

# ⊕ Come Emmanuel



## Preface

In the northern hemisphere, December is a month of looming darkness and scarcity. No matter how much we play with our clocks or the calendar, the light grows dimmer each day. In the fading daylight, we share a heightened awareness of the things that we need: food, clothing, shelter. We take them for granted, but these needs determine our survivability.

Blanketing these very tangible needs for survival, Advent comes with its own awareness of the things that we need: love, peace, joy, hope. On a very personal level, we need love, peace, joy, hope—not as commodities to place under a tree but as resources to better our life and living and to better the life and living of those around us.

We believe in the power of love, peace, joy and hope. We believe in their power to build community. We believe in their power to satisfy our deepest needs in a season when our deepest needs are so glaringly obvious.

We pray this devotional will stimulate you, invigorate you, challenge you, and comfort you.

—Rev. Kerry D. Krauss, Pastor  
Sister Bay Moravian Church



Love

## Love

noun \ˈləʊv\

(1): strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties

(2): affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests

(3): warm attachment, enthusiasm, or devotion

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## Sunday

**1 John 3:18 – “Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”**

**Hebrews 13:2 – “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”**

Perceptions are powerful influences on our actions. For years, I have raised cutting flowers and sold them at markets or from my farm. Zinnias have no discernable fragrance, yet it is not uncommon for people to lift the bouquet to their faces, inhale deeply, and announce how wonderful the flowers smell! Simply by virtue of being a flower, the belief in a delightful fragrance overpowers the logical senses. What if, when dealing with others, we cultivated an expectation that they have something pleasing, but perhaps unseen, to offer us? Just like we assume a certain delight when approaching a flower, we anticipate something remarkable from all persons?

*Gracious God, Giver of Life and Love: In this season of Advent, as we celebrate Immanuel, “God with us,” may we concern ourselves more with knowing the heart of God and less with trying to know the mind of God. Amen.*

# Monday

**I John 3:1 – “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God.”**

Taking our daily walk, the young one and I were on a mission of discovery, his toddler steps matching my “grandmother” pace. I was sad today, as I would soon be leaving to return to my home in another state. It was still early, and the dew was heavy on the shrubs and flowers that we passed. “Look, Grandma” He stopped abruptly and pointed to a special leaf. “Look, it’s sparkling!” There on the edge of a leaf, just his height, was the last dewdrop sparkling in the sunlight. “Grandma, can we take it home? It’s so pretty.”

“My dear, it will not last. It will dry under the heat of the sun.”

His lower lip began to tremble. “Oh, Grandma, can’t we take it home?” One tiny tear trickled down his chubby cheek. I took his hand and we moved on, and soon he was finding other beautiful things to catch his attention.

But the thought stayed with me: How do you catch a dewdrop? How beautiful, yet how fleeting. The Giver of dewdrops wrapped his arms around me. “There will be more dewdrops,” I heard.

*Father, thank you for letting me see your love for me, even in the little things. Amen.*

# Tuesday

## 1 Corinthians 16:14 – “Do everything in love.”

“In essential, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things love” is a motto that speaks to many Moravians and other Christians as well. No matter how right we are in our doctrine, how many good works we can come up with in a day, or how much we decide to give away—if we do not do it out of our love, it really means nothing.

Some people are easy to love. Some people are easy to love *sometimes* but not at *other* times. Babies are always easy to love. The sight of an infant child in a manger can melt even the coldest of hearts.

Baptisms in church can do that too. I love it when we have a baptism during worship. The whole congregation is at its best. There are soft faces all around as we gaze on that little one held by young parents. At the end of the service, the congregation is asked whether they will support and teach and love this child. We are asked to promise to love that child forever. Who wouldn't say “yes” on such a day? How can you not love a precious baby? But babies don't stay babies. It's hard to keep our promise to love that child when that darling baby becomes a screaming two-year-old, and all we want is for that child to be somewhere else so we can worship in peace.

It's hard to keep our promise to love that child when that baby becomes a rascally third grader who systemically draws pictures of war planes on every prayer card tucked into the back of every pew.

It's hard to keep our promise to love that child when that baby becomes a sullen young teen, dressed in black with a stud in her lip and sporting a brand new tattoo.

*Jesus, let us love the Christ Child in each person we meet, no matter the age or circumstance. The Advent of your coming offers us a chance to practice “in all things love.” Amen.*

## Wednesday

**Matthew 1:24 – “When he woke, Joseph did as the angel of the Lord had directed him; he took Mary home to be his wife.”**

When I was about 15, my Presbyterian minister asked me to participate in the annual Christmas Eve play. I was humbled to play Mary but frightened once I realized my scene dealt with Mary telling Joseph that she was already carrying a child not his. Joseph was played by a young man I'd never met. He was slender, tall, and several years older than I.

Except for a few stumbles, Jim and I knew our lines at the first rehearsal. In subsequent rehearsals, we were perfect—but embarrassed over the impact of what our words were saying. We both knew the beautiful fact that Joseph wanted no harm to come to his betrothed, even before an angel came to him in a dream; yet, this scene was almost impossible for us, probably because of its reality, the strength of the writing, and our youth. Dress rehearsal was predictably chaotic: costume problems and missed cues. Our minister led us safely through, yet I was still uneasy about the critical scene—so well written, so important to the story.

On Christmas Eve, a light snowfall set the scene as cast members fought against jitters. Finally, our organist began playing, and I went onstage alone until the angel came to tell me I was chosen to give birth to the Son of God. Then my scene with Jim: When I told him what had happened, he didn't behave in his usual fashion! He began pacing up and down, saying his lines in an anguished way—inspiring my responses. You could have heard a pin drop. Our minister's words and God's were suddenly alive!

When I saw Jim again after a number of years, neither of us mentioned that experience. I think he knew what I knew, that love can conquer even disbelief because Joseph's love for Mary was that strong. Perhaps it was that strong love that brought the affirming angel to Joseph in his sleep, assuring him that Mary had told the truth. I hope so!

*Lord, help me to see the stories of love evident around me this day. May they be shining moments lighting the path toward you.  
Amen.*

# Thursday

**John 3:16 – “God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son so that all who believe in him will not be lost but will have eternal life.”**

How do we learn of God’s love as human beings—beings created in the image of God? How do we inherit this fallen human nature and inclination to sin? It comes to us simply because we are human; our life is continuous with all our fallen ancestors. This oneness permits the reverse to happen as well. When Christ entered the human race, he set an opposite force in motion, a strain of healing from sin that spreads outward, just as sin-sickness spread from Adam and Eve (having been deceived into choosing to live without God... without the Source of Life). Christ came not to pay a legal infraction but to heal us of the sin infection that afflicts us, teach us how to be restored, made whole, the true path we need to travel in life, how to cooperate with God to recover the original purpose of creation.

We are beings who are saved by grace... God’s gift and process that invites us to active participation and cooperation... keeping the commandments, walking in his ways, cultivating our dependence on God, seeking him first, pursuing love for the Truth (2 Thess. 2:10) and having compassionate love for each other. For this reason, he takes on and bears a body so that we may see and imitate his life. He reveals the Holy Trinity’s overwhelming love as he prepares us for the mystery of the Father’s daily providential work in our lives.

By fully identifying himself with us, Christ has come to show us, teach us, heal us, and lead us back to the Father... Christ’s humble advent and birth is truly the greatest gift of the Father to us for our salvation. “The Word became flesh and dwells among us full of grace and truth...” (John 1:14). This is the mysterious way of our God. Christ is in our midst!

*Grant me an open heart, flowing with love anew. So that my days may be fulfilled, giving it all away. Make me a trusting child, ready to believe. Strengthened by prayer, encouraged with hope, and blessed beyond compare. Amen.*

# Friday

**Isaiah 40:3 – “A voice cries out, ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord.’”**

In the 1971 musical *Godspell*, John the Baptist calls out the words of Isaiah: “Prepare ye the way of the Lord!” Repeated over and over, the message is there: “Prepare for the coming of the Lord.” But how, for whom, and why? The journey to Christmas is before us.

**First, begin walking the Advent pathway**, a four-Sunday season leading us to the Nativity of Jesus, an individual celebration, yes, but also in community. This requires a conscious decision to walk toward Christmas through Advent.

**Clear the path.** Our lives are way too cluttered, needing an intensive clearing out. Worship with your church family to walk the path together. Place an advent wreath in your home with four royal blue candles and a white Christ Candle, lighting one for each Sunday of the Season. Think about the message of the greens: God is, has been, and will always be. Red berries remind us of the blood of Christ shed for our salvation. Reflect on candles, telling of the Hope, Joy, Love, and Peace found in the coming King.

**Pause along the path**, at the waysides of confession, asking for and extending forgiveness, seeing how to touch human need around you. In an already busy season, make time for responding to the needs of others in tangible ways.

**Finally, look up the path.** Focus on for whom we spiritually prepare ourselves, no less than Jesus Christ and his rebirth in our lives. The words of “O Little Town of Bethlehem” say it so well: “Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.” Christmas is more than celebrating a historical birth long ago. It means nothing if this Jesus isn’t reborn in us again and again and again. So...

*“How shall I meet my Savior? How shall I truly welcome thee?  
What manner of behavior is by thy love required of me?  
I wait for my salvation; grant me, O Lord, why Spirit’s light;  
And may my preparation be well accepted in thy sight.”*

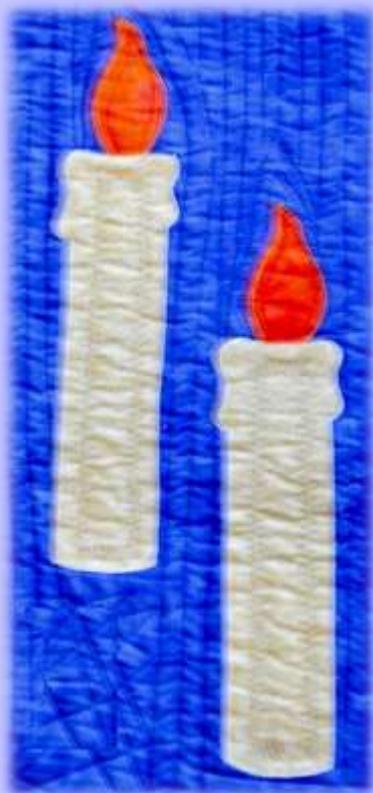
(Moravian Book of Worship, #269)

# Saturday

**Zephaniah 3:17 – “The Lord your God is in your midst. The mighty one will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.”**

The sunroom of our home is my favorite place to be in all seasons and weather. I recall a blizzard several years ago, sitting in my favorite reading chair, cozied in the corner and watching the snow accumulate. Here were no distractions, and when I stepped to the door, opening to feel the flakes, I heard nothing. Absolutely nothing. Stillness such as we sing in “Silent Night” and, with it, a sense of holiness. Purely peace and comfort. Could that have been the feeling so many years ago? Wonder and awe, soothing the souls who were present. In fact, that stable—as distasteful as it may seem, medically unsafe as we see it now, and smelly as it may have been—provided shelter, a place to host guests and to feel the wonder of a promise. Humble beginnings...

*Lord, remind us of the peace that comes from simple delight. We ask you to open our eyes to the wonder at our feet every day. Silent night can be every night! Amen.*



Hope

## HOPE

verb \ˈhōp\

1: to cherish a desire with anticipation

2: to desire with expectation of obtainment

3: to expect with confidence: trust

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## Sunday

### My Psalm, based on the 23rd Psalm:

My heavenly Father is my master and provider.

I can rest and be safe in his care.

I trust and obey—the Shepherd loves me, and I love him.

God gives me hope, makes things right.

God leads me, and I can trust and follow him.

I have nothing to fear.

God loves me, is always with me, and gives me peace.

He gives me comfort and care, is in control and guides me.

I will not be afraid.

He knows me and everyone, and watches over us.

I am so grateful that you are with me and that I have your goodness and mercy for all of my life.

Things will be okay, and I count all my blessings.

Thank you, Lord, for opening the door to heaven for me and all.

*Tender Shepherd, as we look to you with hope and great expectations, help us to pause and count your many blessings. You guard and guide us with loving care. We are so grateful for your presence and rest safely in your arms. Amen.*

# Monday

**Psalm 130:5 – “I wait for the Lord; my soul waits, and in his word I hope.”**

Hope is all about waiting. We trust in something that hasn't happened yet. Without hope, we are unbuoyed, at sea. Hope makes it possible for us to live in the between times—between the Already and the Not Yet.

As children, we despair of the waiting. I can remember that my mother did everything she could to help me make it to Christmas. That's why someone invented the Advent calendar. That's why we cross off the days in December. We wait in hopeful anticipation. If we have had the luxury of growing up as normal, happy children, we could trust that Christmas morning would come with the Easy Bake Oven under the tree.

It's no different now that we are grown. We wait in hopeful anticipation for Christ to be born again. We are not disappointed. There is hope each year that Christ will find room in our hearts—to be present in a new way.

Sometimes, we feel hopeless and wonder where we can get hope. Just as Advent calendars filled with pieces of chocolate helped us live in hope as children, so worship, hymns, and devotional reading can help us now as we wait.

God is a trustworthy God, and each time, we live again through the days of waiting—the days of Advent—we learn to trust in good outcomes for our lives. Hope does not mean that we will always get the Easy Bake Oven, but gifts of grace will come. “Everything will turn out right in the end, and if it doesn't turn out right, it isn't the end” (Best Exotic Marigold Hotel).

*Lord, help us to be patient in our waiting in this Advent season. Inspire us to use our days to open our hearts and minds again to your leading. May your coming again fill us with peace and joy and hope. Amen.*

# Tuesday

**Psalm 146:5 – “Blessed is he whose help is in the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.”**

Advent has been observed since the fourth century, using candles on wheel-shaped bundles of evergreens symbolizing ongoing life. When lit, they gave off comfort at the darkest time of year. By the sixteenth century, wreaths held three purple candles symbolizing hope, peace, and love. The rose candle represented joy.

The dictionary defines *advent* as “the coming.” Coming into place, view, or being. It is also a time of expectation and preparation for a celebration. The symbols of Advent are important in everyone’s life, not just the four weeks before Christmas but throughout the year. How do we bring the Advent season into our lives all year? Perhaps we do and aren’t aware of it. If a big change in our life happens, something unexpected, there is always hope, and this gives us the strength to continue and conquer the obstacles.

When hardships, illnesses, and world catastrophes happen, remember hope and peace for ourselves and for the world. Pray for it in our daily lives. During difficult times, a smile and warm touch make all the difference in how we feel, our attitude, and gives us the strength that is much needed.

An essayist and poet from the Tang dynasty, Han Yu is quoted as saying “When the efforts of man are directed toward a common goal, they will breathe in harmony with each other.” This could be the road to peace, love and hope.

*Father, during this special season, bring us together to provide peace, love, joy—and especially help—to those near and far. Help us be the healing touch, to offer prayers for strangers, and look for opportunities to keep Advent alive throughout the year. Amen.*

## Wednesday

Psalm 33:20–21 – “We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.”

The Advent season is built on the tenants of Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace, but what if you find yourself entering the season questioning if you really have faith? What is faith? Is it a set of beliefs or just a feeling? Is it based upon certainty or merely hope?

If it is a set of beliefs, are we allowed to confront or reject or question those tenets that we have been raised to believe are necessary for faith? When others seem to have all those questions wrapped up in a neat little black-and-white box, what do we do with those grays that seem to pop up and don't have such simple answers?

We recognize that a feeling of closeness to this God, our creator and friend, is necessary to make the claim of joy and peace, and yet we sometimes feel a lack of connectedness and wonder: *God, are you there? In the stillness of the black night, am I alone? How do I find you?*

The candle of Hope forces us to remember events of our life where, in doubts, we were sustained. We recall when visions of your love were evident, yet we still felt a sense of distance and uncertainty. For a moment or a time, the light of the candle of Hope sets us on a path to search, to pray, to listen until we once again rediscover the love, joy, and peace you offer. With small steps, we move toward the cradle and the One who understands our doubts and fears, yet still offers us his love. HOPE.

*Heavenly Father, we are warmed by the glow of Hope. Hope for our long-expected Savior, Hope for rest in the shelter of your arms, Hope for a more peaceful world, and Hope that our actions glorify your kingdom. Doubt and despair we place on the altar as the candle of Hope shines brightly. Amen.*

# Thursday

Psalm 25:3 – “No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame.” Psalm 42:5 – “Put your hope in God.”

This poem, “The Hurricane,” was written some years ago for a group of men who studied while incarcerated in Cook County Jail in Chicago.

There’s a dark sky and a black cloud rising.  
A hush and a pause and a tension surrounding  
all who stand in the path of the storm.  
The worst will be coming, the waves will be pounding.  
The chill will replace all comfort and warmth.

The crash of the rain and the wind mean power.  
The noise and the dark blot out the season.  
For every poor soul in the path of the storm,  
confusion is reigning, as terror, like sin, overwhelms reason.  
Who can diminish such death and harm?

Christ is his name, praise it forever!  
He is the Savior, constant and true,  
who calms every storm with mercy and love,  
reaching beyond the days of destruction,  
tending His children from a throne above.  
Changing life’s deluge to a gentle dew.

His purpose is ever to rescue and heal.  
His love is unending, never held back—  
arms outstretched as they were on his Cross,  
while the hurricane howls and the wind’s fierce crack  
are dispelled in spite of Satan’s attack.  
The Lord Jesus guides each one of His sheep,  
promising faithfully, “You’ll never be lost.”

*Lord God, we stretch our arms out to you as our hope in turmoil. We may be lost in the great storm, but we know our safe harbor is in your sheltering arms. Touch us and grace us with your spirit. Amen.*

# Friday

**Psalm 33:22 – “Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name.”**

Music speaks powerfully to me, often more so than mere words. Melodies linger and with it the words. It isn't unusual for it to play in my mind during the waking nighttime hours.

There is a hymn titled “All My Hope on God is Founded,” which starts out “All my hope on God is founded; He doth still my trust renew, Me through change and chance He guideth, Only good and only true, God unknown, He alone Calls my heart to be his own.” The hymn was written by a German high school teacher who lived a very short evangelistic life and wrote notable hymns, such as “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty.” The hymns were eventually translated by a British Poet Laureate. What stands as tribute to the writer and the translator is the blending of their talent and dedication for others to be able to sing the power of words that remind us while cathedrals and temples eventually fall, the hope we find in God never fails.

Recently in a small group discussion on poverty, as we tackled this enormous topic, one gentleman reminded us “we must never lose hope; if we focus on the global scale it is too easy to feel hopeless.” Hopelessness stops us in our tracks and inertia means we give up. Hope implies a level of trust that while I cannot see the future or know what is coming, I believe that what my faith promises will happen. For me, hope also implies a level of action on my part. While I can hope for some things, I must actively work for them to come to fruition. I can hope for a more positive attitude, stronger body, less judgmental voice, or better relationships, but I have some responsibility to work towards those goals. Hope carries me through as God and I are partners in these adventures. I trust He will provide me the resources and pave the way.

I light the HOPE candle in expectation of my long-awaited Jesus.

*Oh God, hear my prayers for the light of HOPE to spread farther than I can imagine. Bring Hope to the world as we actively engage in making your world here on earth more of a heavenly place in kindness, acceptance, wholeness and peace. We are not hopeless; quite the opposite...hopeful! Amen.*

## Saturday

Psalm 18:35 – “...and your right hand upholds me, your gentleness makes me great; you enlarge my steps under me, and my feet have not slipped.”

Psalm 94:18,19 – “If I should say, ‘My foot has slipped,’ your lovingkindness, O Lord, will hold me up.”

1 John 3:1 – “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called Children of God; and such we are.”

We stood by our young daughter as she began the new challenges of crawling and standing; then walking. Holding on, falling, clutching our outstretched hands—only to release herself and try again.

Those early years were certainly an adventure. How we hovered, cleared a path, held her up, our love pouring out as we moved with her.

How I am reminded of the Father’s love for us in our own struggles to walk his way. Now for the ultimate gift of his love, his very own Son who walked the path so we did not have to, and a Father who hovers even now to guide us on our way.

*Father, please continue to remind us by your Word and your Holy Spirit of your great love for us and your most splendid gift, your Son. In his name we pray. Amen.*



Joy

## JOY

noun \ˈjɔɪ\

1a: the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires

b: the expression or exhibition of such emotion

2: a state of happiness or felicity

3: a source or cause of delight, thoughts, or emotions

4: harmony in personal relations

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## Sunday

**Matthew 25:40 – “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”**

Given the expectations of today’s pregnant couples, I am astounded at the level of faith Mary and Joseph displayed. I play out that scene in my mind’s eye every now and then, trying to see how a modern-day couple and their families would react. Surely, someone would attempt to hospitalize a woman who claimed Immaculate Conception and a vision of an angel. Could we imagine a rebirth like the first one? Will it be simple and unheralded? In the midst of international turmoil, will we recognize a second coming? Will the son of God be a simple servant, walking among us and returning us to the basics of love, selflessness, honor, caring, humility, and devotion? Will we recognize the face of Jesus or pass him by?

*Oh, Lord, keep my antennae tuned into your plan. Keep my heart and mind open and receptive, my hands ready to assist or receive, and not let me pass by without seeing the face of Christ in all I meet. Amen.*

# Monday

**Psalm 55:12 – “You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.”**

We all have different memories of Christmas. It might be Advent when we hung the Moravian Star in the window or when we brought home a freshly cut tree to trim.

In my family, we would travel to Florida to spend Christmas with my parents, who had a home in Winter Haven. Being a teacher, my husband had a two-week holiday break. We were often asked if it seemed like Christmas without any snow. Christmas to us had very little to do with weather.

We helped my mother trim her tree and hang our star in the window. They had poinsettia plants growing outside their front window.

On Christmas Eve, we drove over to Rolling Hills Moravian in Longwood for the afternoon service. They had a traditional Moravian Love Feast and candles. As we left church, we observed their live manger scene with Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus with shepherds and real sheep on each side. It was a beautiful, peaceful scene. One particular year, when arriving home after the Christmas Eve service, some of the neighbors came by and sang Christmas carols to our family. My mother gave them a plate of Christmas cookies.

On Christmas Day, my aunt and uncle would join us for dinner. In the evening after dinner, my daughters would want to take a ride around the community to view the Christmas decorations on the homes. We all felt the Christmas spirit. Our hearts were filled with love and joy as we celebrated Christ's birth together as a family.

Christmas is in all our hearts and can be celebrated wherever you are.

*Father, thank you that we can once again recall the joys this season brings us. Show us true peace. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

# Tuesday

Luke 2:10 – “The angel said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid. I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.’”

“Joy arrives when divinity dances in us.”

—*Wendy Wright, theologian*

Joy is such a favorite word for me that my youngest daughter’s middle name is JOY! She lives out that middle name every day!

We’re surrounded at this time of year by references to joy: decorations, family, friends, carols, food, good cheer...but what brings us this joy, and in the spirit of this season, how can we give it away?

Joy is funny that way. We can try to share our joy, but it can meet a dead end unless the receiver is ready to take it in... think Scrooge. We can be surrounded by the joy of the season, but the only way we can receive it as a gift is to accept it deep in our soul.

Likewise, the only way we can *share* true joy is to give genuinely from the core of our being. Thirteenth-century theologian Rumi said, “When you do things from your soul, you feel a river of JOY moving in you...”

The carol “Joy to the World” is my favorite. The chorus goes, “... and Heaven and Nature Sing...” Let’s join together in the chorus of JOY by sharing the JOY that is within our hearts.

*Our God, Spirit of Life and Love: May we receive the gift of Joy in this season in such a way that spills over bountifully to others all year. Amen.*

## Wednesday

**Luke 2:8–12 – “That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. ‘Don’t be afraid!’ he said. ‘I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.’”**

In the Prussian Province of Silesia, before Christmas of 1353, the Black Death ravaged the population of Goldberg. The people were terrified. They knew the plague had killed one out of every four people in nearby cities and villages. Historians who survived the illness had recorded, “All lived in awful fear someone might breathe upon them or touch them.” No one went out. Fear of contamination continued until Christmas Eve.

On Christmas Eve, a man ventured out of his house. He thought he was the only survivor in the entire city. Knowing it was Christmas Eve, he put aside his grief and fear, raised his voice and began singing a Christmas hymn. As his song rang into the stillness of the night, another voice—a voice from behind a door—echoed his own. Then a woman joined him in the street. Their songs brought forth more voices, and 25 survivors—all who were left of the town—came and sang of the love of God shown to them in Jesus, the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

Much like the night Jesus was born, when an angel chorus joyfully sang of promise fulfilled and hope newly born, the Prussian villagers’ voices pierced the darkness to reveal the light of life.

As we light the candles of Advent, may the warmth and glow of God’s peace and love, his joy and hope, fill us and shine through us into a world that needs more peace, love, joy, and hope, May our lives reflect the long-awaited proclamation of a Messiah who transforms us from fear-filled to hope-filled, who brings us from death to life.

*Immanuel, God with us! I am surrounded with your love and filled with your presence. May my life sing the joyous proclamation of the hope and salvation found in Jesus. Amen.*

# Thursday

John 16:20b – “You will grieve but your grief will turn to joy.”

## Joy

Deep down  
Very Heart  
Of the soul  
Gift of God  
Life well lived  
Knowing the Lord  
All is well  
Peace reigns

*Heavenly Father, at this time of year when we hear, sing, and think about joy, may we come to the realization that it is more than happiness but rather a deep-down feeling of well-being and living in Thee. Amen.*

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**John 16:22b – “...then you will be joyful and no one shall rob you of your joy.”**

Joy came at 1:30 pm today as the breeze blew through the tree leaves and the bay waves rippled quietly; the tall grasses swished back and forth noisily, and the birds floated on currents as the sun sparkled on the water. Boats bobbed and the gulls cried. Other visitors at the bay sat quietly absorbing their own view or enjoying an ice cream cone. We did not speak but acknowledged each other with a nod. Warmth caressed my face, and contentment filled my soul. It was only a moment, but one of perfect joy.

*Father, help me see and capture in my mind's eye the joys in everyday living. There are so many in the world you have created that to miss even one seems a shame. On the long days of winter, let me recall the warmth in my soul and rejoice in it. Amen.*

# Friday

**Isaiah 52:8 – “Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy.”**

Growing up in Northern Door County in the mid-Fifties and early Sixties was not far removed from the Depression prior to World War II. No one had much, but as the Christmas season neared, I always felt I had it all.

It began quietly during the summer when my dad walked the woods, pruning shears in hand, to find what would become that year’s Christmas tree. More prunings through summer and fall, it would finally be up to his standards.

Come early December, the season began at Bethel Baptist Church. Each of us received our “piece,” the poem or recitation we were instructed to memorize for our Christmas pageant. Rehearsals followed before the big program. Anticipation grew when Mom placed a red Swedish candleholder on the buffet in the dining area. In those days, radio stations did not play carols in the weeks before Christmas: My dad supplied the seasonal music, singing familiar verses but often breaking into a verse or two of his own making, bringing laughter or a sigh at his clever wit and rhyming ability. As the day neared, my mom began gathering the ingredients she’d need for our treat of cherry fruit soup.

The tree was placed in the stand on Christmas Eve. Boxes of beautiful glass ornaments were carefully handed through the attic’s trap door. Off to bed as Santa Dad spent the night trimming the tree and Santa Mom wrapped gifts. It’s difficult to express the joy of the rush downstairs on Christmas morning to see the bedecked tree and gifts. Gifts of love, handmade and practical. Perhaps a new coloring book and crayons or, my favorite, a paper doll booklet. Eyes sparkling with sheer joy, I anxiously awaited the Christmas dinner to come.

We didn’t have much, but in those days of celebration of our Savior’s birth, I had it all.

*Heavenly Savior, in these days of anticipation, may we too lift up our voices with joy, knowing that when we have you in our lives, we do, indeed, have it all. Amen.*

# Saturday

**Psalms 16:11 – “Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forever more.”**

Those of you who I have accosted with my iPad over the last year are aware that I have a new grandchild. To those of you who haven't seen my 900+ photos, just call and set an appointment. I would love to share; she is such a joy.

It got me thinking: Why joy? What is it about the word *joy* that it fits so rightly on certain occasions? Is it more than happiness? Is it more than elation? Less than rapture? Both the Old Testament and New Testament have lots to say about joy. The Christmas story in Matthew describes the wise men, seeing the star of Bethlehem, rejoiced with exceeding great joy. We sing “Joy to the World” each year, our own rejoicing at the birth of Christ. The Book of Luke tells of the shepherds in the fields and angels who calmed their fears by telling them of “good tidings of great joy!”

I personally find that the word *joy* is used for a deeper, quieter, more reverent version of *happiness*. Happiness can be superficial. Chocolate makes me happy, sometimes bordering on joy. Everyday things, lovely things make me happy. Dining with good friends, good-looking shoes that are actually comfortable, a loss of five pounds, makeup that really works. Joy surpasses the superficial, emanates from and resides in the heart.

And yet scripture goes a step further. “In your presence is fullness of joy.” This is the real joy we have in and through Christ, fulfilled, fulfilling, fullness of joy at its deepest, shared with the world in small ways, reaching its full potential through the love and mercy and grace of Christ. His gift, ever available to all who ask.

*Dear Lord, teach us to appreciate the joy you give to us every day, the beauty of your earth, the glory of your being, the richness of your grace. Help us to help others as you have taught us and, in doing so, continue in your joy daily. Amen.*



Peace

## Peace

noun \ˈpēs\

- 1: a state of tranquility or quiet: as
    - a: freedom from civil disturbance
    - b: a state of security or order within a community provided for by law or custom
  - 2: freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions
  - 3: harmony in personal relations
- 

## Sunday

**Matthew 25:40** – “Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of these, my brothers, ye have done it unto me.”

Most of us remember where we were and what we were doing on 9/11. Walking on the streets where smoke and rubble surrounded workers and victims alike; we see exhausted, grimy faces of those who have worked nonstop for 24 hours.

Our eyes scan the sidewalks, and we spot a blue cap from a water bottle—and, over there, a plastic bag that once held a sandwich. “So?” you ask, so what? And a story unfolds of one sharing with another, sharing the horror, the profound sadness, the welling of love and care one human to another. How many unknown, unnamed turned to comfort another wandering human who just needed to hang onto someone for a while, to share a sandwich and a drink of water?

Let us not look the other way; perhaps we are not too far from sharing a simple touch with another, only a step away.

*Father, give me the vision I need to see my brothers in a new and loving way. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

# Monday

**I Corinthians 13:6b–7: “[Love] rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”**

## Love

One God

Father of all

Many Forms

Encompasses all

Heals the world.

*Father, we confess that we are often unloving. Help us to so live and love our neighbor that we may participate in encompassing all and healing the world. Amen.*

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**Romans 15:13 – “Now may the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”**

As we walk toward Christmas and all the celebrations it brings, will we be awed by the simplicity of that first night or carried away by all the trappings the season has become? Will we rejoice in family and friends being together to share time and memories, or will the ribbon and wrapping take center stage? Years ago, I recognized a transformation: I had everything I needed. There was not one thing that would add to my life or circumstances and, therefore, I started asking for world peace and selecting gifts in an entirely different manner. Keeping the spirit of this season in one’s heart all year-round is tough when surrounded by all the trappings that the marketing world thinks I must have to be a whole and happy person. The joy of this season is a simple fulfilling, awesome sense of creation and pure joy.

*Lord, open my eyes that I may see, open my ears that I may hear, open my heart to receive all the joys of this season just as you created them. Amen.*

# Tuesday

**John 20:26** – “A week later, his disciples were once again in the room and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them saying, ‘Peace be with you!’”

As we await the peace of Christmas, I think of the peace of God that I’ve experienced.

God came to me when we were very worried about our baby daughter, and I felt God’s love and deep peace. I knew he was with me, and I have kept that experience close to me all these years.

I know God’s goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of our life, and I am grateful and at peace.

*You are always with us, Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit, and we are thankful for your loving presence. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

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**Psalm 65:8** – “The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders; where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy.”

## **From an 8-year-old:**

Joy is playing  
Joy is baseball  
Joy is swimming  
Joy is a dog  
Joy is family  
Joy is being together with a friend

## **From an 80-year-old:**

Joy is in the music of the wild geese  
Joy is in a little girl with sparkly shoes  
Joy is in the magic of the first snowflakes  
Joy is in reliving memories with a friend

*Father, thank you for your wonderful blessings that bring us joy. In this season, show us the special joy of welcoming your Son into our hearts and lives. In his name. Amen.*

## Wednesday

**John 14:27 – “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid.”**

### **“Peace” . . . HUH?**

December 18. Presents to purchase and wrap, dinner to plan for a family gathering, cookies for the Christmas Pageant, and a tree to decorate. “Help!” I murmured, as the phone interrupted my roster of duties. “Hello? Uh... sure, I can help with the part at the retirement home.” Slowly, I sank into the nearest chair, feeling the heavy weight of all that I had to do.

Just then, Cassie, my four-year-old came to me with a worried look. “What is it, Honey?” “Mom, could we open the crèche now?” “Well, perhaps I could squeeze that in between shopping and supper.” “No, Mom, now, please, please.” Big brown eyes asking for some “Mom time.” “Okay, let’s get the box.”

She rushed to the stash of boxes waiting to be opened and found the one marked “crèche.” Together, we unwrapped each figurine, and the beautiful words of Luke tumbled through my mind. “Decree, Caesar, taxed, Joseph, Mary great with child, days were accomplished, manger, firstborn son, angels, shepherds, Glory to God in the Highest.” As slowly I repeated that beautiful story to Cassie, I felt the weight that I had allowed to gather slowly slip away, and once more I knew the peace that the Savior brought—his Peace.

*Father, please help us to seek the Peace you have for each of us as we look to you this season. Show us the real priorities, not allowing ourselves to become overburdened with the “business” of the holidays. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

# Thursday

**Numbers 6:26 – “The Lord turn his face unto you and give you peace.”**

Have you ever worked on a beautiful jigsaw puzzle for days, only to find at the end you were missing a piece needed to complete the picture? What did you do? Did you hunt in the normal places you would expect to find it? Was it in someone's pocket, in the wrong place in the picture, or hidden under the box? Then when you were not looking for it, did it appear in an unexpected place?

So it is with PEACE. Have you spent a lifetime collecting things and experiences, only to realize one day you are missing PEACE?

Where will you find it?

*Spirit of God, I pray today for the days I feel incomplete and know I need you to give me PEACE. Amen.*

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**Psalm 133:1 – “How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!”**

Peace

Perfect  
God

Uniting  
All

In Harmony  
Unity

Encompassing  
Diversity

*Lord, we look to you in these times of chaos to restore peace to our lands our home, and our families. May we also become peacemakers for you. Amen.*

# Friday

**Colossians 3:15 – “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”**

## **Not Connected**

Recently, we have had a few problems that were related to TV and computer function. I did what “troubleshooting” I could, but then I had to resort to calling in the Big Guns to help me out of the problem. Would you believe that in both cases, the “problem” was that the connections had become loose so that not all the information could be fed to the computer? Immediately, I was reminded of my daily relationship with my God. How often do things seem out of whack, not just right, out of sync? As soon as I am fully reunited with the main source, everything starts to work properly again. So now, when things seem “not quite right,” I am reminded to make sure my connections are fully attached.

*Father, forgive me when I try to do other things instead of making sure I have my connection with you, fully attached. Thank you in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

# Saturday

**Philippians 4:6–7 – “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”**

I first read this scripture in a church bulletin when going through a most difficult and painful time dealing with my mother’s Alzheimer’s disease. I kept it with me always, reading it often. The verses brought me much comfort and gave me a reassuring feeling that I was not alone. Six months passed, and our church—Sister Bay Moravian—had the “Drawing of the Texts” for the coming year. I reached into the basket to draw out my scripture, turned over the card, and it was the same verse from Philippians. I was very moved and felt it was a reminder to do as it read.

The following year when I again drew my text, I went near the bottom of the basket, turned over the card, and again I had chosen Philippians 4:6–7. Tears came into my eyes, for these verses had helped me so much dealing with the deaths of my mother and mother-in-law within a six-month period.

Several months passed, and I was sharing my experience with friends. Tom was going to read the scripture at his church and had no idea what he was about to read. When he looked down at the Bible, he saw he was to read Philippians 4:6–7.

*Lord, I am so grateful for your mysterious way of being present in my life. Amen.*

# Making Life with God Better

Think for a moment. What was your most favorite memory of Christmas this year? Talk or think about it.

**Luke 2:52 – “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and people.”**

These words were written about Jesus when he was 12 years old and on through his teenage years. And I have found them helpful for 40 years. Here's how: Make some changes or set some goals for the next week or for the month of January in each of four areas:

1. Jesus grew in stature. That has to do with his **body**. It could be sleeping, eating, exercising, or whatever. Write one goal.
2. Jesus grew in wisdom. That has to do with his **mind**. Or what do you do for most of the day: go to school, have a job, work at home, or in retirement? How could you do it better?
3. Jesus grew in **favor with God**. Could be pray the Lord's Prayer daily, or write a praise a day, or write a paragraph on what God means to you or whatever. Write a goal.
4. Jesus grew in **favor with others**. Could be give a compliment a day, visit an older person, send a birthday card, call a grandparent, or whatever. Write a goal.

*Dear God, thank you for the Christmas story. Please help me to do at least two of these goals before January 1<sup>st</sup>. Amen.*

*–Delmar Dahl*



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