees planted across the African continent.

#### PRAY:

Creator God, creating still, remind me of the deep roots of your love. Show me where you would have me plant peace today. Amen.

#### ACT:

Do some small act to care for creation today: a pet, a plant, or a person.





## December 11: Father Greg Boyle

#### **READ:**

Therefore, as God's choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other. As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other. And over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. The peace of Christ must control your hearts—a peace into which you were called in one body.

- Colossians 3:12-15

#### **MEET:**

Father Greg Boyle served as pastor of the poorest Catholic parish in Los Angeles. Their neighborhood also had the highest concentration of gang activity in the city. He witnessed the devastating impact of gang violence on his community during the so-called "decade of death" that peaked at 1,000 gang-related killings in 1992. In the face of policies of mass incarceration as the means to end gang violence, he and church members adopted what was a radical approach at the time: treat gang members as human beings. Together they started "Homeboy Industries" to offer wrap-around care, training, and employment opportunities to men and women coming out of gang life. Homeboy Industries is now the largest gang rehabilitation organization in the world. Father Boyle says, "Our goal in life is to love each other into wholeness."

#### PRAY:

God of Shalom, I pray that your wholeness will set my heart free in a way nothing else can. Mine, and everyone else's, too. Amen.

#### ACT:

Drive by the Ector County Youth Center and pray for the kids and staff there.



#### **READ:**

Mary said, "With all my heart I glorify the Lord! In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior. He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant. Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored because the mighty one has done great things for me. Holy is his name. He shows mercy to everyone, from one generation to the next, who honors him as God. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations. He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. – Luke 1:46-52

#### **MEET:**

As a college student in the 1990's, Muenther Isaac watched the Israeli security wall go up cutting Bethlehem off from Jerusalem. He was compelled to understand the theological reasons why the Holy Land is so fraught with war and oppression. After studying theology in the United States and England, he obtained a Ph.D. in religion. When he married, his wife made him promise he would never be a pastor. But after they had children, their family chose to attend the Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church, and their pastor urged them to consider ordination for him. They said yes, and today Muenther is a leader in the Palestinian Christian movement, pastoring that church, as well as leading the Bethlehem Bible College and an annual conference called "Christ at the Checkpoint." Through the war of the last two years, he has led people to miraculously remain willing to work for peace despite unimaginable loss.

#### PRAY:

Holy Spirit, just as Mary and Muenther became a part of your redeeming plan, I also say yes to your will for the world's restoration through me. Amen.

#### ACT:

Write a thank you note to a leader in our community who has said yes to serving others and working towards peace.



# TODAY WE REFLECT QUIETLY, USING THE PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS. READ THE PRAYER, THEN KEEP THREE MINUTES OF SILENT MEDITATION, MAKING ROOM IN YOUR MIND FOR PEACE.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

### December 14: Third Sunday in Advent

- Worship at 9 and 11am
- Jesus Jam at 6pm

•	We will light the third candle of Advent, the candle of Joy, and celebrate a music-filled Sunday in the morning and in the evening. If you took a tag, gifts are due back for our community's children today.
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### December 15: Alexander Campbell

#### **READ:**

A child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

There will be vast authority and endless peace for David's throne and for his kingdom, establishing and sustaining it with justice and righteousness now and forever. – Isaiah 9:6-7

#### **MEET:**

Alexander Campbell is a founder of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). He and his family immigrated to the United States from Scotland in the early 1800's and eventually settled in West Virginia. There his father-in-law gave him land which included the "ownership" of enslaved people. Alexander immediately freed them, giving them parcels of the land, and providing for the children's education himself. Campbell taught and wrote that those who enslaved people were slaves themselves to a system of sin, which the authority of Jesus Christ had broken. In 1829, Alexander became a delegate to the Virginia Constitutional Convention. He had two aims: to abolish slavery, and to prevent civil war. He did not win on either count. His efforts turned to keeping the burgeoning movement for Christian unity we now know as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) together. That, too, brought discouragement sometimes. But he continued his ministry, believing in Christ's ultimate peaceful victory. He wrote that: "if you wish opinionism to cease or subside, you must not call up and debate everything that men think or say. You may debate anything into consequence, or you may, by a dignified silence, waste it into oblivion."

**PRAY:** I submit myself and all my opinions to your authority, O Prince of Peace. Redirect my thoughts and priorities as you will. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

**ACT:** Try out keeping in silent prayer the next time you are in a position for debate.

### December 16: Sara Cunningham

#### **READ:**

May the God of endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude toward each other, similar to Christ Jesus' attitude. That way you can glorify the God and



Father of our Lord Jesus Christ together with one voice. So welcome each other, in the same way that Christ also welcomed you, for God's glory.

- Romans 15:5-7

#### **MEET:**

Sara Cunningham was a Christian mother in Oklahoma who rejected her son after he came out to her as a gay man. After years of estrangement, conflicted by her love for her son and her spirituality, Sara exhaustively searched for answers. What she learned transformed her from excluding to embracing her son.

When Sara realized the pain many people experience from being exiled from their families, she felt led to attend the Oklahoma City Pride Festival in 2015. She wore a homemade button with the words "Free Mom Hugs" and offered hugs to anyone who made eye contact. The first hug Sara gave was to a beautiful young woman who whispered, "It's been four years since I got a hug from my mom because I'm a lesbian." Sara embraced her and hundreds more that day, and many shared similar stories with every embrace. After that experience, Sara began Free Mom Hugs, an organization to share love with people who are rejected because of gender or sexual identity. Free Mom Hugs now has chapters in all 50 states.

#### **PRAY:**

God who first loved us by sending your Child for us, let me receive your joyous love and share it without exception. Amen.

#### ACT:

If you're up for it, make a "free hugs" or "free listening" sign and wear it, or put it on your desk at work, or your car bumper. See what happens.

### December 17: Williams & Corrigan

#### **MEET:**

In 1977, a car out of control, its driver an Irish Republican Army gunman shot dead fleeing from British soldiers, smashed into a family out for a walk, killing the mother and children. This senseless killing produced a wave of revulsion against the violence which had been sweeping Northern Ireland. The movement was led by **Betty Williams**, a stay-home-mom who came upon the scene after she heard the shot, and **Mairead Corrigan**, the young aunt of the children.

These two women channeled their grief to lead marches in which Protestants and Catholics walked together in demonstrations for peace and against violence. At their invitation, tens of thousands of people in Northern Ireland joined together, giving hope that this could be the dawn of a new day bringing lasting peace to the bereaved Irish people. Catholic and Protestant mothers embraced one another and promised each other they would not allow their children to kill each other again. Within months, a ceasefire was called. Betty says, "In the work of peace, one has to be a little crazy. If the rest of the world is not crazy, and wars and destruction are going on, well I would rather be on the other side of that and be the crazy one who believes we can finish this."

crazy one who believ	es we can finish	n this.		



#### **READ:**

Various trials are necessary so that your faith may be found genuine. (Your faith is more valuable than gold which won't survive a tester's fire.) Your genuine faith will result in praise, glory, and honor for you when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you've never seen him, you love him. Even though you don't see him now, you trust him and so rejoice with a glorious joy that is too much for words. – 1 Peter 1:6-8

#### **MEET:**

Clarence Jordan grew up in the 1920's as a white child in segregated South Georgia. Early on, he was bothered by what he experienced: at church, they would sing "red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world." But outside of church, he noticed children who had a different skin color than his were treated very poorly by many of the same people who sang that song in his church. This bothered him enough that Clarence made it his life's goal to work toward the reconciliation of all people, described as "breaking down the dividing wall" in Ephesians 2:14. In 1942, Clarence and his wife Florence began a Bible study for people of all racial identities. That group founded Koinonia Farms together. Still thriving today, Koinonia Farms is a working farm where diverse people live, work, and serve others together. Its aim is "joyful hospitality" for all who come to be a part of the farm, for a day, or a decade. Though Clarence was kicked out of the church where he grew up for his inclusive actions and persecuted in other ways, he was fond of saying "the preaching of the gospel will make you an outcast if you do it right." Many progressive Christian leaders in the last eighty years have been shaped by their experience of heaven on earth at Koinonia Farms.

#### **PRAY:**

On earth as it is in heaven, Lord, is my prayer. Help me to rejoice every time I see a glimpse of your radical love coming into my neighborhood. Amen.

#### ACT:

Practice joyful hospitality today by connecting with someone different from you in some way.



Don't get upset over evildoers; because they will fade fast, like grass; they will wither like green vegetables. Trust the Lord and do good; live in the land, and farm faithfulness. Enjoy the Lord, and he will give what your heart asks. Commit your way to the Lord! Trust him! He will act and will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, your justice like high noon.

Be still before the Lord, and wait for him. – Psalm 37:1-7

#### **MEET:**

Tiffany Terrell and her husband ran a daycare for low-income families in Albany, Georgia. They noticed how often the children were dealing with health issues like diabetes and asthma. Parents told them there was little fresh food to buy in the Dollar General stores within a reasonable distance. That compelled Tiffany to attend a conference about food access in the United States. While she was there, she saw a retrofitted van that just happened to be in the area. The van was serving as a grocery store on wheels. "What if we had a bus for these families that would drive fresh produce into their neighborhoods?" she thought. So, she bought a used school bus. And Better Way Grocers sprouted up. A mobile grocery store that brings fresh produce into "food deserts" in Albany, Georgia, A Better Way is nutrition education on wheels. They offer classes to neighbors on how to season food in healthier ways, using onions and peppers instead of butter and salt. Everything in the store is labeled with how it can help your body. For example, cucumbers boast a sign that says, "Helps regulate blood pressure." Their customers and staff have become like family, looking out for each other and growing healthier together. Together, every day they are disrupting a food system that used to actively harm their neighbors by providing an abundant garden of goodness in its place.

#### PRAY:

Let me farm faithfulness, O Lord, and discover joy where there was nothing good before. Amen.

#### ACT:

Make a fruit basket and share it with an elderly neighbor.



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SILENT MEDITATION, MAKING ROOM IN YOUR MIND FOR PEACE.

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Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
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where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

### December 21: Fourth Sunday in Advent

•	Worship at 9 and 11am

• We will light the fourth candle of Advent, the candle of Love.						



#### **READ:**

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. When Mary his mother was engaged to Joseph, before they were married, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband was a righteous man. Because he didn't want to humiliate her, he decided to call off their engagement quietly. As he was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Now all of this took place so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled:

Look! A young woman will become pregnant and give birth to a son,

And they will call him, Emmanuel ("God with us.").

When Joseph woke up, he did just as an angel from God commanded and took Mary as his wife. – Matthew 1:18-25

#### MEET:

Joseph was the kind of man who always did the right thing. Separating quietly from a woman who was having a child that was not his biological child seemed like the wisest course of action to cause the least amount of harm. It did not occur to Joseph to marry his fiancé anyway. But an angel appears to him in a dream to say, "Don't be afraid to marry this woman, and become the child's father." It may not have been the usual societal expectation, but it was God's will. Joseph was obedient to this out-of-the-box plan, despite his likely doubts. He saved both Jesus' mother and Jesus from being cast out to fend for themselves in a culture that would have excluded them. Before Jesus saves us, Joseph saves Jesus.

#### PRAY:

God of angels who say don't be afraid, show me who I may take under my wing as Jospeh did for Mary and Jesus, and as you do for me. Amen.

#### ACT:

Have you invited someone to sit with you at our Christmas Eve worship service?



In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled. Since Joseph belonged to David's house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David's city, called Bethlehem, in Judea. He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom. – Luke 2:1-7

#### **MEET:**

Mary, mother of Jesus, agreed to grow a miraculous child in her womb. She proclaimed that she was blessed to see "the lofty brought down from their thrones, and the lowly lifted up" through her (Luke 1:46-55). But at this point, she must be wondering what she'd agreed to do. The Roman emperor was showing his power by making the Jewish people register to be taxed, and that required her to travel at the end of her pregnancy. What's more, the city was crowded and Joseph's relatives' homes were full. So the young couple were accommodated in a make-do area, probably on the lower level of a family home where animals were also kept. When the time came, she gave birth and laid baby Jesus in a manger. Thus began the revolution she proclaimed. A more lowly beginning there could not be for Jesus, who would be lifted up as Savior of the world.

#### **PRAY:**

True Lord, though Caesars think they are in charge, we know it is you who holds authority, even from the manger. Come quickly again. Amen.



- Worship at 6pm
- We will light the Christ candle.

#### **READ:**

Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors." When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go right now to Bethlehem and see what's happened. Let's confirm what the Lord has revealed to us." – Luke 2:8-15

#### MEET:

The shepherds were the first to hear of the birth of Jesus. They are the least likely people to receive such an important message. They are poor, menial laborers who work the night shift with stinky animals. But here come the angels. This is who the good news of God's love born into the world through Jesus Christ is for- for the least likely people. That's you. That's all of us. The shepherds think it is too good to be true, so they run to find out. Now it is time for you also to confirm what the angels said. Has God sent Love-in-the-Flesh? Is Christ born again in a manger heart like yours? Are you the one filled with Christ's peace that the world has been waiting for? Come and see.

#### PRAY:

O Holy One, on this Holy Night, be born anew in me. On earth, peace! Amen.

#### ACT:

Light your candle and sing Silent Night, wherever you are, and receive the Light that the shadows cannot extinguish.

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