

# *Personal Advent*

The Keezletown United Methodist Church  
2018 Advent Devotional

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### Abbreviations

KJV	King James Version of the Holy Bible
NIV	New International Version of the Holy Bible
NKJV	New King James Version of the Holy Bible
NLT	New Living Translation of the Holy Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible

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## Introduction

During the season of Advent that comes before Christmas, many Christians take time to prepare for the coming of God in Jesus Christ. Christians remember during this time how Jesus first came and look forward to Christ's return. We also remember during Advent that Jesus comes even today into our lives. It is my prayer that using this devotional will help you to have your very own experience of Jesus coming into your life this Advent.

The devotional uses an alternating rhythm so each day is not the same.

There will be a pattern for days when someone from Keezletown United Methodist Church has written about a time Jesus came into their life and there are accompanying Bible readings and prayers for those days. I would encourage you on those days to take the time to read the scriptures and pray the prayers. Don't just read the prayers, pray them. Don't just skim the Bible passage, read it, let it dwell in you, think about it, invite God to speak to you through the words of the Bible. For each of these days there is space to write your observations, thoughts, prayers, doodles, or questions for reflection. It is an opportunity to slow down and consider how the devotion, scripture, or prayer for that day has affected you. You may write in this booklet or you may wish to record your responses in a journal.

The second kind of days you will find in this devotional are designed for you to try a spiritual discipline. These days include ways of prayer, scripture engagement, and challenges that Christians have found are regular ways we can receive the grace of God. Some of these days might contain spiritual practices that are new to you. I would encourage you to try them out for that day as a way to invite Jesus into your life.

May Jesus Christ come to you this Advent and fill you with the hope, peace, joy, and love of God.

Joel Robinette

First Sunday of Advent  
December 2, 2018

### Bible Reading

Isaiah 40:31 reads: “but those who wait upon the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (NIV).

### “Wait Upon the Lord”

As we ponder the season of Advent and the hope of Jesus' second coming, we can also be renewed. We can soar like eagles. The eagle needs to leave the safety of his nest and as he jumps out he just spreads his wings and the air currents take care of the rest. His tail feathers steer him. As it has been said before, we need to let go and let God. Colossians 3:15-16 says, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (NIV).

### Prayer

As we wait for your return, renew us in body and spirit. Amen.

Mac Coffman

Write your observations, thoughts, prayers, doodles, or questions related to the scripture, devotion, or prayer for today.

Monday, December 3, 2018

“Dear Jesus”

Yesterday Mac Coffman reminded us how Isaiah encouraged the people of God to “wait upon the Lord.” This season of Advent is a time of waiting for Jesus to come. As a way to wait today, write a letter to Jesus.

Write about what you are waiting for or needing Jesus to do in your life. Try to write at least one thing you hope God would bring or do in your life. Describe to Jesus why that is important in your life, or what the struggle is you face, or what you hope for.

Share with Jesus your emotions at this time whether they be frustration, doubt, anticipation, joy or another feeling about waiting on God. Be honest with Jesus with what you think. It could lead to praising God, reflecting on how Jesus or faith is new to you, or even writing about anger or disappointment you feel toward God.

Don’t forget to ask Jesus questions. What is it you want to know about Jesus, faith, justice or something else? Include your questions in your letter.

After writing your letter, share it with someone. Read it to them. Waiting on Jesus is often best done with other people. Also, the Spirit of God often speaks through people God has put into our lives. After sharing your letter with someone, invite that person to be in prayer for you until Christmas Day about what you wrote to Jesus.

Save your “Dear Jesus” letter for Christmas Day.

Tuesday, December 4, 2018

Bible Reading

Luke 2:12

“Open Your Heart’s Doors to Christ”

Christmas—more stress! There shouldn’t be, if your heart is right with God and if your priority is His birth. But we don’t let it be first, do we? We let cards, and parties, and gifts, and meals, and gifts, and programs, and gifts, and all the material stuff get in our way. How soon we forget the feelings of Christmas: cuddled in your spouse’s arms, having a child with their arms around your neck, drinking hot cocoa and eating cookies, listening to the sounds of old familiar Christmas songs, letting memories flow like wine, a warm home and your favorite blanket. Oh we can watch the Hallmark shows and get warm fuzzies or we can watch the Grinch, the Charlie Brown Christmas, Frosty, Rudolph, Elf, and get a few laughs. But the warmth we really need must be felt in our hearts, as we take the time, make the effort, open our heart’s door, and kneel before that manger filled with the Son of God, and accept the only love that will see us thru life, death, and eternity.

Prayer

Father, may we open the doors of heart wide this year and let you in again to feel the eternal joy of the birth of our Savior. May we kneel at His manger and see His cross, and feel the love. In His holy name. Amen.

Diana Davis

Write your observations, thoughts, prayers, doodles, or questions related to the scripture, devotion, or prayer for today.

Wednesday, December 5, 2018

“Opening Your Heart with Mary”

Mary magnified the Lord with her life, her soul, her heart and her song is known as the *Magnificat*. Diana Davis encouraged us to open our heart’s door wide to God. That is just what Mary did. If you are unfamiliar with her story go ahead and read it in the Bible in Luke 1:26-56.

As a way to open your heart wide to God today, read the Bible passage Luke 1:46-55, which is that song of Mary magnifying God. Become familiar with what she said. Read it a second time aloud and imagine Mary saying those words and what they meant to her. Read it a third time, but this time try making it your prayer. Take your time, linger over a meaningful phrase and repeat it or pray it slowly.

Now, write down that passage of Luke 1:46-55 in your own words. Follow Mary’s example and open your life to God by paraphrasing the passage with what Mary’s words mean to you. After you have written your own version of Mary’s song, pray it, and magnify the Lord.

Thursday, December 6, 2018

### “Life Struggles”

Why does life have so many struggles?

In March of 1992, only six months before Scott and I were to be married, my dad died of a massive heart attack. Then, in 1996, only four years after my dad died, my mom had a stroke. Things didn't get any easier over the next several years, but it was like riding on a roller coaster so I needed to hold on for the ride! I had three miscarriages, two successful pregnancies, and many other challenges that life continued to throw at me. I never let go of God because I knew He was the one helping to hold me together.

I have now found a new way that seems to draw me closer to Him and helps me through the struggles that I face each day. Over the past four years, I have been a part of several Emmaus teams. I enjoy the music, fun, and fellowship that I experience with many friends that I have met over the years. We laugh, we cry, we sing, we encourage each other. In October, I had the best Emmaus mountaintop experience, one that I almost missed because I felt that the stress that I was currently experiencing was going to hold me back.

So what do I need to remember with my current struggles? If I don't take care of myself physically, mentally, and spiritually, then I won't be any good to those that I love. We read in Matthew 6:33 that we are to put God first in our life, “and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern” (NLT).

Bible Reading  
Matthew 6:25-34

### Prayer

Father God, thank you for walking with me each and every day. Thank you for the many Shenandoah Valley Emmaus Community friends that are a part of my life. Amen.

Michele Dodrill

Write your observations, thoughts, prayers, doodles, or questions related to the scripture, devotion, or prayer for today.

Friday, December 7, 2018

“Worship Christ with Others”

Michele Dodrill wrote yesterday about the need for caring for her soul in the gifts of Christian retreat and community. Sunday is coming soon and is a time many Christians take for rest, taking a break from everyday patterns, making time for worship, and enjoying Christian community and fellowship. Make plans today for a time to worship God with others this Sunday or another time in the coming week. Find the place you will go, the time of a service or gathering, plan how you will get there, guard that time and commit it to God. Tell someone what your plans are and ask them to keep you accountable or even to join you in going to a time of Christian worship.

If you are able, come on over to Keezletown UMC. There will be Sunday school at 10 AM (we gather a little before in the sanctuary at 9:45) and a worship service at 11 AM.

Saturday, December 8, 2018

Bible Reading  
Luke 1:5-25, 57-66

“The Coming of Jesus”

At age 75, my grandmother, Snookie, experienced a massive stroke in September and was immediately sent to the University of Virginia hospital where she remained 22 days. Although small in stature, she was a vibrant, strong, and sturdy matriarchal FORCE to be reckoned with. She was a spitfire. She had still been cleaning (on her knees scrubbing floors) for other people! She was still active in church and helped with all the meals! She and her four widow-lady friends kept the telephone lines hot on Saturdays planning where they would go for supper that evening and they always ended up at the mall to “people watch.” Her stroke hit us really hard. She pulled through and spent months in rehab until June when we brought her home. She required supervision for cooking, laundry, driving her to the grocery store, and to get her hair “fixed” each week by her dear friend, Charlotte Coffman.

Four years later, she experienced another large stroke and needed care in a nursing home. She spent the next nine years there, while an average nursing home stay was two years at that time. After three years, due to continuing mini-strokes, she could no longer talk or recognize us. We did not understand why God was keeping her here through the next six years. The nurse said she had a strong heart muscle from all the years of hard work.

One day in May, I received a telephone call. She had pneumonia. When I visited that day she *recognized* me. I immediately called my parents! She *recognized* them, too. We could tell by the way her eyes sparkled when we walked into the room and how she would follow the conversation with her eyes. She gazed and gazed at my Daddy, her only child. It made no sense; what a blessing! I visited nearly every day and talked and shared what was going on with family members and Keezletown friends. I read some of her favorite scripture and sang some of her favorite hymns. She lived six weeks.

Jesus came and blessed us during those last weeks of her life! He allowed her to know us again, and we saw a glimmer of her former self. What a blessing after all those years!

Jesus came and continues to come if only we recognize Him.

### Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you for the all the ways you bring grace and hope. Help me to recognize today the ways you are working in the lives of people around me, in my community, and in my life. Amen.

Tanya Dawn Eppard

Write your observations, thoughts, prayers, doodles, or questions related to the scripture, devotion, or prayer for today.

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent  
December 9, 2018

### “Visit the Sick”

In yesterday’s devotion, Tanya Dawn Eppard visited her grandmother Snookie because of pneumonia news. Tanya had gone to visit the sick but found a surprising gift from Jesus that day and over the next six weeks. Tanya did not go with the expectation to get a Jesus blessing. Her story reminds me of the parable Jesus told in Matthew 25:31-46 where Jesus will bless people for giving him something to eat when he was hungry, giving him a drink when he was thirsty, welcoming him when he was a stranger, clothing him when he was naked, caring for him when he was sick, and visiting him when he was in prison. In that parable people don’t recall doing those things for Jesus, but Jesus replied that whenever we do those things for others, we do them for Jesus.

In times like Advent when we are looking for the coming of Jesus it is good to remember the places Jesus comes. In the Gospel stories Jesus is found where there are people who are sick, blind, crippled, deaf, mute, lost, hungry, poor, sinners, marginalized, or even dead.

Visit someone today who is sick or in need. Go to care for them and they might just receive the blessing of the love of Jesus Christ from you. Go to give the gift of yourself and you may find a surprising gift Jesus has for you in the person you visit.

Monday, December 10, 2018

Bible Reading  
Acts 12:1-17

“Rang the Bell”

Wally Simmers shared this story for us.

I didn't really see Jesus but I'm sure he was there.

It was June 1996 after I had brain surgery. I had been having migraines and then had a bad one. At the hospital a cluster of irregular blood vessels was found. It was an AVM, an arteriovenous vascular malformation.

After the surgery I woke up in distress. I was having a stroke but I wasn't alone. The “Three R's” were there. Ronnie was my husband who had died and he was sitting on the bed beside me. Ruby was Loretta Eklund's mother and Ruby died in 1968 and she looked like she did after her brain surgery with head shaved and her head wrapped in a turban. Russell, who was Dale Dodrill's dad and also deceased was there too wearing blue-checked pajamas. I had only met Russell once before and I don't know why he or Ruby were involved. Ronnie or somebody or Jesus rang the bell to call the nurse—I couldn't, I was paralyzed. I don't know how else I would have gotten help when I couldn't move and couldn't talk.

Ronnie died March the 23<sup>rd</sup> of '92. People who lose someone like I lost Ronnie—I don't know how they make it through without faith. I feel my faith has gotten me through these last 26 years.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we pray for those paralyzed like Peter in the jail and Wally during her stroke. Send your saving help quickly Lord that we may add to your praise as have Peter, Rhoda, and Wally. Amen.

Wally Simmers and Joel Robinette

Write your observations, thoughts, prayers, doodles, or questions related to the scripture, devotion, or prayer for today.

Tuesday, December 11, 2018

### “Lectio Divina”

If Wally Simmers were to compose a hymn about what she shared in “Rang the Bell” the words might look like Psalm 40. Today will be an opportunity for reading the Bible spiritually known as Lectio Divina. The text for today will be Psalm 40. The steps below for Lectio Divina are adapted from the *Common English Bible for Daily Prayer*. These steps may be used with any passages from the Bible. Some Christians use this practice regularly as a way to enter time with God with the Bible and prayer.

- Invite God to speak to you through the scripture reading and get yourself ready to listen.
- Open a Bible to Psalm 40 and read it. Read it a second time slowly. Read it again a few times aloud. Pay attention for what word or phrase stands out for you in reading today.
- Spend a few minutes reflecting on what those “stand out” words mean. What might Jesus be trying to say to you through those words today?
- Respond to what you think Jesus might be trying to say to you through those words in Psalm 40. How do they move you to pray? Pray your thoughts, feelings, and questions to God.
- Spend a few silent minutes resting in God’s presence. This is not more time to fill with your own words, neither time to strain your spiritual ears for more words from God. This is just a time to enjoy being near to God in this time of prayer.
- Give God thanks for the gift of scripture and for God coming alongside you in this time of prayer.
- Write down your experience from this time of prayer and any insight you have received.

Wednesday, December 12, 2018

Bible Reading  
Philippians 4:1-9

“God Put People in My Life”

Wally Simmers has this second devotion to share with us.

After my husband Ronnie died God put such good neighbors in my life.

One neighbor joked with me, “Wally, you’ll starve to death, because you don’t like going to the grocery store.”

Another neighbor watched over me. Even their chocolate lab would bark when someone new parked in my driveway.

After my stroke I saw how Jesus put a lot of people in my life.

Loretta Eklund came over to visit me and I was trying to eat spaghetti and I was learning to eat again. While trying to eat that spaghetti I misfired and flung it in her face. We still laugh about that.

During that time Dale and Lulu Belle Dodrill stayed at my house in Penn Laird. Dale made me practice ties and buttons on my clothes.

Still to this day Wally’s children, grandchildren, friends, and people lending a caring hand can be found blessing her through the week.

Prayer

Thank you Jesus for the good neighbors and friends you have put in my life for caring, friendship, and laughter. Bless my good neighbors and bless me to be a good neighbor and share the grace of Jesus.

Wally Simmers and Joel Robinette

Write your observations, thoughts, prayers, doodles, or questions related to the scripture, devotion, or prayer for today.

Thursday, December 13, 2018

“Thank You Neighbor”

The greatest commandment named by Jesus is to, “Love God...and love your neighbor as yourself.” Wally Simmers found there were people God had put in her life to love and care for her after the death of her husband and after her stroke. Some of those neighbors were family relatives, extended in-law family, church family, friends next door, and even a protective pooch.

Take a few minutes to make a list of the people God has placed in your life who care for you. Write down how each has been a help, encouragement, or blessing to you.

After making this list spend a few minutes giving God thanks for the people God has placed in your life who share grace with you. Give God thanks for them.

Last, express gratitude to one of the people on your list. Visit them, call them, send a card and take time to give thanks for what that person has shared with you.

Friday, December 14, 2018

Bible Reading  
Proverbs 22:6

“Great-Uncle Nute”

I had a Great-Uncle Nute when I was growing up. He lived to be 109 and lived up in Sangersville. We used to go up and visit him on the weekends. He loved to sit on the front porch and read his Bible, which he had read thru nine times. He also loved to tell Bible stories and quote verses to us kids. It fascinated me that he could remember all that. While the other kids, who thought he was a crazy old man, were off playing, I would try to sit and listen. That’s where I got my interest in history and learned about God and how he needs to be a part of our lives.

Prayer

Father, thank you for the wisdom of our elders. May we be slow to walk away, but instead let the words of their mouths bring your guidance and love into our hearts. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

E.L. Davis

Write your observations, thoughts, prayers, doodles, or questions related to the scripture, devotion, or prayer for today.

Saturday, December 15, 2018

“Learning from Others”

E.L. Davis wrote about his Great-Uncle Nute who was willing to teach him about the Bible and faith. Nute’s readiness to teach was not enough. E.L. also had to make the space to listen and learn to a teacher God had put in his life. For E.L. it even meant missing some of the time he would have spent playing with children his own age. Jesus often took time to teach people about God and the scriptures because he had compassion on them and saw they needed guidance. Jesus still teaches today through people like Great-Uncle Nute.

Make a plan today to learn about the Bible, faith, or Jesus Christ from somebody else. You could connect with a local church Sunday School class, Bible study, or small group. You could also think of somebody God has placed in your life you know would have things to teach you and ask that person to teach you something about God.

If you are nearby, come join in a Sunday School Class at Keezletown UMC this Sunday. There will be an adult Advent study and other classes for children and youth. Sunday School begins at 10 AM and we gather a few minutes before that at 9:45 AM.

Third Sunday of Advent  
December 16, 2018

Bible Reading  
Psalm 130:5

“What We Anticipate, May Not Be What God Has Planned For Us”

2007 was going to be a wonderful year. I was just recently married to a wonderful woman that helped focus me and allow me to understand love and I had purchased my first home just before getting married. In early spring we found out we were going to have a baby, I was so excited. As we went through all the prenatal care visits the anticipation mounted. I could not wait to be a father; I began imagining all the things we would do together. At about the 20 week visit we were given news that just turned our world upside down. They informed us our unborn child had a heart that was not properly formed.

We were referred to a hospital that was better suited for this challenge. At that time I had just started my fall college class, *The Study of the New Testament*. Through all this I struggled and began to drink more than normal. I had only started going to church again regularly within the past couple years. I was a pew sitter but my faith was weak. We had great emotional and financial support from family and friends. As we prepared for the birth of our child and the challenge we were about to face, little did we know how things would go and the decisions we would have to make.

Gabriel was born on November 26<sup>th</sup>, even though we had challenges I felt optimistic. Then we found out Gabriel had a chromosome issue and was blind. After several nights in the NICU we were finally getting some idea of the true issues facing Gabriel and us. The doctor informed us they could do surgery however Gabriel's chances were very slim. We finally had to make a decision that no parent should have to make. God gave us the courage and peace to make the decision that was best for Gabriel. We took Gabriel home and on December 11<sup>th</sup> he went to be the Lord.

Looking back at what we went through it all seems daunting but I realize God was there the entire time. We were surrounded by caring and loving family and friends and I was in a class that made me study the Bible. And through it all something stands out to me, I never questioned God about why this was happening to us. God is a loving and healing God, on December 11, 2008 our healthy son Brayden was born. I feel God used what

we went through to bring me closer to Him, so in my anticipation of a new child I truly found a rebirth of my faith.

#### Prayer

Dear Lord, allow us to understand in our anticipation, what you have planned for us may not always be what we anticipate, it may be something to draw us closer to You. In Jesus name, Amen.

Steve Morris

Write your observations, thoughts, prayers, doodles, or questions related to the scripture, devotion, or prayer for today.

Monday, December 17, 2018

### “Scripture Memorization”

One of the graces Steve Morris listed during a difficult time in his life was what he was learning about the Bible. One form of learning is memorization. A benefit of memorizing parts of the Bible is how it gets some of God’s words right in your heart and thinking. Take time today to memorize a passage from the Bible you have not committed to memory. You may need to write it down, carry it along with you, post it on the refrigerator or bathroom mirror, or input it into your phone for easy access and review. Repeat the passage through the day. Do not get discouraged if you have not memorized it perfectly. If you don’t have it down, look it up again and practice some more. Continue to recite the passage silently or out loud throughout the day. You may select a passage on your own or choose one of those below.

“I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope” (Psalm 130:5, NRSV).

“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1, NRSV).

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13, NKJV).

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2, NRSV).

“Be still, and know that I am God!” (Psalm 46:10, NRSV).

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10, NRSV).

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33, NKJV).

Tuesday, December 18, 2018

Bible Reading  
Deuteronomy 11:18-21

“Flannelgraph Jesus”

To me, Jesus seems to have been there my whole life. Growing up going to the EUB Church here in town, I have many memories of Sunday mornings. I can remember lying on the wooden pew with my head resting on my mom’s lap while the service was going on, listening to Cameron Miller’s voice as he preached, to Diana Armentrout (now Davis) playing with great joy on the old upright piano, to Wade Huffman’s voice in prayer. I can still picture Jesus the Good Shepherd on the cardboard fans that were spread about to help us all deal with the hot days. And I remember Flannelgraph Jesus. We would meet for Sunday School in the basement in a room whose walls were made of wood paneling, and on the flannelgraph board we would see stories of Jesus as He ministered: healing the lame, raising Lazarus from the dead, coming out of the grave Himself on Easter morning. We would also see and hear the stories of David and Goliath, Noah and the ark, Moses leading the children out of Egypt.

I don’t remember who my Sunday School teachers were, but the stories have always stuck with me. Those teachers may not know how fruitful their labors have been until the day that they stand before Jesus and He says, “Well done, you good and faithful servant! Thanks to you I was known by all of these people.” And to those who have taught our children, I say a great thank you for sharing Jesus with so many. Even if you don’t have a flannelgraph.

Prayer

Dear God, we thank you for so very, very many people all over the world and all through the ages who have shared Jesus with the children. Bless those who You have called to this important ministry this day, and may their labors bear fruit beyond measure. Amen.

Steve Suter

Write your observations, thoughts, prayers, doodles, or questions related to the scripture, devotion, or prayer for today.

Wednesday, December 19, 2018

### “Praying with Icons”

Steve Suter shared one of the things he remembers from childhood was “Flannelgraph Jesus.” The pictures made from stories in the Bible stuck with him. Bible and Christian images can be a help for praying with our eyes open. Various Orthodox churches have used icons—pictures of Jesus, people from the Bible, or saints—for centuries to help with prayer. Sometimes Christians have been opposed to using images for God in fear of slipping into idolatry (worshiping the image rather than God or the image giving a wrong or limited picture of God). While pictures, images, icons, and symbols do not give us the full picture of who God is, they can be used to point us toward God.

Choose a picture, image, icon, or symbol to help you with prayer today that you think points you toward Jesus. It could be a cross you have at home, a Bible story on the puzzle you finished last week, artwork at work or home, or even an internet image search for Jesus. Pick one image.

Place the image before you or get yourself in front of it.

Invite God to speak to you in the time of prayer.

Consider the story or message the image has. What does it say about God? What does it say about humanity? What does it say about the grace and love of Jesus? What does it say about how the Holy Spirit works in people and the world?

Invite Jesus to be with you in viewing the image and spend a few minutes in silence.

Ask the Holy Spirit if there is a message, word of encouragement, or challenge to take with you today from your time of prayer.

Give God thanks for entering a time of open eyed prayer with you. Give God thanks for the artist who created something that pointed you toward the grace of God.

Thursday, December 20, 2018

Bible Reading  
Luke 24:31-32

“Every Day”

As a child, my mom and my grandmother would take me to church. I attended WRE (Weekday Religious Education) in my elementary years of school and learned the stories of Jesus, memorized the 10 commandments, the names of the 12 disciples, sang the songs, prayed the Lord’s Prayer, and so on. I was introduced to Jesus but didn’t have a good realistic understanding of what difference this should make to me and my life other than knowing it was important to try and be “good.”

In my teen years, church became optional and I mostly opted out. I wanted to sleep in. Church was boring. I had better things to do with my time but it was still a very important part of our holiday traditions to go to church on Easter and Christmas!

As a young adult, I began a relationship with Scott that would change my life. As we grew in our relationship and he began to share his faith with me it soon became very clear that he had a far deeper understanding of exactly what it meant to have Jesus in your life and how impactful that could be on EVERY aspect of your life. He planted and tended seeds in me that started to grow and take root. I was curious and began to explore the scriptures, attend church regularly, and became more actively involved in a faith community.

In October of 2000, Noland Suter sponsored me on The Walk to Emmaus. I was ripe for the picking now! As I sat there in the darkness of the chapel and asked Jesus to come into my life fully and completely, I was overcome with a sense of warmth and light that permeated every fiber of my being. The pastor there asked me if I had asked Jesus into my life and to be my personal Savior. I told her that I thought I had done that before but it didn’t feel like it did right at that moment so I must not have done it right. She said, “Jenny, you don’t ask Jesus to come into your life one time—it’s a choice you make every day to let him in.”

Prayer

Father God, thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ. Thank you for coming into my life—not once—but every day. Amen.

Jenny Dillard

Write your observations, thoughts, prayers, doodles, or questions related to the scripture, devotion, or prayer for today.

Friday, December 21, 2018

“Into My Life”

Jenny Dillard wrote about how she learned to ask Jesus into her life every day. If you have never asked Jesus to come into your life “fully and completely” then do so today. If you have prayed that prayer before, whether once or as a daily habit, pray it again today.

Pray that prayer in your own words or use one of the prayers below. Make it not just a prayer for today, but for each day.

*“I Surrender All” by J.W. Van Deventer*

All to Jesus I surrender; all to him I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust him, in his presence daily live.  
I surrender all, I surrender all,  
all to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

*“Away in a Manger”*

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay  
close by me forever, and love me, I pray;  
bless all the dear children in thy tender care,  
and fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

*A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition*

I am no longer my own, but thine.  
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.  
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.  
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,  
exalted for thee or brought low by thee.  
Let me be full, let me be empty.  
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.  
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.  
And now, O glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou are mine, and I am thine.  
So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.  
Amen.

Saturday, December 22, 2018

Bible Reading  
Matthew 1:23 and Luke 2:13-14

“With Peace in Our Hearts”

In quiet communion with God, we realize that God created us to be at peace, to experience “the peace that passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7), for “God is not a God of confusion but of peace” (I Corinthians 14:33, RSV). God is peace, and what all people desire is to experience the peace of God. As we remember the words of the apostle John, “greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world” (I John 4:4, KJV), we realize more fully that God is truly greater than any force we may face.

Throughout our marriage, our steadfast love of God and our constant awareness of the Holy Spirit have empowered us to gracefully experience the trials of life with peace in our hearts.

Prayer

Almighty God, let there be peace on earth, and let it begin within my heart today.

Charles and Karen Harris

Write your observations, thoughts, prayers, doodles, or questions related to the scripture, devotion, or prayer for today.

Fourth Sunday of Advent  
December 23, 2018

### “Contemplative Prayer”

Charles and Karen Harris wrote about “quiet communion” with God. Prayer can be a great time for quiet attentiveness to God’s presence. Contemplative prayer uses silence and a way to focus on God as a way to be in God’s presence. Contemplative prayer is not about filling up the time with wordy prayers. It is a time to simply be with God.

Make time to spend with God in silence. Make space to spend 10 – 20 minutes with God where you can be uninterrupted. Uninterrupted does not mean isolation. You could practice this form of silent prayer with others. Some people find this form of prayer particularly helpful when sharing it with others and being in silence together with God.

Choose one word to focus on during your time of silence. You could choose a name for God (i.e. Jesus, Savior, Good Shepherd, Creator, Light of the World, etc.). You could choose a word that connects you to God’s grace (i.e. peace, grace, hope, justice, resurrection, joy, cross). Choose one word.

Invite God to be with you in this time of prayer

Begin your time of silence with God. Center your thoughts on God. If at any time your thoughts wander or you get distracted, use your focus word to help you turn your attention back toward God. This is a time to just be in God’s presence.

It may be in the silence that thoughts, fears, or distractions do come to mind. If they do, take the opportunity to be aware of them and possibly acknowledge they are on your mind as a worry, concern, need, or distraction. Give God these things on your mind and center your thoughts again on God using the help of your focus word.

At the end of the time, give God thanks for being with you in prayer.

What feelings or insights do you have from this time of prayer?

Christmas Eve  
December 24, 2018

Bible Reading  
Luke 2:11

“A Christmas Moment”

Tonight, Christmas Eve, as I sat at the computer reading the Facebook postings, I came across an item that stated that these three singers will give you the chills. Intrigued, and knowing they were singing “Silent Night” and that I had missed the Christmas Eve service at church because of illness in my family, I decided to listen. I needed a little Christmas spirit—what with last minute shopping, no cards sent, the presents not yet wrapped, only half of tomorrow’s food made, and a sick husband—I was feeling pretty much out of the Christmas spirit.

The first singer was lovely, and the harmony between the first and second singers was lovely, but for some reason, when the third singer began, I closed my eyes and I could feel the tears welling up. I envisioned a stable, dark and chilly, and I was walking toward it slowly with trepidation. Yes, trepidation, a little fearful, but still walking. By the time the singers were singing together, I was at the stable, seeing the manger, and I fell to my face, sobbing. The dream ended with the song, and with me saying to myself, no, don’t go away, I need to talk to You.

I got up from the computer and walked to a quieter room for a moment and looked out the window at the hills across the way, dotted with lights, and tried to envision them as the shepherds’ hillside. I sat down and closed my eyes again, and felt the warmth of a hand on my shoulder. My angel, I thought, trying to comfort me, but no, I don’t believe it is. My thoughts turned to another hillside, one with a skull, and my heart got heavy and it was hard to breathe. Sweet Jesus, how can I be picturing the awful place of Your death on this Your birthday? If the reason for the season is You; the reason for You is me; the reason for Your birth should not be death; yet the reason for Your death is my soul. Oh Sweet Jesus, how the angels rejoiced at Your birth, and how they cried at Your death. But oh did they know, did they know, that You would return, that You would defeat the very thing that can keep us from You, that the Holy Spirit would live in us that love You, and would LEAP for joy in Your presence. I needed a Christmas experience. Thank You for allowing me to lie in front of Your manger for those few seconds, and for touching my shoulder. But most of all, thank You for reminding me that You have NEVER left Christmas and

You have NEVER left me, whether my celebration be in cards, and trees, and lights, and well wishes to others, and all the to-do we make of Christmas, or in the silence of sobbing before Your manger throne.

#### Prayer

Sweet Jesus, may all who read this experience a Christmas moment that touches their heart, and may they know it is You. Amen.

Diana Davis

Write your observations, thoughts, prayers, doodles, or questions related to the scripture, devotion, or prayer for today.

Christmas Day  
December 25, 2018

“Read a Letter”

Advent is finished and Christmas has come. As a way to look back at the season of Advent and the waiting you did on Jesus, read again the “Dear Jesus” letter you wrote at the beginning of Advent.

Was the hope you wrote about realized or is it still something to hope for? Did Jesus bring you any unexpected hope this Christmas?

What were you feeling at the beginning of Advent? Do you still feel the same way? How has this time changed or reinforced how you feel about Jesus and how you feel about life?

What questions did you ask Jesus? Were any of them answered? Did you find new questions through this time of Advent? Did you learn something you hoped to or learn something unexpected? What questions do you still need to ask and seek God for?

Who did you share your letter with early in Advent? Remember you asked them to pray for you during this time. Reach out to them again and share about your personal Advent. Share how Jesus came into your life or did not. Talk with them about what you learned or gained. Share with them which spiritual discipline was most meaningful and which practice was just not for you.

Invite that person to continue to pray for you that God would bless your life and faith.

## Afterword

I pray this personal Advent was a time Jesus came into your life in many ways. During these last weeks you took time to read the Bible, pray, read about the faith of others, and try different spiritual disciplines.

Keep seeking Jesus.

Keep praying.

Keep reading the Bible.

Keep connecting to the faith of Christians near you. Learn from them and teach them. Listen to their stories of faith and share your own. Join others for worship and growing in faith through learning and serving others.

Keep practicing spiritual disciplines, especially to the ones that connected you best to God.

May the grace of God the Father keep you, the light of Jesus keep bringing you hope and showing you the way of peace, and the Holy Spirit keep you connected to the gift of faith filled people.

Joel Robinette

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to Jesus Christ who came, comes today, and will come again and make all things new.

Thank you to the people of Keezletown United Methodist Church for writing devotionals, supporting this work, printing the devotional, and sharing it with family and neighbors.

Thanks to *The Common English Bible for Daily Prayer*. It just came out in 2013 and is helpful for having a Bible full of helpful ways to pray and read the scriptures daily.