

Lexington United Methodist Church
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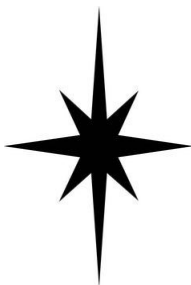
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Silent night, Holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin, mother and child
Holy infant, tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.



Silent night, Holy night
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at thy birth
Jesus, Lord at thy birth.

Silent night, Holy night
Shepherds quake, at the sight
Glories stream from heaven above
Heavenly, hosts sing Hallelujah.
Christ the Savior is born,
Christ the Savior is born.

Advent Greetings to You All,

Welcome to the 2018 Advent Devotional booklet for Blue UMC and Lexington UMC. Within these pages you will find stories, songs, poems, and more from people of all ages. These devotionals speak of joyous times, as well as difficult times, and they all point towards the glory that is the coming of Jesus Christ. You are invited to start reading each daily devotional, starting on Sunday, December 2nd, and travel with us through the Advent Season leading all the way to Christmas Day. Advent is a time of preparation, so please use this booklet as a way to help you become prepared for Jesus' coming. O come, O come, Emmanuel!

**Peace Be With You All,
Pastor Raegan**

Monday, December 24th
Christmas Eve

Written by: Pastor Raegan Seaton

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:8-14

Christmastime is here, and Charlie Brown knows that he should be happy, but he isn't. He also knows that commercialism is the problem (truly a prophetic word!)- even manifesting itself within his own family as seen by younger sister Sally's Christmas letter to Santa, and Snoopy entering a Christmas decorating contest with a cash prize - but he doesn't know what to do about it. When Lucy suggests that he direct the Christmas play, Charlie Brown hopes to find the true meaning of Christmas in the process. But that doesn't seem to be working. One of the last pieces for the play is to get a Christmas tree as the set centerpiece. Charlie Brown, with Linus is tow, takes on the task himself, with all of his cast wanting him to pick out a nice aluminum tree. Instead, Charlie Brown chooses a small, sickly looking real tree that he believes needs some tender loving care. Although it is the exact opposite of what his cast asked him to get, it may act as that symbol to bring the true meaning of Christmas back into everyone lives, with a little help from a speech by Linus.

Linus says these words from Luke 2:8-14:

"⁸And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. ¹⁰And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ¹⁴Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill towards men." Linus then walks back over to Charlie Brown and gently says, "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."

It is easy to get caught up in all there is to do at Christmas. Presents to buy, food to cook, parties to attend, it is never ending. And yet, when we get caught up in all those things, we miss the blessing of Christmas right in front of us.

The God of all creation came to save us. And God didn't come in power and might but as a small baby born in a manger to poor parents. This baby would change the world and continues to change the world today. So before you put out the cookies for Santa and get ready for all the visitors, stop and say thank you to God. Thank God that He sent His son to us. Thank God that Jesus is still at work on us today, and remember the real reason for Christmas.

Prayer: *Father God, thank you! Thank you for the blessing of your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to remember this gift you so freely give us not just on Christmas but every day. Amen.*

Monday, December 3rd

Provided by: Pastor Raegan Seaton

5 Questions to Ask Yourself this Advent Season...

As we prepare to take this Advent journey together, here are some questions to think about.

1. When I wake up on Christmas morning, how will I be different? How do I hope the meditations and practices of the season will shape me?
2. How can I prepare myself, my home, and my family for the arrival of Jesus in a way that nurtures a spirit of anticipation and hope?
3. Have I left enough space in the busy holiday season to pay attention, to listen, to wait, and to be surprised? What practical steps can I take to both guard those quiet moments but also embrace divine interruptions?
4. Consider the effects of light. It can warm and it can guide, but it can also expose and surprise. What does light in the darkness mean for the world? What does it mean for my life in this season?
5. What does it mean to *listen to the prophets* in this season—not just the prophets of old, but the prophets of today? Who is crying out for justice and peace from the margins, and what will I do to heed their calls?

From Rachel Held Evans

Saturday, December 22nd

Written By: Neta Callahan

Scripture: Revelation 21:1-7

About forty years ago, when my son, Kevin, was five, he had a friend in his class named Lee Ann. Lee Ann seemed to like him a lot. As Christmas approached the class started drawing names for a gift exchange, and Lee Ann swapped around so that she could get Kevin's name.

Now Lee Ann's family and our family were taking our kids to school five minutes earlier than they were allowed on the school grounds. We wanted to personally take our kids to school rather than let them walk on their own, and this was partially because when I was a child a little boy had run out to a bus and was killed. Well, we started receiving nasty notes because of the fact that we were taking our kids early, so Lee Ann's mother hired a babysitter to walk a block to school to take Lee Ann there.

Two weeks before Christmas, Lee Ann decided to walk by herself. She was killed before she made it to school.

When Kevin found out he immediately begged the teacher to let him call me. I told Kevin that every year Jesus picks someone special to be his Christmas angel. What else could I say? I couldn't let him know that I was crying.

On December 23rd they had the funeral. Kevin wanted to take some flowers so we hurried by the flower shop and picked up a red rose. The church had a reserved section with thirty seats for Lee Ann's classmates and that was where we sat. The casket was closed and on top there was a mountain of pink roses. I had never seen so many in my life. I bit my lip and Kevin was holding the rose, shaking. When we were leaving, with so many pink roses I told Kevin that he could place the rose on the floor beside Lee Ann. As he laid it down he smiled at the preacher like his rose was the only one there.

A few days later, Lee Ann's dad brought over the gift for the exchange. Can you imagine? Now, before the accident, the children had made ceramic angel Christmas ornaments for their trees. We put that little angel on top of the tree that year. Kevin still has the angel.

Cherish your loved ones this Christmas. And hold on to those precious memories.

Prayer: *O Emmanuel, God with us, so often in our lives we face unspeakable pain due to tragedies that befall us. Yet we know that the time will come when Christ will come again, and we will experience your Kingdom fully. In that place there will be no more tears, or mourning, and death will be no more. Thank you for this hope; a hope we hold tightly today.*

Wednesday, December 5th

Written By: Carolyn Shirley

Scripture Reading: Psalm 100:1-2

Advent is the Beginning of the Christian Church year, a Time of Preparing Ourselves for the Coming of Christ and the Opportunity of Forgiveness.

When I was growing up I sang in the Church Junior Choir (OK we were kids). We wore Blue long skirts and white flowing tops. We learned Advent songs for the four Sundays before Christmas, and we also practiced and thought about the Christmas Hymns for Christmas Day. This was a lot of work because our Choir Director challenged us to sing in harmony and learn new songs.

The Advent Hymns had clear Messages:

"Come Thou Long Expected Jesus, Born to set the People Free" *

At times a Minor Tone would reflect our Sadness and need for a Redeemer:

"O Come O Come Emanuel And Ransom Captive Israel

that mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear" **

Or Expectations:

"On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry

Announcing that the Lord is Nigh!" ***

For me, the Stories of the Bible are told in the Words of Hymns and the Holy Spirit Moves through us in our Breathing and our Song. If you have not been singing, give it a try this Advent. Listen to other voices and match the sounds going up and down and prepare for those great Christmas Carols.

*Melody, Christian Friedrich Witte, 1715, words by Charles Wesley, 1744

**words from 9th century Latin, music 15 Century Fr. arranged by Thomas Helmore, 1854

***Musikalisches Handbuch, Hamburg, 1690

Prayer: *Lord, in this joyful season, help us to spread cheer through our voices. Let us sing your praise now and forever.*

Thursday, December 20th

Submitted by: Cinda Lewis

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 7:14 “Behold, a virgin shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”

An excerpt from *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers:

His Birth in History. “Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35) Jesus Christ was born *into* this world, not *from it*. He did not evolve out of history; He came into history from the outside. Jesus Christ is not the best human being, He is a Being Who cannot be accounted for by the human race at all. He is not man becoming God, but God Incarnate, God coming into human flesh, coming into it from outside. His life is the Highest and the Holiest entering in at the Lowliest door. Our Lord’s birth was an advent.

His Birth in Me. “Of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.” (Galatians 4:19) Just as Our Lord came into human history from outside, so He must come into me from outside. Have I allowed my personal human life to become a “Bethlehem” for the Son of God? I cannot enter into the realm of the Kingdom of God unless I am born from above by a birth totally unlike natural birth. “Ye must be born again.” This is not a command; it is a foundation fact. The characteristic of the new birth is that I yield myself so completely to God that Christ is formed in me. Immediately Christ is formed in me, His nature begins to work through me.

God manifest in the flesh – that is what is made profoundly possible for you and me by the Redemption.

Prayer: *O Wonderful Lord Jesus, please enter into me and let a new life be born. Change me forever by God’s amazing grace so that my life will forever look like yours. It is in your name I pray. Amen*

Friday, December 7th

Written By: Kathy Newcomer

Scripture Reading: Psalm 68:35

“You, God, are awesome in your sanctuary; the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people. Praise be to God.”

Peacefulness and Wonder, Under the Christmas Tree

I am a member of the “Baby-Boomer” generation, which means I was a little girl in the early 1960’s. A popular Christmas item, during this particular era, was aluminum Christmas trees. It is true, the branches of these Christmas trees were made of aluminum tinsel, all silver and shining. Rotating color-wheel lights were often used to illuminate these aluminum trees, which would slowly change the color of the Christmas tree from blue, then to red, next to green and finally gold. It was very magical and exciting for a young child to experience.

My maternal grandparents had an aluminum Christmas tree, complete with the lighted rotating color-wheel. Whenever I went over to their house, during the Christmas season, I would always lay on my back, under the aluminum Christmas tree, and I would become engulfed with the feelings of peace, awe and wonder.

I loved to lay there, staring up through the center of the aluminum Christmas tree, watching the tree slowly changing colors, again and again. I would check out my own reflection in the numerous glass ball ornaments which hung from the tree’s glistening branches. When the furnace started running, warm air circulated throughout the room, which would make the Christmas tree’s shiny silver branches flutter and catch the colorful lights. I found it almost hypnotizing.

While under the aluminum tree, I could hear the familiar voices of my family members, typically resonating from the kitchen. Muffled in the background I could hear familiar Christmas tunes being played. My grandmother was a HUGE Elvis fan, so “Blue Christmas” was a repetitively played favorite.

Laying under the aluminum Christmas tree was a very special place for me; a place that I did not want to leave. It brought me such peacefulness, and was so soothing to my spirit, that more than once I fell asleep under the Christmas tree, amongst the gifts and other Christmas treats.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for today and every day. Thank you for your bountiful blessings in our lives, Thank you for your son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. May we celebrate his birth, and his life, this season; just like we are children, who are filled with excitement, awe and endless wonder. Amen.*

Tuesday, December 18th

Poem written by: Trudy Doerfler

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:7

“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”

The Greatest Gift Sent

In contentment He lay, by omnipotent care,
Though the bed where he slept was all but rough, bare;

In contentment stars bend at His call for night's lights,
As snow geese glide content through the darkest sky heights;

In contentment all follow, nature's beasts, to His feet,
As a pup seeks his master's hug, so soft to greet...

And contentment He gave us, the blessed Christ Child, on that cold, quiet eve,
As He took sin from our souls, stained tears from our sleeves;

In contentment we will all humbly pray now, and on, from this Christmas time;
As the lion and lamb will in peace lie content,
My we, too, stay content in this, the Greatest Gift sent.

Prayer: *You have given us the greatest gift, O Lord. We pray that you bring us back to that place where we feel so deeply about the birth of Christ, as shepherds to the stable after hearing the angels sing. Bring us back to that place when our love was fresh, and we were content in your arms. Restore us to a place of contentment, O Lord, we pray. Amen!*

Second Sunday of Advent Sunday, December 9th

Written By: Pastor Raegan Seaton

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 12:1-6

You will say on that day: I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, and you comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say on that day: Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

JOY

The Grinch is a classic Christmas movie, that for my family, is a must watch of the Holidays. In fact, it is so popular that they have just come out with another version of it with Benedict Cumberbatch. You know the story, a grumpy old Grinch is out to ruin Christmas for the people of Whoville. But when he finds out he can't steal their joy, he goes through a huge transformation.

Like The Grinch, there is always something or someone trying to steal your joy. We have to make a conscious effort to not let that happen. Just like being thankful, we have a choice to CHOOSE JOY! We can look at the world and see all the bad or we can look at the world and see the good.

Christ does this for us. Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit helps us to see all the joy that is around us every day. We then can share that joy with the world, and truly celebrate all that Christ has done.

Prayer: *Father God, thank you for the joy you bring to our lives. Help us to always see your joy and choose to be people of joy every day. Amen.*

Third Sunday of Advent Sunday, December 16th

Written By: Pastor Raegan Seaton

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 25:6-9

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain he shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

LOVE

George Bailey spends his entire life giving up his big dreams for the good of his town, Bedford Falls, as we see in flashback. But in the present, on Christmas Eve, he is broken and suicidal over the misplacing of an \$8000 loan and the machinations of the evil millionaire Mr. Potter. His guardian angel, Clarence, falls to Earth, literally, and shows him how his town, family, and friends would have turned out if he had never been born. George meant so much to so many people; should he really throw it all away?

It's A Wonderful Life causes us to stop and ponder the impact that we all make on one another. And while the story is about a man realizing his worth; it is also a story about love. George's love for his family and community are what save him. The community needs him. Can people say that about us? Do we live our life's full of love so much that when we are gone or if we had never come to be, would the world miss us? Jesus offers us this love to us. And then Jesus calls us to go out and share that love with the world in real and powerful ways. So the question is, will we?

Prayer: *Lord of Love, help us to love like you do, to share your love with the world so that we might make a difference for Your Kingdom and Your Glory. Amen.*

Tuesday, December 11th

Written by: Patsy Durkin

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:8-14

Christmas is a wonderful time of the year. My favorite song is Silent Night. I listen to Christmas songs all year long. Each song has the story of the birth of Christ. At Christmas time, we enjoy being together.

Silent Night

Silent night, Holy night,
All is calm, All is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, Holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ the Savior, is born!
Christ the Savior, is born!

Silent night, Holy night,
Son of God, Love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, you sent your son humbly to us in human form. Not as a king in a castle, but in a manger to a lowly virgin.*

Friday, December 14th

Written by: Pastor Raegan Seaton

Scripture Reading: Mark 13:24-37

When we were pregnant with our first child, my husband graduated from seminary and took his first appointment. So at 34 weeks pregnant, we moved to a new state where we were two hours away from the hospital where I would deliver. Being so close to the end and so far away from the hospital, my husband had color levels, not unlike those used by Homeland Security, to emphasize the urgency of our situation. We started at Yellow for our first visit and quickly moved to Orange when the due date was pushed up. There was a great expectancy in our house. We needed to do all that we could to be prepared for this child. It was exciting and nerve racking all at the same time. We didn't want to be caught off guard.

I'm always reminded of that time when we celebrate Advent. The Israelites were waiting for the Messiah and they didn't want to be caught off guard. It was a time of expectancy for them. They had been waiting for a long time. But they were not passive in their waiting. As we prepared our house for our new baby, so the Israelites prepared their hearts for the coming of the Messiah. There was much work to do.

We, in many ways, are like those Israelites but instead of waiting for the Messiah to come, we are waiting for Him to return. We live in an "already not yet" time when it comes to the kingdom of God. We are actively waiting on Jesus and at the same time actively carrying out the mission of Jesus in the world we have already been given.

Advent is a reminder that God came in the flesh and dwelt among us and that He is returning to finish what He started. Let's be ready by keeping true to His ministry in the "already not yet" time. Let's keep preparing and be ready for His return.

Prayer: *Gracious Father, thank you for sending your Son to us so that we might begin to grasp how much you love us. And thank you that He will come again and we will all be united with you forever. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

Thursday, December 13th

Written by: Brenda Smith

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 4:2

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 2 Timothy 4:2

As humans, our emotions vacillate on a daily basis. One day we can be so euphoric and the next day, be as low as one can go on the emotional scale. It's at this time, one can feel so inadequate and question what can I do to be a better Christian? Are my daily interactions with others guided by the Holy Spirit? Unfortunately, like me, many are weak and instead of giving all the situations to God, I try to manipulate and produce "happy endings" or favorable, less stressful ones. Instead of feeling fulfilled, I realize how inept, empty and temporary those results are when I leave our Heavenly Father out of the process. It is when I embrace His love and help, a sense of purpose and peace prevail and the "endings" have more value and sustenance. My soul has been fed. It was on one of these types of days, that we ventured to Manvel, Texas, to view some horses. I had tried for 2 years to get my sweet mare in foal to no avail and was searching for a well pedigreed mare to use for the breeding I had purchased. As we drove up to the facility, the quality of the mares became quite evident. It was also evident that the horses were not handled. Being closer to 70 than 65, I knew they were beyond my expertise as well as my physical ability. We went through the motions and left for home. As we drove off, my husband commented that that was a wasted trip. It was hot, we were tired and hungry so we decided to stop for lunch. We passed by a restaurant that had a fairly full parking lot (good sign) and I mentioned we should turn around and go try it. So, even though it was difficult, we did a u-turn and went back. That's where this God moment actually takes place.

The timing was perfect in the sense that our order got mixed up so it was a tad bit tardy being delivered to our table. I began people watching and focused on 3 young men sitting directly in front of me. Two of the fellows were joking and laughing during their meal, but the third seemed anxious. He kept getting up and down and walking off while talking on his phone. He would return to the table and as he spoke to his friends, they became quite somber. When he would leave with his phone, they would joke around together, but when he returned, again, you could tell they were empathizing with his situation. Something told me I needed to talk to this young man, but I was like, "Uh, yeah, right. He'll think I'm crazy and what would I say?" As they got up to leave, I felt an urge to go after him and a prodding with "Go now, or you'll miss your chance" floating through my head. Just as I got to the door, there was the young man being ever so polite and holding the door open for me. There we were.....eye-to-eye.....no backing out now. I thanked him for holding the