WAXAHACHIE
FIRST
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Advent Devotional 2026

Happy Advent Church Family!



This year, we were the first house in our surrounding neighborhood to get our Christmas lights up. And before you think about it, no, we didn't just leave them up from last year. The week before our Worship Outside the Walls event, the company we used reached out to check on available dates to install for this season. Which meant, during the worship event I was leading on October 18, my phone and watch were pinging with alerts from our motion-detecting doorbell. It also meant that as soon as we took down our Halloween decorations on November 1, we turned on the Christmas lights.

Preparing our homes, Church, and other spaces for Christmas is so much more than the decorations we put up, presents we buy, or anything else that comes from the commercialized "Christmas Creep." As followers of Christ, we must take care to center ourselves to best appreciate and reflect on what Advent and Christmas are really about. They are about preparing our spirits and celebrating the birth of God with us, Emmanuel, as the infant Jesus.

This year, members of our team have collaborated to write this devotion guide for our church family. Each week focuses on one passage of scripture, and you will get to read devotionals written by different members throughout the week. My prayer is that through this guide, we will all draw closer to our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer so we can approach and celebrate this Christmas with renewed and revitalized spirits. Let us set aside the pressures and to-dos of the season for just a moment each day, and journey together through the season of Advent.

Grace and Peace,

Rev Adam Thayne

Week of Hope: Angels

Luke 1:26-33

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

*26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent
by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to
a virgin engaged to a man whose name was
Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name
was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said,
"Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."
29 But she was much perplexed by his words
and pondered what sort of greeting this might
be. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid,
Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And
now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a
son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be
great and will be called the Son of the Most
High, and the Lord God will give to him the
throne of his ancestor David. 33 He will reign over
the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom
there will be no end."*

Week of Hope: Angels

November 29

Rev. Adam Spore, Lead Pastor

For many of us, the stories about the birth of Jesus are familiar. This week's passage is no exception. Mary is visited by the angel Gabriel, who brings amazing news to all the world about her role in bringing God into the world through the birth of Jesus. Many of us may remember the line, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you," but we need to consider the experience of an angelic visit in the broader scope of the story.

Scripture portrays angels as messengers who bring news to individuals or groups. The birth narratives of Jesus are some of these moments. In most of the encounters mortals have with Angels, the visit is accompanied by some variation of the phrase, "do not be afraid." What would there be to fear of an emissary of God? Perhaps their sudden or radiant appearance would have been a shock to those who were receiving a message. But the messages themselves were many times ones that would drastically alter the direction of the lives of the recipients.

For Mary, news of her role to bring God into the world through her womb changed everything. Since we know she was betrothed, the Law was clear about what should have happened. However, the words of caution and assurance from the angel Gabriel were more than words for the moment of interaction; they were words that would remind her of God's presence with her, Joseph, her unborn child, and ultimately all the world.

Prayer: God of love and assurance, help us to hear your words of "Do not be afraid" when we enter a new chapter in life. Remind us that your love conquers fear when we put our whole trust in you. Amen.

Week of Hope: Angels

November 30

Andy Truex, Music Ministry Director

Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"

This past Sunday, we sang the beloved carol "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing," with music by Felix Mendelssohn and lyrics by Charles Wesley. As Methodists, we owe much to the Wesley brothers – John wrote the script of our denomination; Charles wrote the soundtrack. Charles composed over 6,000 hymns, and though he must have been pleased that so many were widely circulated, he did not appreciate it when people altered the lyrics.
The carol's original opening was "Hark! How all the welkin rings," welkin meaning the vault of heaven. Charles' friend, the evangelist George Whitefield, changed it. I think we can all agree the change was a good one. Sometimes, no matter how talented we are, it takes a trusted friend to let us know when we might need a little change. And the better we are at something, the harder it can be to hear a loving word of correction.

This week's theme is "Angels." In the coming days in worship, you'll hear delightful settings of scriptures about angels appearing to Elizabeth, Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. As a musician, I am grateful for the way music has aided my memorization of scripture. As Thomas Carlyle wrote, "Music is well said to be the speech of angels... It brings us near to the Infinite."

In the busyness of the season, let me ask: What are you listening to? Is it bringing you near to the divine? Are you so focused on what you do well that you are unwilling to listen to a good friend if a change is needed? Don't take offense – these questions are more for me than for anyone else.

Let's pray: *Dear God, we have so many things going on in our lives this time of year, and we are truly grateful for them. But help us to find time to pay attention to you and to listen to your direction. If change is needed in us, may we bend to your word. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

Week of Hope: Angels

December 1

Rev. Val Stewart, Associate Pastor

Are you aware of the angels among us? I believe I've encountered angels, or at least someone acting with divine inspiration. Let me tell you about a heavenly encounter I had while I was expecting my son, Tyler. I kept going into preterm labor with a condition that caused blood loss, so I stayed in the hospital for weeks before he was born.

Throughout Scripture, angels bring messages and connect our human world to the heavenly. The angel Gabriel's message to Mary must have felt unsettling. Mary was a young woman engaged to Joseph, so I wonder if she was alarmed by a stranger speaking to her without a chaperone. No wonder Gabriel had to tell her not to be afraid – that God was with her, and that she had found favor with God, even in all she would be asked to endure. Angels remind us that God favors us; in all we endure, God is with us. One night in labor and delivery, an angel appeared as a nurse's aide and stayed with me as doctors and nurses worked to stop my labor. Through the pain, the procedures, and my fear that my son would be born too soon to thrive, she comforted me. By morning, the labor pains had stopped, and I was sent back to my room. When I asked who had been with me, no one knew whom I meant, and I couldn't remember her name.

Angels are among us in all the ways God's presence comes to us through those who love us, comfort us, and care for us, and in holy ways we may not be able to explain. May the angels of our lives draw us ever closer to the thin veil between our everyday world and the unseen holiness of God.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for surrounding us with your presence. May we be more aware, in these Advent days, of your everlasting love and grace that come to us, and be ready to support others when they need holy help. In the name of our coming Savior Jesus, Amen.

Week of Hope: Angels

December 2

Rev. Adam Spore, Lead Pastor

Have you ever seen artistic renderings of what angels would look like according to Biblical explanations? If you haven't yet, pro tip: don't Google it. You won't necessarily like what you see. Personally, I've always been a little fascinated with the different depictions of angels that have been Westernized. They're pretty, majestic, winged, and, most importantly, look very anglicized. In other words, artists many times make the angels look like the people they have an affinity with. However, one lesson from my Hebrew classes has stuck with me about angels.

Mind you, this lesson did not come from anything we were actively translating. It came from our professor just allowing our curiosity to run and answering questions. One of my classmates inquired about the translation of the word כָּנָף (Kanaf). Kanaf is the word used for literal wings on birds, insects, and cherubim, but it's also the word used for the outer edge of garments, specifically for a טַלִּית (Tallit), the traditional Jewish prayer shawl. From that line of thought, we entered a moment where we pondered Angels being wrapped in prayer shawls rather than wings to demonstrate their reverence for God.

However you picture angels, we cannot ignore the fact that stories exist where they served as messengers. But after the birth of Jesus the Christ, God demonstrated a willingness to be intimately involved in the life of humanity by becoming one of us. No longer do we need someone or angels to intercede on our behalf when it comes to God. God, who is infinite in love and mercy, showed us the life intended for us as God's creation through Jesus the Christ.

Prayer: God of all things, thank you for dwelling inside each of us through your Holy Spirit. With the breath of life, alongside the angels and saints in the Church Eternal, we praise you and offer ourselves to work and build your Kingdom here and now. Amen.

Week of Hope: Angels

December 3

Kennedy Stouffer, Director of Family Ministry

When I think of angels, my mind always wanders towards our annual Christmas program. Little kids in white robes that are a bit too long, tinsel halos that never sit quite right, and glittery wings made from wire and fabric. If you have ever helped out with the Christmas program, you know it is a very big deal when a child is finally old enough to play the role of an angel. There is something so special about watching our children bring the Christmas story to life.

In this week's passage, we see the angel Gabriel appear to Mary and deliver the news that she will give birth to Jesus. We have heard this story so many times that it's easy to forget just how incredible this moment was. This was news that people had been waiting generations to hear! Imagine hearing it for the very first time. Imagine the excitement and wonder of knowing that the promised Savior was finally coming into the world.

I think this is something we can learn from our children. When they put on those angel wings and take their place on the stage for the Christmas program, they are genuinely excited to be part of the story. They aren't thinking about how many times they've heard it before. They are just thrilled to have the privilege of being part of the special story of Christmas. Sometimes, as adults, we forget to stop and appreciate just how special and exciting this part of the story really is.

This Advent, I hope we can look at the Christmas story with fresh eyes and a little more childlike wonder. The story of Jesus' birth is just as extraordinary today as it was when Gabriel first delivered the news to Mary.

Prayer: God, thank you so much for the Joy and Wonder of the Christmas story. Help us to slow down and never lose the excitement of celebrating the birth of Jesus. Thank you for the children who remind us to find joy in the little things. Amen.

Week of Hope: Angels

December 4

Lydia Sims, Communications Director

Verse 27 is Mary's debut in the Book of Luke. We know little about her history or her family before this. Joseph is the one with family ties to King David! And the fact that she is "nobody special" is not lost on her. In Luke 1:48, during "Mary's Song," she sings, "for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant." Yet Mary, this unseen girl, has been called to the holiest of tasks – carrying, birthing, and mothering the Son of God.

After the birth of Jesus, Mary is largely set aside. Her name is written 19 times in the Bible. And only three of those fall outside the birth story. Mary's story is hidden and unseen. The holiest of tasks, raising the Son of God, is unwritten. Yet I don't think any of us would say that her work was not worthy of recognition, or that her sacrifices went unnoticed.

We see in Luke 1:48 that God sees Mary. He looks at her with favor. God recognizes that he has asked this unseen person to complete the holiest of tasks without thanks from the history books. Our holy work takes place behind the scenes too: caring for our parents, tucking children in at night, adding items to the grocery list to donate to the food pantry, and bringing a meal to a friend. Our daily lives are filled with small, invisible tasks that fulfill the holy work of loving each other. But these tasks do not go unseen. Jesus says three times in Matthew, "... your Father who sees in secret will reward you." So during this time of Advent, know that, like Mary, your holy tasks are seen by the One who matters most.

Prayer: Lord, your eyes are enough. You inspire us to be good servants, to complete the holiest of tasks – caring for each other and others in need without expecting thanks or recognition. We pray that in our unseen work, like Mary, we know we are chosen by you and are in your favor. Amen.

Week of Hope: Angels

December 5

Rev. Adam Spore, Lead Pastor

At the end of the day, if your nativity scenes depict angels hovering over the scene of Christ's birth, the fact of the matter is that angels were probably surrounding the entire event. From the Annunciation to the recognition of Christ's divine kingship, the birth of God with us, Emmanuel, carried cosmic significance that resonates throughout time. The angels were uniquely tasked with bearing witness and carrying messages to all those involved with God's humble descent to demonstrate the extent of love for all creation.

I've talked with people who speak of "modern-day angels," referring specifically to people who offer the gift of presence when it's needed most. While we may not descend with divine glory, our presence can mean the world to someone who needs to hear the phrase, "do not be afraid." There are many things we could be afraid of in today's world. In fact, it feels that there is more talk of division and who to be afraid of than the voice of love, grace, and peace that God demonstrated through Jesus the Christ. In a world where so many people want to divide and cast fear, we have to be the ones to demonstrate the better way of living through the truth of the Gospel.

When we pass from this life into the next, we don't become angels; God already has enough angels within the heavenly realm. However, we can serve as modern-day angels to represent who God is as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. In a world that wants to pit us against each other on various "sides," let us proclaim the message of "Do not be afraid," which was spoken by the angels and taught by the one we follow: Jesus the Christ.

Prayer: God of all creation, help us to believe and live your message to not be afraid. In our belief, help us draw close to you, love as your Son Jesus the Christ, and live in our communities as a witness to the Gospel. Amen.

Week of Peace: Shepherds

Luke 2:8-14

The Shepherds and the Angels

8 Now in that same region there were shepherds
living in the fields, keeping watch over their
flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood
before them, and the glory of the Lord shone
around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the
angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I
am bringing you good news of great joy for all
the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of
David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.
12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child
wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a
manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the
angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising
God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he
favors!"

Week of Peace: Shepherds

December 6

Rev. Adam Spore, Lead Pastor

There are shepherds throughout the stories in our scriptures. From Moses and Myriam, David and his brothers, the image of a person who lovingly tends a flock of livestock permeates the stories of our faith. It is that very image that we attribute to Jesus the Christ, the Good Shepherd. It makes sense that the shepherds in the Nativity story received a special invitation to witness the good news of great joy for all people, which was the birth of the Messiah.

The role of the shepherd was very important. Not only did they guide their flock to places of grazing, watering, and resting, but they also identified lambs born to the flock that were without blemish and perfect for ritual sacrifice. The shepherds would take a perfect lamb, wrap it in cloth, and place it in a safe place so as to not be injured by the rest of the flock. It is this very image that they were invited to come witness: the Christ child similarly wrapped and placed in a manger. This image would not be lost on those tasked with the aforementioned responsibility. Here was a baby, the Messiah, who would grow up to journey to the cross as the ultimate and final sacrifice for the sins of all humanity.

The duality of Christ's role to both guide us as the Good Shepherd and bear the cross for us is powerful, to say the least. What was born all those years ago was God with us as Emmanuel to be both Shepherd and Lamb. Shepherd to lead God's people beside still waters and find rest. Lamb to atone for our sins. The mystery of faith calls us to pause in reverence again this year to admire the fullness of God's humility and love being born in the Christ Child.

Prayer: God of mysteries, you are God, and we are not. Help us to rest in the mysteries of faith, and in doing so, better appreciate your gift of yourself during this season. Amen.

Week of Peace: Shepherds

December 7

Andy Truex, Music Ministry Director

While shepherds watched their flocks, all seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down, and glory shone around.

Several years ago, I had the privilege of conducting a Messiah Sing-Along. With soloists, an orchestra, and dozens of enthusiastic singers, we read through the Christmas portion of Handel's masterpiece.

Early in the work, a tranquil orchestral movement evokes the shepherds in the field at night, followed by a soprano narrating Luke 2:8–13. This leads into the choir singing "Glory to God in the Highest," joined by brass and the full orchestra. It is very dramatic and effective – if everyone is ready.
In this performance, the choir was not ready. The soprano sang, "And suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying," followed by blank stares from our ad hoc chorus. There was no glory to God, peace on earth, or goodwill towards men. It was memorable, but it would have been better if the singers were ready to declare the good news.

Handel wrote the music for "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks," which we sang in worship this past Sunday. Though Handel is now considered one of history's greatest composers, he went through a period when his concerts were sparsely attended. Once, when friends told him the hall was nearly empty, Handel quipped, "Never mind; the music will sound better," noting the great acoustics of an empty hall.

We musicians want as many people there as possible. But in the music of the church, we must ask, "To whom are we singing? For whom are we playing?" Be prepared to be surprised this Advent season. And be ready to share the good news wherever you go, no matter the size of the crowd.

Let's pray: Dear God, we thank you for the story of the birth of our Savior. Although we have heard it many times, help us to be surprised at some point this Advent, finding something new in your word for our lives. And help us to share what we have found with those in need of hearing it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week of Peace: Shepherds

December 8

Rev. Val Stewart, Associate Pastor

God chose the open fields where shepherds kept their sheep to share the good news of the Messiah. God meets us where we are, just as God met the shepherds, but the angel of the Lord still had to tell them not to be afraid. These brave men and women were used to fighting off wolves and bears, yet an angel and the glory of the Lord shining around them in the night terrified them. Then they heard the news: the Messiah had been born in Bethlehem, the City of David, whose name means “House of Bread.” And the sign would be a baby lying in a manger, where animals were fed. The angel was telling the shepherds that the Messiah wasn’t born in a fancy place or to royalty, but to regular folks, for ordinary people like them. It must have been quite an experience for shepherds used to the quiet night sky, taking turns watching the sheep and sleeping.

Did the shepherds leave their flocks, or did they take them along to see Jesus? Some nativity scenes have sheep with the shepherds, and some do not. Luke says they went “with haste,” so we get the idea that Bethlehem was nearby. The rest of the story makes the shepherds the first joyful evangelists, testifying to the miracle of a Messiah who has come for all of us.

This Advent season, as we look up into the night sky and remember the glory of the Lord that shone around the shepherds, let’s be joyful evangelists like them. This season isn’t about the parties, gifts, or decorations. It’s about the joy of Jesus in our hearts and sharing our faith through service and love. May we share the shepherds’ joy with friends and strangers.

Prayer: Holy God, shine your glory on us as we remember the shepherds’ joy. May we share the joy of the season as we love and care for one another. Amen.

Week of Peace: Shepherds

December 9

Rev. Adam Spore, Lead Pastor

In all the stories of shepherds throughout Scripture, I'm captivated by the parable of the lost sheep. The parable, told by Jesus, describes the shepherd who searches for the one lost sheep while the ninety-nine are left behind. Often, what we picture from the stories is calm, as if the shepherd merely walks off into the wilderness only to find the one shortly thereafter. But what if things were a little more . . . human with the shepherd's demeanor?



I submit to you a picture I found years ago, created by artist Kevin Carden. This is my favorite depiction of the lost sheep. The sheep doesn't appear to know it is lost, but the shepherd in the background is clearly running without abandon toward the precious one. This, my friends, is how Christ searches us out whenever we feel like the lost one.

When we feel lost, Christ is actively searching for us. Many times, all we need to do is turn around and see Christ actively running toward us, a precious member of the flock. This is the one born to us as our Messiah, Rabbi, our Good Shepherd.

Prayer: Lord of the flock, help us to hear your footsteps as you search for us when we feel lost. Remind us that you desire for us to be together with your flock to be seen, loved, and cared for. Amen.

Week of Peace: Shepherds

December 10

Kennedy Stouffer, Director of Family Ministry

One of my favorite Christmas carols is “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear.” It paints a beautiful picture of the night Jesus was born. I think that it shows a contrast between the beautiful sights and sounds of the angel choir and the peaceful stillness of the ordinary night it happened on. It makes me curious about the shepherds' experience on this night.

For them, this was just another normal evening. They had probably done it hundreds of times before. They were in the dark, with moonlight shining on them as they kept their flocks safe and calm. They were definitely not expecting angels to appear or to hear news that would change the world. They were just going about their everyday lives when God interrupted their night with extraordinary news.

I think that is something we can remind ourselves of. So much of life happens in the unexpected and ordinary moments. We do our daily routines like running errands, going to work, and taking care of our loved ones. It is easy to think that special moments need a special place to happen, like a church or a planned event. The shepherds remind us that God is present in our everyday lives, too.

During the holidays, we try to make everything perfect and special. We try to set up the perfect aesthetic and environment to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Celebrating and making things special is in no way bad; it is a time of celebration, but I hope we don't overlook the ordinary moments along the way. We never know when God might use a normal day, a regular conversation, or an ordinary moment to remind us of his presence.

Prayer: Gracious and loving Father, help us recognize you in every moment of our days. When our lives may feel ordinary, please remind us that you are still at work. Give us eyes to recognize your goodness in all we do. Amen.

Week of Peace: Shepherds

December 11

Lydia Sims, Communications Director

At the time of Jesus' birth, there were laws around religious purity. Shepherds' duties, by nature, would have kept them from following these laws strictly. For example, just keeping the Sabbath would have been difficult; the flocks would need water, protection, and care every day of the week. For these reasons, shepherds likely lived on the edges of religious life and may not have followed the law as rigidly as people in other professions. But this makes the angels' visit to the shepherds that much more out of the ordinary. Yet we know that God has done this before! I mentioned last week that Mary, a mostly unknown figure of history, was seen by God. In Mary's song (Luke 1:52), she sings, "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly."

In our scripture for this week, we hear an angel say to the shepherds, "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people." Once again, an angel is bringing a message of great importance to the lowliest of people. And what better way to lift up the lowly than to deliver to them the message of the birth of a king? As you read this scripture, what character do you play? Are you a lowly shepherd receiving the good news? Or are you the angel delivering a message to those who need to hear? I think we are all both at different times. Sometimes we relate to the shepherds, fearful in the night, comforted in the dark with news of joy. Other times we can be an angel of mercy, delivering a much-needed message of comfort to those who are suffering alone in the darkness.

Prayer: Lord, help us, your lowly servants, to find those moments in our lives when we can both receive your message of love and share it with others. Help us to remember that no matter how small we feel, we all have BIG work to do. Amen.

Week of Peace: Shepherds

December 12

Rev. Adam Spore, Lead Pastor

We had a nativity scene in our front yard when I was growing up. This was a simple nativity scene with plywood depictions of Mary holding Jesus, Joseph, a few shepherds, and sheep. It was a tradition to put it out every year and it seemed to always be on the coldest, windiest, rainiest day of the year. One year, after I started becoming more aware of variations in nativity scenes, I remember asking my dad why the Wise Men weren't part of our outdoor scene. His reply was, "Well, the shepherds got an invitation; the Wise Men just showed up."

The invitation to the Shepherds to witness the birth of Christ is one that we have to stop and recognize for what it was. God invited the humblest of people to come witness God's humble entry into the world. No fanfare, no palaces or finery. Unwashed, likely unkempt sheep herders who probably smelled like the animals they tended. That's who got the invitation to witness the birth of Christ! What an honor that was for the Shepherds, but also what a lesson for us. God's entry into the world demonstrated the grassroots style of transformation that Christ would teach and profess. Start with those at the bottom, and move your way up rather than the other way around.

The ministry of Jesus the Christ took on the role of a servant. Like the shepherds, Jesus was willing to take on the undesired tasks. He fed thousands, cured the sick, and taught us that the greatest way we can care for others is to wash some feet. Of course God would invite people who understood humility to come and witness the humble entry of Emmanuel to this world.

Prayer: God of humility, help us to remember that you gave up your "top-down" approach to our relationship and came to be among us in Christ Jesus. Help us follow your example to serve and love like Christ. Amen.

Week of Joy: Wise Men

Matthew 2:1-6

The Visit of the Magi

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born
in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east
came to Jerusalem, 2 asking, “Where is the child
who has been born king of the Jews? For we
observed his star in the east and have come to
pay him homage.” 3 When King Herod heard
this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with
him, 4 and calling together all the chief priests
and scribes of the people, he inquired of them
where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They told
him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been
written by the prophet:

6 ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of
Judah,
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.’ ”

Week of Joy: Wise Men

December 13

Rev. Adam Spore, Lead Pastor

One key part of the Nativity story is the visit of the Magi. Depending on your background, they could be called Wise Men, Magi, Star Gazers, and probably others based on regional and cultural contexts. No matter what name they are given, these were people who looked to the heavens and noticed a star that rose, signifying a new king being born to the Jewish people. That star guided them into Jerusalem, where they discovered the new king was not born in the palace, but in Bethlehem.

Sometimes I like to place myself in the stories of our faith. How would I have reacted if these Magi showed up saying they knew a child had been born? For anyone who had not welcomed a child into their family, this would have been a confusing revelation. For Herod, however, the news brought fear. Fear of being overthrown. Fear of losing power. Fear that drove him to do unspeakable things to try to thwart what God was doing through the birth of the one promised to the Jewish people.

The very birth of Christ started the events that God set in motion to turn the whole world upside down. The poor would be declared Blessed. The last would become the first. The humble would lead. And surprisingly, Jesus would elevate a child as the example of how we are to welcome the Kingdom of God. Christ's birth changed the status quo and challenged preconceptions about how the world should work. It was a momentous event that still offers transforming power to this day when we slow down and remember that it gave us an example through God's own self about how to live and serve in God's Kingdom.

Prayer: God who orders your Kingdom, help us to allow your transforming grace to challenge what we think we know about the world. Empower us with your Spirit to continue to build your Kingdom here and now. Amen.

Week of Joy: Wise Men

December 14

Andy Truex, Music Ministry Director

What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd,
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part; yet what I can, I give him:
give my heart.

A few weeks ago, Pastor Adam asked a pointed question in a sermon: do we reflect Christ when we are driving? My mind went back to a childhood toy – a black Corvette that shot out orange circular saw blades. It was an awesome gift! At times I wished I had that Corvette in real life. Not now, of course; but in the past, when I was lost in sin.

I also remember a movie toast: "Champagne for my real friends, and real pain for my sham friends." At times I wished I had come up with those words. Not now, of course; but in the past, when I was lost in sin. Some things the worldly parts of us encourage, the spiritual parts discourage.
This past Sunday we sang "In the Bleak Midwinter," with beautiful words by Christina Rossetti that invoke the spirit of giving. The Magi brought gifts for the Christ child. If you were to meet him, what would you bring?

If we are intentional, we always have the gift of reflecting Christ with us. We can reflect Christ when we are shopping, attending a concert, watching a game with friends, or yes, even while driving or proposing a toast.
In the closing verse of "In the Bleak Midwinter," Rossetti concludes that the gift she will give Jesus is her heart. If we turn our hearts over to Jesus, we can reflect Christ. You may have finished your Christmas shopping, but there is one more gift to bring to whatever is on today's schedule. Don't show up empty-handed.

Let's pray: Dear God, we thank you for sending us your Son, and we thank you that your Son does not give as the world gives. Help us to be motivated inwardly to reflect Christ outwardly through what we give, say, and do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week of Joy: Wise Men

December 15

Rev. Val Stewart, Associate Pastor

The Magi are mysterious figures in the story of Jesus' birth. They came from a faraway place and set out without even knowing their destination. That is hard to imagine in a world of Google Maps updating our ETA every moment. They faithfully followed a star on a difficult journey to a new king, but they didn't know where they were going or when they'd arrive. They probably had some deep conversations along the way, and it must have been a long, hard journey to get to Jesus.

There have been times in my life when I couldn't see where a journey was leading or how it might end. I don't think I'm the only one who has gone through seasons like that, without seeing the part Jesus was playing in my journey.

The Magi must have wondered how many days and weeks were left, and how much time and effort it would take to get there. Like them, you and I can't see what the next day or week will bring. We have hope and faith that we'll get there, but we can't know where our relationships and callings will take us. Still, we carry on as they did.

What gets me every time I think about the Magi's journey is that they had no idea where they were going until they arrived at Jesus' home. They followed the star, and that was enough. So often in our lives, we don't need to see the destination or know when we'll get there to know the way to Christ. We just have to follow, and following will take us on our own holy journey to exactly where we need to go.

Prayer: God of all people, places, and times, you lead us each day with your love and light shining on all of us. Help us to notice all the ways you guide us through the journeys of our lives. In your holy love we pray, Amen.

Week of Joy: Wise Men

December 16

Rev. Adam Spore, Lead Pastor

In my home church of Whitesboro, we had a tradition when I was in upper elementary. It was created by my father and put on by the youth at the time, but we would put on a “living nativity” outside the church building. Dad made a recording of him reading portions of the Nativity story interspersed with musical settings, and each person or group would emerge from our fellowship space to go stand in the cold December air. While we would take turns with the various roles, the one role I never really enjoyed was that of the Magi. As Magi, we had to keep our hands visible while holding out the gifts for the Christ child, and the cold December air could really numb your fingers fast when you’re standing still.

The gifts we held in my youth were nothing more than spray-painted boxes and ornamental jars; facsimiles of what the Magi historically brought. But the three items given to the Christ child were more than symbolic offerings for a King; they were a foreshadowing of sorts of the life and death of the Messiah. Gold represented the earthly kingship of Jesus, but we know his Kingdom extends well beyond this mortal plane. Frankincense represented the divinity of Jesus, often burned in the temple as an offering to God. And Myrrh represented the death of Jesus, commonly used to embalm bodies before burial.

The author of Matthew took careful literary steps to foreshadow and elaborate on the story of Jesus the Christ. In this account of Christ’s birth, we can see the fullness of Christ’s reign on display from the Magi who traveled from outside Jerusalem to pay homage to the Christ child.

Prayer: God of all knowing, help us to remember the fullness of the birth, life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ this season. The Manger and the Cross are intertwined in our faith, so help us approach this Christmas with reverence. Amen.

Week of Joy: Wise Men

December 17

Kennedy Stouffer, Director of Family Ministry

My previous church, Ovilla UMC, had a beautiful nativity set that would sit on the altar. Each week during Advent, we would add another piece leading up to Christmas Day. It was time to add the Magi, and for some reason, they were missing! We searched all week for them, looking in every bin and cabinet.

When I read the story of the Magi in Matthew, I can't help but remember that frantic week in Ovilla. The Magi weren't sure exactly where Jesus was. They followed the star as they searched for him. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they began asking where they could find the newborn King. Their search did not stop until they found Jesus.

We were so excited when we finally found the missing Magi pieces. After searching for them, it was such a relief to finally have them back where they belonged. I imagine the Magi must have felt something similar when they finally found Jesus. They had traveled so far and searched for the child they had heard about. Think about what it must have been like to finally find the one they had traveled so far to see.

The Magi could have given up when they didn't find Jesus right away, but they kept looking. I imagine how excited they must have been when they finally found him after such a long journey. I hope we never stop looking for Jesus in our own lives. There is always a reason to keep seeking him and to remember just how incredible it is that God sent his Son into the world.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the Magi and for the reminder of how important it is to seek out Jesus. Give us curious hearts and a desire to never stop asking questions or growing closer to you. Amen.

Week of Joy: Wise Men

December 18

Lydia Sims, Communications Director

In week one, the knowledge of Jesus' upcoming birth was a circle of one. We read about Mary, receiving news of her pregnancy and its importance from an angel. We also know that Mary was an insider, a devout woman of her faith. In week two, the circle widens. The news of Jesus' birth travels to the shepherds, people living on the edge of religious life. Now, in our scripture for week three, the news travels to foreigners outside the faith entirely.

In each case, God brings the news in a way that the group would understand. For Mary, it was an intimate encounter with an angel; for the shepherds, a host of angels praised God before them in the night sky. Both were comforted as the angels spoke, "Do not be afraid." The Magi were outsiders who practiced a different faith and were known for studying the stars. To them, God sent "a star in the east" to follow. For each encounter, God met them where they were. It was God's intention that the news of his Son's birth spread not only throughout the land of Israel but throughout the world. In Acts 1:8, Jesus says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." God intends the circle to grow and knows how to communicate his love in ways that people understand. In what ways do you grow God's circle? Do you ever find yourself drawing the circle smaller than God does? The season of Advent provides us with such a beautiful story to tell; let's take advantage of this opportunity to spread the good news.

Prayer: Lord, in our daily lives, let us continue to grow your circle. Let us use methods to spread your message in a way that people will hear and understand. Help us not to close our lives to others, but to continue to grow your Kingdom. Amen.

Week of Joy: Wise Men

December 19

Rev. Adam Spore, Lead Pastor

The journey toward Christmas is almost complete, but we have our final week of preparation remaining. Before we allow this week to end, let us take a moment to better appreciate the presence of the Magi in Matthew's Gospel account.

Matthew's account was written for the Matthean community, which largely consisted of Jewish Christians. These were people whose faith began in the Abrahamic traditions and the Temple, and were now trying to make sense of faith in light of the revelation of Jesus the Christ. The traditions held pointed to the Messiah, the one who was promised to come and lead God's people. As such, this was a tradition where you belonged to God's people if you could literally trace your lineage all the way back to Abraham via the twelve tribes of Israel. What business did the Magi have, as outsiders, coming to recognize the birth of a new King?

Christ's birth ushered in a redefinition of what "Kingdom" looked like. Before, kingdoms were defined by rulers, borders, and fealty. With the birth of Christ, as demonstrated by the Magi seeing and recognizing his Kingship, we see how God was beginning to wipe away any sense of borders when it comes to God's Kingdom. Furthermore, God's Kingdom is one where you don't have to be born into a specific lineage; you just have to recognize the gift of Christ as the King of all creation.

Prayer: God of all creation, help us to open our minds to see your Kingdom through your eyes. May we not see division defined by human labels, but instead allow your spirit to connect us with brothers and sisters in our midst. Amen.

Week of Love: The Holy Family
Matthew 1:18-23

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

*18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this
way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to
Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found
to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband
Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to
expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her
quietly. 20 But just when he had resolved to do this, an
angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and
said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take
Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is
from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are
to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from
their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what had been
spoken by the Lord through the prophet:*

*23 "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give
birth to a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"*

which means, "God is with us."

Week of Love: The Holy Family

December 20

Rev. Adam Spore, Lead Pastor

Matthew's Gospel account begins with a Genealogical account of Joseph's heritage all the way back to King David. Though not royalty himself, Joseph is part of the line and lineage of the prophesied one to come and lead God's people. As such, his part of the Holy Family's story is directly tied to the birth of Jesus being the fulfilment of prophecy and God's deliverance of all of God's people through the birth of the Messiah.

Some of my extended family lives out in Missouri. A story I heard growing up was about a cousin who, when much younger, was at church with his parents. They had a practice of giving him money for the time of offering, telling him that he was making sure to give money to "Jesus." One of these times, he dutifully obliged in the practice of offering, but after they finished services, he posed a question to his parents. While returning home, he asked, "Do we know if Jesus is sharing the money with Mary and Joe?" Even at a young age, he understood that Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were a family, a unit, a package deal.

Jesus is clearly the main character in the stories of the Gospel accounts, but Jesus was brought into this world and raised by his earthly parents, Mary and Joseph. While Matthew and Luke's accounts isolate one parent in the story of Christ's birth, the other always has a mention. This year, as we celebrate the birth of Christ, may we also give thanks for those who raised him alongside God, who brought Christ to our world through the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: God of all people, help us to remember those who brought Christ into this world so that we may learn from his teachings, follow in his footsteps, and marvel at the mystery of faith. Amen.

Week of Love: The Holy Family
December 21

Andy Truex, Music Ministry Director

Joseph dearest, Joseph mine, help me cradle the child divine;
God reward thee, and all that's thine in paradise, so prays the mother Mary.
He came among us at Christmastime, at Christmastime, in Bethlehem;
... Lo, he comes, and loves, and saves, and frees us!

Today, when people feel wronged, far too many want to "go public" and happily expose others to "public disgrace." In Matthew 1, when Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant, he planned to divorce her quietly so as not to expose her to public disgrace. His reaction shows his care for her, protecting her from how society would have treated an unwed, pregnant woman. He showed not rage, but wisdom and tenderness. Then an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, revealing God's plan for the son to be.

This past Sunday, we sang "Joseph Dearest, Joseph Mine." In the verses, we overhear a conversation between Mary and Joseph; in the refrains, we are invited into the nativity story to celebrate the infant Jesus.
So many favorite holiday movies draw humor from the horrible ways we treat our families: big secrets exposed, disappointments, and life plans upended. We relate because we have seen it in our own lives. It can be difficult to carve out moments like the one in this carol.

This week's theme is the Holy Family, and the Advent wreath candle is Love. If you are fortunate to be with family this week, may your treatment of one another reflect the picture painted in this carol: parents helping one another, caring for their child, and celebrating the future he brings. If stress is high, if things didn't work out as planned, if a major pivot was forced upon you, remember that Jesus, the one who loves and saves and frees us, is among us.

Let's pray: Dear God, we understand that we may not know what the future holds. But we thank you for the gift of the present moment. Help us to enjoy one another's company and to appreciate the love between family and friends. In life's uncertainties, may we always remember that you are with us. Thank you for loving us, saving us, and freeing us. Amen.

Week of Love: The Holy Family

December 22

Rev. Val Stewart, Associate Pastor



One Christmas, my son surprised me with a hand-carved nativity of the Holy Family. It's carved from a tree in the Hill Country, and the pieces are sanded down to fit inside the wooden manger like a perfect puzzle. The artist must have had great precision and skill to bring this work of art together. He or she may have had special tools, but every time I look at this piece, it reminds me of the breadth, length, height, and depth of God's love for us (Ephesians 3:18), and of all the intimate and intricate details that had to come together for Emmanuel, God with us, to come.

Think of all the pieces: the angels who brought the news to the shepherds, the star that later led the Magi to the family, and Mary's faith in becoming the mother of God's Son, even before God revealed to Joseph the source of her pregnancy and his role as Jesus' earthly father. All these pieces of love, service, generosity, and hope had to be fitted together in each person and event to make this incredible miracle possible.

This little carved manger stays on the hutch in my kitchen, so I see it every day. It reminds me that God's love has carved out a place for all of us to be included. The miracle of Emmanuel, God with us, shouldn't be celebrated only during this season, but all year. God is present with us through his Son, Jesus Christ, in all the times of our lives. The miracle of his birth powers the hope, peace, joy, and love of this season, and it carries on and on...

Prayer: Loving God, we thank you for the light and love of the Holy Family, who remind us of your presence with us. May these days leading up to Christmas Eve be a sacred time of preparation for the coming again of Emmanuel. Amen.

Week of Love: The Holy Family

December 23

Kennedy Stouffer, Director of Family Ministry

Glen Lake Camp is such a special place to me and to many others in our church. I get the privilege of going multiple times a year with our kids and youth. Over the years, I've heard many lessons directed toward kids, and usually it's a story I've heard before. This fall at Bible camp, I heard a new perspective on Joseph and his role in the story of Jesus' birth. We talked about how we know so much about Mary and her part in Jesus' story, but Joseph doesn't always get much attention. When we picture the nativity, he's usually standing quietly beside Mary and the baby. We don't always stop to think about what exactly it meant for him to be there.

Imagine being Joseph. He was engaged to Mary, and then he found out she was expecting a child. I'm sure he had plenty of questions and fears. He could have walked away, but when the angel appeared and told him about God's plan, Joseph chose to stay and trust God. His life probably wasn't going to look the way he had planned, but he stayed. We don't have any spoken words from Joseph in this scripture, but his actions speak volumes. Following God doesn't always mean doing something big or noticeable. Sometimes it's simply showing up when someone needs you, standing by someone when things get difficult, and trusting God when you don't know what comes next.

Tomorrow is Christmas Eve, and many of us will hear the story of Jesus' birth again. I hope that when you hear the familiar story or see a nativity scene, you'll think a little more about Joseph. I know I will.

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for the gift of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. They trusted you even when they were unsure of what was ahead. Help us to trust in you at all times as well. Amen.

Week of Love: The Holy Family

December 24

Rev. Adam Spore, Lead Pastor

On this Christmas Eve, we will gather with our church family to observe Christ's birth with a service of Lessons and Carols. This is a tradition that predates any of us, although the format has changed slightly over the years. In between each of the readings of the story of the birth of Christ, we will have music that enhances the theology of the story. At the end, we will light our candles as a sign of carrying the light of Christ within each of us out into the world.

I remember helping my family pass the light of Christ from a very young age. At the conclusion of the service, we would receive the light from my father, who lit his candle from the Christ Candle in the center of the Advent Wreath. One by one, we would walk down the aisle and pass the light on to the person sitting at the end of the pews, walking in the dim light of our own candles. There was always a sense of majesty and beauty as the dark space began to fill with light as the single flame became many. Once each candle was lit, we would gaze out over the illuminated faces as each person held the light of Christ close to themselves as we sang Silent Night.

This tradition is one that is shared among Christians around the world. Even though they worship in different spaces, languages, and customs, each person will hold the light of Christ aloft. It is that very light that dwells in each of us, compelling us forward to ensure that we do not hold the light just for ourselves. Through the light of Christ, we can illuminate the dark places of this world by serving as the hands, feet, heart, and voice of the one whose birth we celebrate this day.

Prayer: Light of the world, we gather to celebrate the birth of Christ, who came to show us the ways that lead to life. Help us witness the beauty made manifest by sharing the light of Christ with those around us, and take that example to guide our every day. Amen.

Christmas Day: The Christ Child
Luke 2:1-32

The Birth of Jesus

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world
should be registered. 2 *This was the first registration and was taken while*
Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 *All went to their own towns to be*
registered. 4 *Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to*
Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended
from the house and family of David. 5 *He went to be registered with Mary,*
to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 *While they*
were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 *And she gave birth*
to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a
manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

The Shepherds and the Angels

8 *Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields,*
keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 *Then an angel of the Lord stood*
before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were
terrified. 10 *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I am*
bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 *to you is born this*
day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 *This will be*
a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in
a manger." 13 *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the*
heavenly host, praising God and saying,

14 *"Glory to God in the highest heaven,*
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

15 *When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds*
said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that
has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."

Christmas Day: The Christ Child
Luke 2:1-32

*16 So they went with haste and found Mary and
Joseph and the child lying in the manger. 17 When
they saw this, they made known what had been told
them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the
shepherds told them, 19 and Mary treasured all these words and pondered
them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God
for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.*

Jesus Is Named

*21 When the eighth day came, it was time to circumcise the child, and he
was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in
the womb.*

Jesus Is Presented in the Temple

*22 When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses,
they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is
written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as
holy to the Lord"), 24 and they offered a sacrifice according to what is
stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."
25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man
was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel,
and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the
Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's
Messiah. 27 Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple, and when
the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary
under the law, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,*

*29 "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word,
30 for my eyes have seen your salvation,
31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
32 a light for revelation to the gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel."*

Christmas Day: The Christ Child
December 25

Rev. Adam Spore, Lead Pastor

Merry Christmas, church family! Each of us is in our own spaces, celebrating in our own ways this Christmas Day. While some of us are carrying on with long-standing traditions, let us take a moment to remember those for whom Christmas is a little, or a lot, different this year. We have members of our church family, community, and world who are experiencing Christmas for the first time after the loss of a friend or loved one. While this does elicit our human grief, may we also have a moment of Hope and Peace for the truth we have through Christ.

Christ's birth into this world was a beautiful gift of love and humility from God our Creator. Eternally begotten as a member of the Trinity, this is God with us, Emmanuel, who came to dwell among us and put on flesh. This was not some supernatural occurrence of a deity coming fully formed to rule over people. No, it was a gesture of deep trust and humility to be born into this world as a vulnerable infant, wholly dependent on the love of his earthly parents to provide for and raise him. While he would grow up to lead us as the Messiah, the Christ Child was just like each of us. This gift of experience and solidarity from the one through whom all things came into being is beautiful, humbling, and demonstrates God's commitment and desire to be with God's creation, us. It is that very truth that we hold on to; that God embraces and welcomes us into life eternal when our mortal lives come to an end. That peace which passes all understanding is the knowledge that God's love descended and was made manifest in the real birth of Christ, so we would know God's desire to love and care for us as our divine parent.

Prayer: Lord, for all of our friends and family who are experiencing loss this year, grant them your peace that passes all understanding. While we celebrate the birth of Christ, help us to remain rooted in the truth of your presence with us as Emmanuel. Amen.

Advent Dates

- November 29: First Sunday of Advent
- December 5, 11:00 am: Women's Christmas Brunch
- December 6: Christmas in Pajamas
- December 13: Big Holiday Music Sunday
- December 20, 5:00 pm: First Kids Christmas Program
- December 24 @ 5:00 & 7:00 pm: Christmas Eve Service
- December 25, 11:30 am – 1:00 pm: Community Christmas Lunch
- December 26, 11:00 am – 1:00 pm: Pop-Up Food Pantry
- December 27, 11:00 am: Combined Worship

www.fumcwaxahachie.org/christmas

WAYS TO SERVE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

- Pack food boxes
- Assist clients with carrying items
- Load food boxes into cars
- All ages welcome

December 26th

1208 Ferris Ave,
Waxahachie, TX 75165

POP-UP FOOD PANTRY

Volunteer Hours:
10:00 am - 1:30 pm

Food Distribution:
11:00 am - 1:00 pm

WAXAHACHIE FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Community Christmas Luncheon

WAXAHACHIE FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

December 25th from 11:30-1:00

FREE meals available for dine-in, pick-up, or delivery. To request a meal, sign up using the QR code below, or call (972) 937-4400.
You can also sign up to work as a volunteer during lunch or prep during the days before.

VOLUNTEER

REQUEST A MEAL

ANGEL TREE

Take an ornament from the tree to purchase items benefiting the children of Ellis County



Digital Advent Devotional
www.fumcwaxahachie.org