

# SHARING JOY

ADVENT 2019





## Dear First Pres Families,

We are happy you are joining us this Advent season. Derived from the Latin word “adventus,” meaning coming or appearance, Advent is a time of preparation and expectant waiting. As we join together to celebrate the birth of our Savior, we share the joy of anticipation and fulfillment of God’s promises. We light a new candle on the Advent wreath each week to represent the four pillars of the season: hope, love, joy, and peace. Let us all take time to thank God for the gift of unmerited favor He graced us with in the form of a baby in a manger. It is a time to focus on being joyfully content in what God has given us already, as we are patiently preparing for what He has in store for the future.

An angel of the Lord shared with the shepherds: “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great JOY for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” Luke 2:9-11. Christians share this same joy as we proclaim our faith in the Messiah.

The Fellowship Committee chose the theme of “Sharing Joy” for this year’s Advent devotional and we hope the stories shared will bring joy to your heart as you read them and spend time with God reflecting on the Scriptures and praying. Several children of the congregation have shared the joy of their faith through their artwork. For the next 24 days, set aside a time, perhaps at family dinners, to read the lessons and prayers together. This is a great way to spark discussions about our faith, foster a special tradition and make lasting memories with each other.

During this season, let us share the joy of God’s fulfilled promises with our family, friends, church members, co-workers and neighbors. Please invite others to join with us for the Cantata, the Christmas Pops, our worship services on Sundays and on Christmas Eve. The schedule can be found on the last page of the booklet.

Thank you for being a part of our church family.

The First Pres Fellowship Committee

Sunday, December 1, 2019

# 1ST SUNDAY OF Advent

*“An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel of the Lord said to them, ‘Do not be afraid.*

*I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.’”*

**(Luke 2:9-10)**

When the shepherds were told of the birth of Jesus, their fear turned to joy. And so it is with me. As my life progresses through the challenges of the aging process, I have occasionally become somewhat fearful and full of what if's and what will happen to me, etc.

It's during those times that I make a mental gratitude list and, eventually, my fear turns into joy. The gratitude list begins with my salvation. I agree with John Newton who proclaimed, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.” I am one of His and He has forgiven all my sins, of which there are many, and He has promised a place in His Kingdom for me. I'm also very grateful for First Presbyterian Church in NPB where the gospel is preached and we are taught how to live a gospel driven life.

My gratitude list continues with my biological family, my neighbors, and my church family. Within the church family, special praise goes to our elders and deacons. A visit from Elder Frank and Deacon Barbara on World Communion Sunday was very appreciated. We have an outstanding Music Department and support staff. I have not been able to be in church lately and I so appreciate staying in touch through the First Pres Release and the Messenger. Cindy recently scanned the monthly prayer card for me and that's another reason for gratitude.

*Dear Lord, we thank You for the gift of Your beloved Son. May we be filled with joy in Him as we wait to celebrate His birth on Christmas Day. Amen.*

Sara Parente



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Monday, December 2, 2019

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*“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”*

**(Matthew 25:40)**

I am a Mentor, correcting Bible lessons for prisoner/students through the Crossroads Prison Ministries in Grand Rapids, Michigan. After we correct the lesson, we write a personal letter to the student. We are told this is often the only mail they ever get. I feel a personal burden to make use of this opportunity, to be sure first that they know the plan of salvation, giving verses such as Romans 10:9, John 3:16 and John 1:12.

Then I tell them, after they know Jesus as their personal Savior, there begins the process of growing as a Christian, and my prayer for them is that they will continue to study the Word, as the Bible tells us in II Timothy 2:15. Then, they should think about meditating, or pondering, portions of God’s Word as they read it (see Psalm 1:2). They should spend serious time in prayer (II Thessalonians 5:17 tells us to pray without ceasing), and Psalm 119:11 tells us to hide God’s Word in our hearts, so they should try to memorize some Bible verses. Lastly, I encourage them to share the joy of their salvation and their love of the Lord with others.

We are told that our students would like to know something about their Mentors, so I tell them I have known Jesus since I was 8 years old, so I have had the privilege of His walking with me my whole life. And I say I look forward to meeting all of the men and women who know Jesus whom I have written to for the 14 years I have been a Mentor – close to 700, so far!

*Romans 12:12 tells us, “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”*

**J O Y**  
**JESUS – OTHERS – YOU**

*“Father, may we project our joy of knowing You in all that we say and do. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”*

**Joyce Brolsma**

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Tuesday, December 3, 2019

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***“Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say rejoice.”  
(Philippians 4:4)***

### **BLESSINGS**

In 2010, just on the heels of having lost my husband of 33 sacred years, I was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma. Out of the depths of grief and illness emerged the most beautiful circle of friends and my 2 incredible children, who never left my side. Survival during this period was measured in 5 minute increments of time and I did so by His Grace and His Grace alone, planted firmly in the palm of His hand.

As I began to heal, the Blessings in these 2 simultaneous tragedies began to wash over me in the most exquisite way imaginable. That “life is a gift” is not just a notion or utterance. Know that every minute of every day is a precious gift regardless of circumstance.

Believe it – “Jesus is a promise keeper and a way maker.” HE WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU.  
“Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say rejoice.” Philippians 4:4

***Heavenly Father, we pray that You will help us to prepare our hearts and minds as we enter the beautiful season of Advent. Instill in us the Hope, Peace, Joy, Love and Faithfulness that You intended, as we wait in prayerful contemplation, the celebration of Your ultimate gift to humanity, Your Son, our Savior Christ Jesus. Amen.***

**Vickie Miller**



***“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”***

**(2 Timothy 2:15)**

**Discovering .....and an Admonition**

“Mrs. Supplee” said, “I enjoy teenage boys, football, horses, golf and God!” I thought that sounded pretty good for beginnings! This was said by a Sunday School teacher greeting me as a new member.

I had a caring and active Christian home, but our church Sunday School program was, at best, nominal. Hence, a cousin invited me to join his Sunday School group. He said “Mrs. Supplee” was a neat lady that leads a great group of high school aged boys; in fact, about half of our football team.

That was the real beginning of my pathway of faith. “Mrs. Supplee” and the gang rearranged my life’s journey. My teenage life had a new beginning of Discovering. It continues as the decades roll by.

Saturday’s football plays and scores and other sports activities started each Sunday morning class. This was until she said, “Okay guys, let’s talk about the real scores of life,” and off we would go into biblical discovery.

Practically every Sunday morning ended with her quoting 2 Timothy 2:15 which is etched on my brain. The words are: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

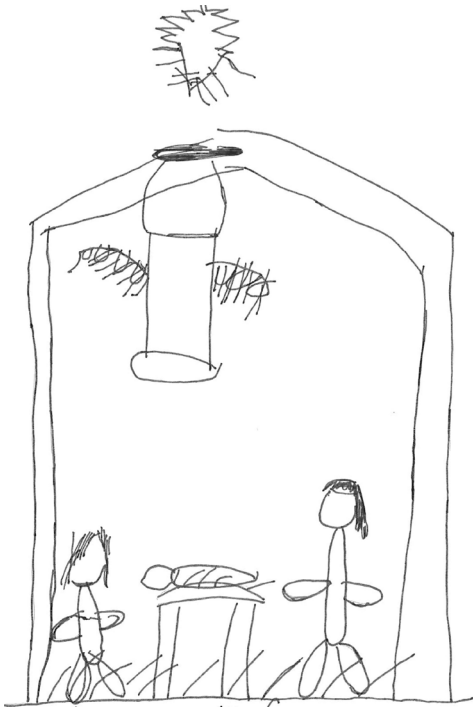
And “Mrs. Supplee” would close by saying, “Okay guys, perform your roles knowing you are behavioral examples to all who see you and.....don’t screw up! The world and beyond is watching!”

“So far, so good, “Mrs. Supplee.” Thanks so very much!” ...and my Discovering continues.

***Dear Lord, we thank You for those who have made a difference in our lives and taught us the truth about Your birth and Your life through Your Word. May we seek to correctly handle the word of truth during Advent and every day of our lives. Amen.***

**William Smedley**

Jesus in the manger



Miles Fulman GR. 5



Paca Content GR. 3



Corinne Stickle Gr. 4

by: Cici Cox GR. 5





*“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all you lands.  
Serve the Lord with gladness: come before His presence with singing.  
Know ye that the Lord, He is God: it is He that hath made us,  
and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.  
Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise:  
be thankful unto Him, and bless His name.”*  
(Psalm 100:1-4)

Our music ministry at First Pres is one of the finest I have had the pleasure of enjoying! The choir, JuBELLaté, concert band, orchestra, jazz band, woodwind ensemble, and brass ensemble, under the exceptional leadership from Jay Arnn; the Praise team of the Way Service, under the talent of Victoria Chaplain; and the children’s music and productions, under soprano Kristina Arnn, assisted with pianist Sally Privett with Jay Arnn; organist and pianist, David Block; together they all prepare us for thanksgiving as we worship together.

“The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise Him.” Psalm 28:7

The word “joy” is from the Latin word “gaudere,” meaning “to rejoice.” Our music ministry helps me to rejoice in the Lord and to praise Him with song. As I prepare for the church service, I absorb the joyful music and rejoice and praise His name. Worshiping our Father through music is one of the highest forms of worship. It speaks to my heart. I am enveloped in His love with gratefulness and joy.

*Dear Heavenly Father,  
We are thankful for our music ministry and the many ways they are making joyful sounds. We thank you for their talent and for their many ways of expressing it. The tenor, soprano, and duet voice solos; the flute, piano, and trumpet solos; the choir, orchestra and bands; All touch our hearts in love for You, our Father, and in thanksgiving for Your love. In Thy name we pray,  
Amen.*

**Meg Brown**

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Friday, December 6, 2019

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*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”*

(Galatians 5:22-23)

*“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

1Thessalonians 5:16

### A Parent’s Love

Have you ever wondered why you have the parents you have? I have prayed about the very question for many years! God has given me a precious gift, my parents. They are loving, faithful followers, strong and caring. I have thanked God for years.

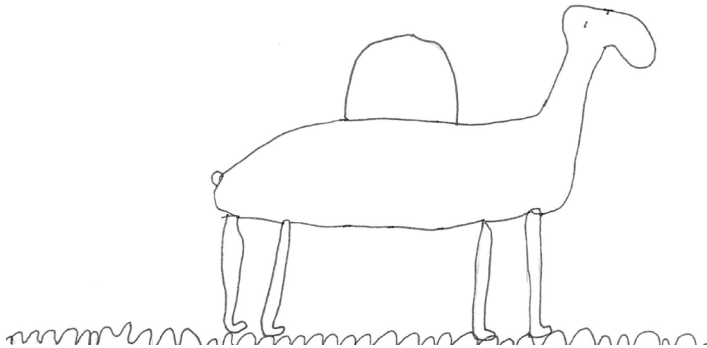
I was a follower and wandered away from my faith. One day 14 years ago, God spoke to me. Since then, I have been a follower. All of my parents’ prayers were finally answered.

I love you, Mom and Dad, dearly. Now, I am able to share the love my parents gave me with my children. I hope that my children know how much I love them.

*Dear God, we praise and thank You for all that we have. We don’t understand Your choices, but we are grateful for Your choice to put us in the families we are in. Thank You, God. Amen.*

Kris Galganski

EASTON JOHNSON GR. 5



***“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.”***  
**(Psalm 34:8)**

### **Personal Moments With Jesus**

One day, I was pondering over what exactly is my “calling” for the Lord. What am I supposed to “do” for Him. As I pondered, with nothing concrete coming to my mind, another thought came to me. . .(my spirit?). . .that my “calling” was to know Jesus, to “be.” Be still and be at rest in the Lord. That sounded so peaceful to me and where I’d like to be. Rest in Him. On another day, being still and quiet, the thought of Jesus sitting next to me, came to me. Nothing said, just being together, sitting next to each other. Suddenly, I became overwhelmed with peace and sensed His Love and presence. No words, just His presence. I began to cry with those thoughts of Him sitting with me, loved. This experience didn’t last long, much to my dismay, but I felt Him, I tasted Him, His Love, His presence. I yearned for more of this, for more of Jesus. I yearned to experience that again.

Earlier this year, I was thinking about my six week visit with my Christian sister and family in Missouri and Colorado just last Thanksgiving, pondering: “Where do I feel at home, the permanent home where those who love you unconditionally are around?” The place where it is comfortable to “be” yourself, relaxed, chat. No drama, but joy in a safe togetherness, a sweet bond. Feeling loved, giving love. I realized, to my despair, that that “feeling,” that permanent place, was not with my sister and her family. I bemoaned. I thought of friends, but we each have our own lives, houses and families. I bemoaned that thought. I realized I had no permanent “home” to call my own. I felt lonely and sad. As I pondered this realization, I heard ever so clearly in my being, **“I Am your Home.”** I immediately knew that was Jesus. I cried in His Love. I was comforted. I knew what He meant; that He, Jesus, was all I needed in order to feel all the described “home” feelings. And He is always here to draw from, to be “Home” anywhere, anytime. Again, I tasted Him. I experienced and felt His presence, His Love, Just still, Just sitting quietly, No words, Relaxed, Rested, Home. Again, this experience didn’t last long.

Oh, to learn to practice His presence. Oh, to always feel at “Home.” I understand and am aware, I can’t and don’t. But, I have tasted of the Lord and He is good. So no matter how crazy I get, how troubled and depressed at times, scared, questions innumerable, I am aware of my need to get “Home.” And it takes a long while or lots of people’s prayers for me, patient people, and me listening to teachings of His Love. But, I experienced “Home” which is where I want to be. I think Heaven just might be like this. . .and more, much more, of course. I am ever so grateful for our pastors and teachers who constantly disciple us from God’s Word, how to stay on the path of our journey to Home, eternal.

***Lord God, as we celebrate the birth of Your Son, Jesus, may we all be one and may we all know the breadth, length, height and depth of Your deep love for us. Oh, that we taste and see that You are good. Amen.***

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Sunday, December 8, 2019

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## 2ND SUNDAY OF Advent

*“The Joy of the Lord is my Strength.”*

(Nehemiah 8:10)

How wonderful to reflect on the joy of the Lord. For me this strengthening joy is found in the reading of the Word of God. I center my expression of faith in knowing and serving God, and I cannot possibly do it without a close connection to Sacred Scripture. The Holy Bible is a wellspring of inspired truth, encouragement and direction for my life. The Word is the core of my creation, as it tethers me to divine truth, as well as the will and promises of God.

As I think about it, the Word is more than a tether. It provides security, shepherding, enlightenment, replenishment, sanctuary, hope, and grace. I can't pick that up at Target! With Bible in hand, I can behold the Light of Christ, drink of Living Water, and taste the Bread of Life. On this path, I connect to that which was, which is, and which is to come. I hold the manual of life that will lead and direct me onto the path of righteousness and salvation. The Word of God embraces every prayer, praise, and gratefulness in my heart. It opens the door to personal and communal worship and glorifies my King. It's a precious love letter of great value and worth that I can read and treasure for a lifetime. I draw upon the comfort, peace and hope of His Word daily.

As the words sing out to me, I seek God more and more, and celebrate His fruitful plan, purpose, and presence in my life. As I read and turn every page of words and works, the “Good News” continues to draw me close to Christ, and with these keys of the Kingdom, I am safely driven home. I rejoice always along the way!

*Holy Father – O, how joyful I am for the sustaining strength of Your inspired Word.  
May all living things draw near to You and be happy. Amen.*

**Annie Dougherty**

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Monday, December 9, 2019

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*“Morning has broken, like the first morning,  
Blackbird has spoken, like the first bird.”*

First thing in the morning I sit in our rec room with my Bible, black coffee, and “The Upper Room.” I still miss our rescue dog, Nellie. She always laid on the royal blue rug a few feet from me, waiting until I was done. She was a black and brindle sixty-two pound mix who had been through several health problems, with two surgeries in the last 18 months. We had to say “good-bye” to her the Thursday after Thanksgiving 2018. Our kind veterinarian said she probably had a stroke. Nellie made it to 12 years, 11 months, which is a good life span for a large dog.

We won't be looking for another dog, but I find contentment watching out our big back window. We look out upon a twenty-year-old live oak tree with four bird feeders that my husband, Jake, hung up when the tree was strong enough. It grows between our house and a North Palm Beach canal across from Anchorage Park. He brings home 40 pounds of seed every two weeks and faithfully fills the feeders.

The busy life that goes on and under that tree is fun to watch! We see grackles (common black-birds), woodpeckers, doves, pairs of cardinals, and blue jays. One day we even saw 3 bright green parakeets. On the ground another game is going on. Many ducks vie for the scattered seed. They also wrestle with the large pigeons, as many as 15 there, too. And, of course, we see squirrels hanging upside down on the feeders getting their breakfast.

Sometimes, I am lucky to see an osprey drop suddenly, claws first, to get its fish. It's a delightful panorama of activity which makes me chuckle many days. I am grateful to see so much “Life” out back.

*Thank You, dear God, for this scene of encouragement that I view  
almost every day when I sit with You. May we all savor in Your love and be in  
awe of You as we view your beautiful creation. Amen.*

*“Praise with elation, Praise every morning,  
God's re-creation of the new day!”*

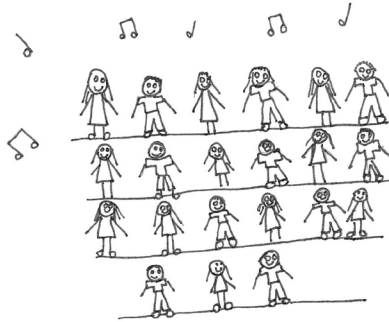
(#553 Hymns for the Living Church (1974))

**Alice Swartout**

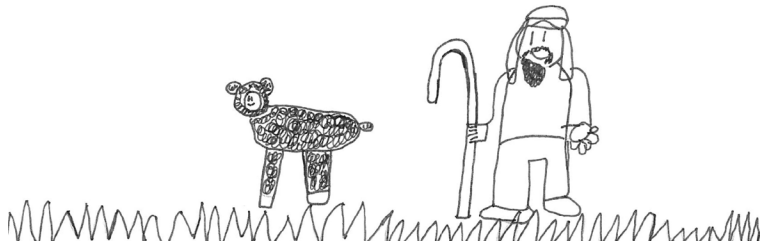


Madeline  
Baldwin GR. 2

Vivi Cox  
GR. 5



JQ  
content  
GR. 5



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Tuesday, December 10, 2019

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***“I have told you this so that My joy may be in you  
and that your joy may be complete.”***

**(John 15:11)**

The Christmas season always brings mixed emotions in our house, as we excitedly plan for and anticipate all of the parties, events, and wrapping presents. The balance between fitting it all in and remembering to slow down and soak in the magic of the season is something that we actively talk about in our family.

Shawn and I enjoy lighting the advent wreath every evening after dinner with our three boys, and letting them take turns lighting the candles, reading the Scripture and prayer, and blowing out the candles. While some evenings they are reflective and sweet, many times they are agitated and fight with each other. We find ourselves saying to them, “Slow down!” and “Don’t fight over who gets to blow out the candle!” and “Let’s remember why we are doing this in the first place!”

What an excellent reminder for us, as the parents, to slow down and remember why we do what we do. Our heavenly Father sent His own Son to be born human and live on this earth, so that we may know Him and live our lives for Him. What an absolute joy! As parents with young children, we want to make it our mission to share that joy and truly LIVE it. God’s joy lives inside each and every one of us, and it is complete in Him.

***Dear Heavenly Father, thank You so much for this season of Advent.  
We are grateful to celebrate another year together and spread Your joy.  
Please help us to stay focused on Jesus as the reason for it all,  
and to share that joy with everyone in our lives. Amen.***

**Carrie Wallace**

Reese Rykse  
GR. 4



***“What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed  
in every way, whether out of false motives or true;  
and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice.”  
(Philippians 1:18)***

***“Burdened Joy”  
(Philippians 1:12–21)***

As Paul writes these words of encouragement, he can't help but hear the sound of his chains, hanging from wrist to wrist, clinking and scraping at the start of each new line. The sound of his chains, however, do not remind him of his current, unfortunate state, but they remind him of the joy that comes from seeing the gospel of Christ advancing throughout the world. The gospel has even found its way into Caesar's household and to the very guards who keep watch over Paul (v. 13).

I have to imagine Paul getting so lost in his joy for the gospel that nothing could take away this joy, not even imprisonment or death. He writes to the Philippians, not to ask for help by getting him out of his pain, nor does he even write to officially thank them for their support, but rather he is writing the letter so that they might embrace the joy that comes from the gospel of Christ. This joy is not dependent on life circumstance, nor is it created by blessings or favor. The joy that Paul is talking about is one that comes from Christ alone.

A burdened joy is one that may birth from a place of pain, but it lives and thrives on the fact that Jesus' name is being glorified. Even in our deepest burdens we can find joy because the joy that comes from the Lord is one that is immune to life's most painful blows. In fact, it is precisely through our suffering that Christ is exalted and made known (v. 12). Suffering isn't the tool that snuffs out the light of joy, it is the wax that allows joy to burn brighter than ever.

***Lord, we thank You for the joy that You bring into our lives and for making that joy evident even in the darkest of times. While we prepare to celebrate the birth of Your Son, we pray that this Advent season would be a time of renewed rest, peace, and hope. Although our burdens may be heavy, we find joy in the birth of Jesus and we eagerly await His glorious return. Amen.***

**Josh Bartz**



***“...great joy that will be for all the people.”***

**(Luke 2:10)**

I try to find joy in almost everything that I do, because to me it is all about attitude and being open to God’s guidance. At First Pres, I found joy in deeper faith, fellowship, and service.

When I started attending First Pres, I sat near the back of the church, and left immediately to go to yoga class. Seeing the announcement of the *Purpose Driven Life* class gave me the courage to attend our first Wednesday night dinner. That class began my faith journey as over the years I have attended classes on *Boundaries*, *Books of the Bible*, *Spiritual Practices*, *Celebrate Recovery* and most recently, *Discerning the Voice of God and Practices That Grow Our Faith*. As a result of these presentations and the sharing of perspectives, I am now able to pray aloud for others, write notes of compassion and caring, read the Bible with Ken daily, and be open to God’s guidance every day.

When we joined the church, my involvement with others was minimal. My “shepherd” invited me to a women’s luncheon, and I politely declined. Gradually, I offered to set up tables, decorated a table for a tea, attended luncheons regularly, and was asked to coordinate the Good Friday luncheon. When the Women’s Fellowship Groups were created, I joined one on Thursday nights, when Ken had choir. I joined the Ladies of the Lord, which provides a casual setting for women of all ages to get together. These are all ways that I experience joyful connectivity.

One day Ken and I were talking with Nori Douglas about educational programs for seniors. This led Ken and I to develop the *Suddenly Alone*, *Using Your Smart Phone as an Extension of your Brain*, and *When It’s Time Seminars*. We receive great pleasure as we share our research and learn from the attendees of their experiences. When I read of the need for deacons, I said to myself (with a nudge from the Holy Spirit), “I would like to become a deacon.” Ken passed my name along to the Nominating Chair for consideration. I am grateful to have served for three years with a special group of dedicated deacons and watchmen. What a joy it will be to serve with the deacons for my fourth Christmas Eve, as we celebrate Christ’s birth.

The gifts of deeper faith, fellowship, and service are closely intertwined, and all it takes is the “first step” to begin to experience these joys at First Pres.

***Dear Heavenly Father, help us to be open to Your guidance  
and to see the joy in the opportunities that are presented to us. Amen.***

**Donna Wright**

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Friday, December 13, 2019

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***“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,  
for thereby some have entertained angels unaware.”***

**(Hebrews 13:2)**

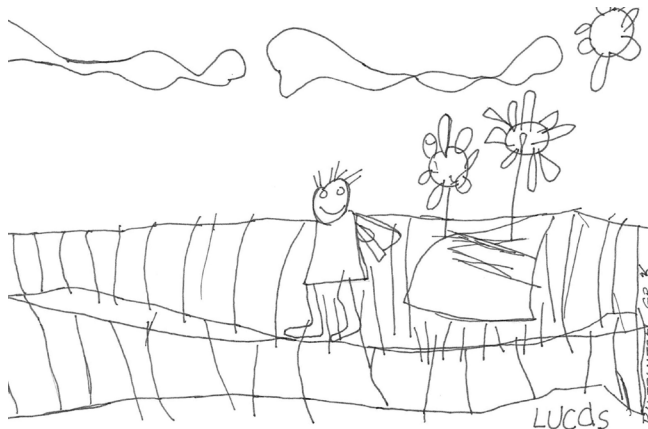
Years ago, I took a course on “Emotions and the Christian.” Our seminary professor included a list of suggestions for getting more joy in our lives, and one was “Learn to share warmly and deeply with people who are different from yourself.” I am so grateful for that advice and the enrichment God has poured into my life through it. If we just let our lives take their course, we make friends who share our interests, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, but as much as I appreciate my own demographic, it would be sad to end up with all my friends being white Protestant women in the final third of life.

God made a big, wide world of people. It takes prayer and a level of intentionality, but I’ve learned it’s joyful to have friends who come at life from a different angle, right here at home. And with God, the international scene is not nearly as scary as many people think. Many of us remember when Albania was the most closed country on earth, with atheism the official religion. When the door first opened a crack, there were all those strange, scary pictures of hundreds of young Albanian men clinging to ships, trying to get away to Italy. One man told my husband, “Albanians all own guns and beat their wives.”

Not so. God is at work in Albania, too. This past summer, in the little town of Erseke that we visit, nearly 2000 kids got a week of church camp, including camps for blind and Down Syndrome folks, with Albanian Christians leading them. I have shared a teaching friendship with an Albanian woman for over twelve years. This year she signs her letters, “Your sister in Christ.” I’m amazed and joyful.

***Lord God, open our eyes and our heart, and move our feet,  
to new friendships from You. Amen.***

**Nancy Ackles**



*“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters; He restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for His name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.”*

**(Psalm 23)**

One of my favorite parts of the Bible is the 23rd Psalm. I pray the Lord will guide me and protect my family to do what is right and protect us from all harm and help to keep us out of contemptuous situations.

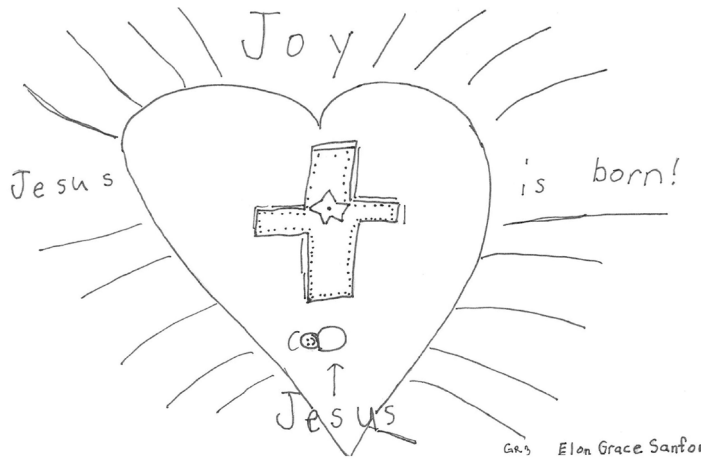
As many of you know, I have been involved in the Sports Car Racing industry for over 60 years. Prayer must be a strong part of a racer’s endeavor. Having crashed at 154 MPH myself, and having our son, Scott, crash Indy Cars at over 180 mph several times, we prayed a lot. Scott crashed A.J.Foyt’s Indy Car at the Indianapolis 500. He was fine, but out of racing for 3 months. Next race was Colorado Springs, Colorado. Unfortunately he crashed in turn 2 on the first lap, backing into the guardrail sustaining 100 G crash, sending him to the hospital for an MRI.

When I went to see him, his eyes went all white back in his head. It appeared he sustained serious head injuries, placing him in the ICU. Carol and I met the doctor at 8:00 a.m. the next morning, after calling our Evangelical Free Church in Connecticut. We had 400 members praying for his recovery. The bleeding of his head had stopped and 3 days later, he was released. He was back to Indy Car Racing 3 months later.

We thank God for helping us through difficult times in our lives. Our prayers were answered through our faith in Christ and the prayers of many. We give our praises to God!

*Dear Lord, in this Advent season, we praise and celebrate Jesus  
and strive to be more like Him. Amen.*

**Bob Sharp**



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Sunday, December 15, 2019

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## 3RD SUNDAY OF *Advent*

*“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.”*

(Psalm 116:15)

As I write this, Penny and I have, this morning, attended the graveside service for our beloved sister in Christ, Joan Johnson. Since memorial services are something pastors both lead and attend, we likely have a broader perspective on such services than most. Ps 116:15 says, “Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His saints.” I have become impressed and have come almost to expect God to show up in some perceptible way at the death of one who loved Him in life. More often than not, I have found that God shows up, in ways that are noticed by family and friends as ‘God incidents’.

This morning, Pastor Ron Hilliard invited the family and friends to reflect on Joan’s remarkable life, witness and ministry. Evrynn Crisafi reflecting on ‘Joan-isms’ remembered that Joan called her grandchildren “butterflies.” At that moment, a single beautiful bright yellow butterfly appeared by the graveside. A bit later, as the service was concluding, granddaughter Briley sang and led the gathered in singing that great hymn *How Great Thou Art*. As she sang, two bald eagles flew directly overhead.

Joan was laid to rest next to her first-born son, Eric, who died as he served his country in the Navy. Earlier this year her second born son, Colin, passed away serving his country on the Presidential detail of the Secret Service, having protected the lives of five Presidents (Bush, Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump). While Joan’s husband, Bob, spoke of her, and their marriage of 54 years and relationship of 61 years as the unfolding of God’s remarkable plan, I heard a mated pair of cardinals chipping back and forth to each other. Cardinals mate for life and have a special call or language between mated pairs. Bob said that he knew the first time they met that he would one day marry Joan.

My last observations glimpse of God’s presence and involvement in Joan’s life came from a story Joan’s daughter-in-law, Marissa, told of seeing a video of Joan on her birthday surrounded by her four children in the 1980’s. She spoke in that video of her desire for “lots of grandchildren” before any of her children had even thought of getting married. Today, Joan is remembered by 11 grandchildren. None of us were ready to let Joan go...but my sense today was that God himself attended her service and sought to comfort, encourage, and strengthen us in our sorrow. Ps 116:15 reminds me that as precious as Joan’s family and extended and adopted family were to her...she and her family are beloved by God and precious.

*Dear Lord, we thank You for how You show up in our lives and in the lives of the ones we love. During Advent, and every day, may we have eyes to see Your goodness and feel Your great love for us. Amen.*

**Lucky Arnold**

***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”***  
**(Galatians 5:22-23a)**

### **Prayer and Sharing Our Personal Faith Brings Joy to Others**

I would like to share the joy of seeing the Holy Spirit at work through prayer and personal faith testimonies like those in this devotional. My mother was grief stricken with the sudden loss of her beloved husband and the transition from her home to a senior care facility. She was angry, confused and her days had no direction. We would call and visit frequently, but nothing we said or did seemed to ease her struggle.

At a First Pres weekend retreat, we were invited to pray with an elder. I took the opportunity to ask Jane Sanders to pray for the well-being of my mother. Jane’s prayers articulated my concerns so well, it seemed as if she knew my mother.

I continued praying for my mother’s relief from her bouts of grief and depression and at one of these low points, I traveled to be with her. I brought her a “Jesus Calling” devotional that had been given to us by Annie Dougherty and encouraged my mother to read it. Not long after, I began sending my mother the First Pres Lenten and Advent devotionals. We started talking about the devotionals during our daily calls and oftentimes our calls ended with us praying together.

Earlier this year, my mother called to thank me for the Lenten Devotional, but I missed the call. The voicemail she left was a message of joy and thankfulness without a trace of the burdens from her former grief and despair. The devotionals proved to be a powerful force in replacing her grief, with the comfort and love that is always available from our Lord and Savior. Her healing was the result of prayers and reading the personal faith testimonies so many of you have shared in the Lenten and Advent devotionals. My mother left us to be with the Lord on July 17, but I will always have her joyful voicemail as a vivid reminder of what the Lord can do to change lives.

***Lord, we give thanks for Your steadfast love and mercy and for the power of the Holy Spirit to change lives. Help us to trust You in all things and to never underestimate how prayers and sharing our faith testimony can impact the lives of those around us. Amen.***

**Roger Bollier**

***“You make known to me the path of life;  
You will fill me with joy in Your presence.”  
(Psalm 16:11)***

My husband, Frank, and I met on an online dating site. We weren't supposed to have met because this particular site had a rule that when you listed the age of people you wanted to consider dating, you could only be a certain number of years older. Therefore, Frank lied about his age so he would only see the profiles of women under 50. I was 55 at the time and did not lie about my age. When his profile came up, I thought he was handsome and had a good story, so I sent him a message. He was not supposed to receive my message, but God intervened. He ended up calling me to say I sounded sweet but he wasn't interested in dating a woman my age because he didn't think I could keep up with him. I responded back telling him all of the things I do to take care of myself, and dared him to try to keep up with me. Men love a challenge, so he agreed to meet me. We fell in love at first sight. He never lied to me again (and I was thankful he was older than me because I didn't want someone younger) and he had trouble keeping up with me. A number of months into our relationship he told me that he wanted what I had; that I had a peace and joy like he had never seen before. Even though Frank believed in God, he did not have a personal relationship with Him. Through conversations with Lucky, Suds and me, he became a true believer and his joy overflowed and reached many of his friends for Christ.

There is a big problem in the world today. So many of us, like when I first met Frank, claim to be Christians but our lives do not reflect our devotion to Him. What is holding us back? It may be that we are secretly ashamed of our past and are not convinced that God totally loves us. We may know what God wants us to do, but still do whatever we want. We may want to trust God as our provider, but find it hard to actually give back to Him a portion of what He has entrusted to us. We may believe in heaven and hell, but sharing our faith is intimidating so our friends and acquaintances die without Christ (this just happened to me). We believe in God, but don't see a need to go to church regularly. Busyness and all of our worries have crowded out our intimacy with Jesus, and although we may not intentionally walk away, we find ourselves far from God.

I am normally a joy-filled person, but have found in recent months that I have been feeling very burdened for our church. In my position, I hear it all, and I want to fix it all. Lately it has been complaints about the building project, how we are always asking for money, concerns about the future of the church with Lucky leaving, what the direction for our church will be as we have a new vision frame, and how we end our services. This morning, before I started writing this devotion, the Lord convicted me to again to be joyful and release all of my cares to Him, because He is in control of everything. It is because of my relationship with Jesus that I hear His voice when I begin to stray. To know God intimately, to be a fully devoted disciple of Christ, means that we become increasingly aware of God's presence within us, including His provision, His power and His peace, and live for Him.

***Dear Lord, this Christmas season, as we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, may we all examine our lives and recommit them to following Jesus, and then share that joy with others. In Jesus' name, Amen.***

***“For you shall go out in joy and be lead back in peace, ...  
and all the trees of the field will clap their hands!”  
(Isaiah 55:12)***

I love to sing, but nowadays I hum more often. When I sing, I sing loudly, at home, in the kitchen, in the shower, in the car. It always made me joyful to sing out loud. My children were not especially accepting of my warbling, loudly or quietly. They never appreciated my musical trills! Actually, they never cared for my grand operatic style. My endeavors must not have been groovy enough for them!

At the age of four I found my singing voice. I would go around and share this amazing talent, a gift from God, with whoever was around to hear it. My sisters and cousins would ask, “How do you do that?” My four year old brain had no idea! I was simply mimicking our Aunt Josie. Aunt Josie would play the piano to accompany herself as she sang her heart out. Singing was her passion, having been professionally trained at the Julliard School of Music. She would share her love and joy of music with the entire family every time we assembled for holidays and celebratory dinners. During these special times I would have fun running around belting out one note for as long as I could. I truly believed I was an opera star in the making!

Many years later, my husband had been given two tickets to an opera at Avery Fisher Hall in Lincoln Center. They were a Christmas gift from one of his fifth grade students and the child’s parents. This young boy had applied, auditioned, and won a solo in this particular operatic performance. The evening was exciting and moving as operas always are. However, what came next was over the top! We met Christopher and his parents for a private backstage tour. It was amazing. We saw makeup rooms, dressing rooms, and vocal practice rooms. By the time we got to the actual stage, the audience had left the premises. The auditorium was totally deserted. Christopher grabbed my hand and led me to center stage and said, “Sing!” Wow! How did this youngster who just shared his talent, passion and gift know about my secret joy? We stood together eye to eye. I gathered up my courage, drew in a deep breath as Christopher motioned with his right arm for me to face forward. What had been empty seats was now spirit-filled. That single note flowed from my vocal cords so easily. My arms slowly raised themselves as a bird taking flight! To my surprise, I was able to hold it for a fairly long time. My inner child was smiling ear to ear, as I also imagined my deceased high school music teacher, Mr. Robinson, to be. What a gift! What a memory! To this day the thought promotes a wide smile and tears of joy. Thank you, Christopher, for sharing your joy. Thank you, Father God, for weaving this thread into my life’s tapestry.

I love to sing, but nowadays I hum more often. I hum in the kitchen, in the shower, in my car, while shopping. It always makes me joyful. My younger sister has spoken to our older sibling about what she perceives as a physiological tick; a worry our sister put to rest by simply saying, “Just ignore it. It makes her happy.”



I hum just about anywhere, doing just about anything. My musical repertoire is quite varied: contemporary, praise, Motown, blues. It's not unusual that I would be unaware of how loudly I might be humming because often it's an unconscious act. However, I'm overwhelmed with joy when I am brought back to earth by another shopper close to me humming along in unison, or on occasion, two part harmony. True joy!

*Dear Heavenly Father,*

*The love You give is constant. Your gifts are freely given. You have been my life's maestro, meticulously arranging and conducting happiness, contentment, and joy into my life. These are precious gifts for me to share. How joyful and thankful I am! May all of us be thankful for the gifts You have given us. May we use them for Your glory.*

**Sally Insinga**



***“Look! I stand at the door and knock.”***

**(Revelation 3:20)**

When I was in the island nation of Bahrain last month, one particular story of faith distinctly stood out among many we heard. A chaplain in a Christian hospital in the capital city of Manama told us about an older woman who was nearing her death. She asked to see him. When he walked into her hospital room, she drew him close so he could hear her. She whispered to him, “I am a secret believer in Jesus Christ. I have been my whole life. I have been too afraid to tell anyone. Everyone thinks I am a Muslim, but I am a follower of Jesus Christ. Would you please pray for me before I die?” The chaplain told us that this was not the first secret believer he had encountered on his job. He thinks that there are hundreds of such secret believers in his country and throughout other Persian Gulf Countries, too.

Saudi Arabia has been forced to open up its society and relax some of its strict laws because of lower oil prices and increasing international pressure on its foreign policies. Women are now being allowed to drive. The Saudi women who have become secret believers in Jesus can now leave their houses, drive their cars, and meet other secret believing women for the first time in different parts of their cities and even country. They are rejoicing in their new ability to have Christian fellowship.

In the West, we need to become a lot less afraid to talk about our faith and matters of God with others. We need to learn how to share the intimate and secret parts of our hearts with others. In general, non-Western people love to talk about God. We in the West need to take more time to listen to each other, talking gently and reverently to each other, or even secretly sharing our stories of faith in the middle of the night if we need to. Most people have a story to tell about a personal encounter they have had with God. However, they need a friend with whom to talk in order to take that experience to a new level of understanding. Hopefully, that conversation will lead to a deeper understanding of God’s Son, Jesus Christ.

As you go about your day, be alert to the presence of Christ in your life and others’ as well. Ask God to give you vision and understanding from above. He is as active today as he was 2000-plus years ago when he walked the earth. However, we need to have ears to hear and eyes to see him. As Jesus told the Apostle John in the book of Revelation, “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.” (Revelations 3:20).

***May the Lord be with you as you open the doors of your heart  
to God and others, now and forevermore. Amen.***

**Dan McNerney, Frontier Fellowship**

***“Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.”***

**(Philippians 4:4-6)**

Several years ago, I shared verse 6 about not being anxious with a friend awaiting a difficult surgery. By sharing the verse, it became my own and has encouraged me through trying times. Later, I became more aware of verse 4: “Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice!” and realized that the transforming peace of God is directly connected to the rejoicing in the Lord. When we rejoice and share our joy, “the Lord is near” and transforms our thinking and actions.

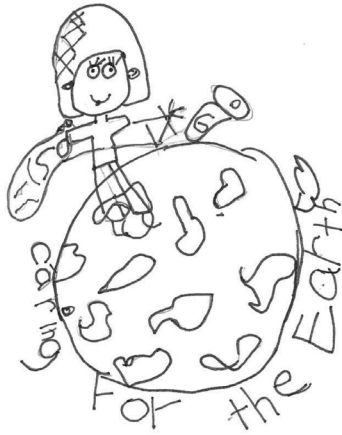
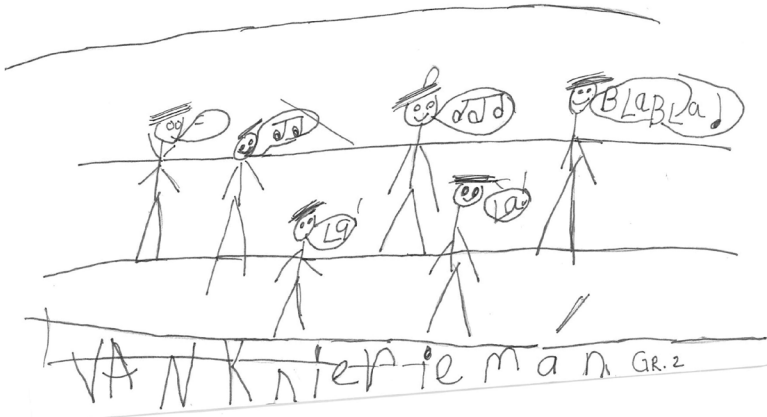
Sharing our joy blesses not only those we share with, but in return blesses us. As a church, First Pres shares joy with our global mission partners who, in turn, share their joy with others. In Berlin, I recently met a young man from Iraq, who grew up Muslim and became a refugee in Germany after his family was killed. While working for Serve the City in Berlin, he met our mission partner, Hannah Valery. He began attending Brucke Berlin, the church plant we support in West Berlin, and four months ago professed faith in Christ and was baptized. He is rejoicing in the Lord and sharing joy with all he meets. When I met him, he was leading a team of volunteers from all over the world as they prepared sandwiches and distributed them to the homeless.

Where can you share joy with others during Advent? Bring a friend to the Christmas Cantata, invite your neighbors to a Christmas Open House, pray for harried shoppers and clerks as you shop and “rejoice in the Lord always” so that you have joy to share.

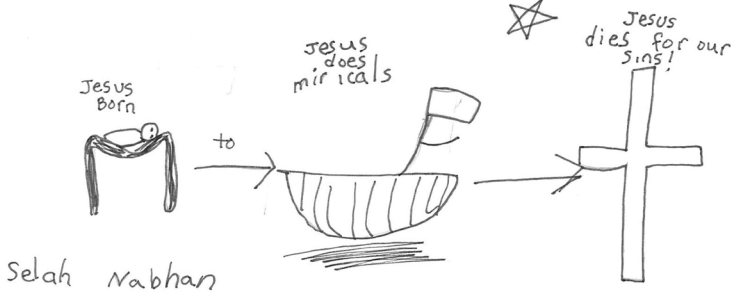
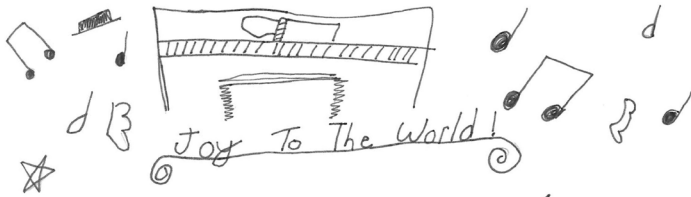
Who needs to hear the Good News so they too have joy to share? Pray and ask God to bring others into your path so you can share with them.

***Dear Heavenly Father, as we rejoice this Christmas, may we feel Your nearness and sense of peace as we share Your love, joy and peace with others. Amen.***

**Sara McDonnell**



Arielle  
Coine  
Gr. 1



***“O Lord, you have searched me and known me.”***  
**(Psalm 139:1)**

**Yada**—The meaning of “Yada” in Hebrew – *“To know, be known, and deeply respected”* – that intimate connection is every human being’s greatest desire – one given by God from creation so that life would be experienced abundantly – soaking up His love in every detail in our day – knowing Him deeply in every emotion and rejoicing at the never-ending revelation of Himself for us to just be enthralled by ... from the tiniest flower, to black holes in space – from the happiest day of our lives, to the gut wrenching heartache we experience because of the loss of something good. He knows us completely – and loves us still. He’s given us the gift to know others deeply to see His creativity and personality in how He made them – and has planted in them a culture, a language that expresses a unique way of thinking about something, an environment that is unique around them – in order for them to know Him and express His praise in a very beautiful set of ways. In Zimbabwe – we dance for Him. In Tennessee, we have potlucks and bean suppers together to celebrate Him. In Oman, we share stories of Him.

Beyond culture, every human being has been created to interact with God in a unique way as well. Each person has a different personality, set of taste buds, – and a story in which God has entered .... That person may see it and they may not, but God is still all around...reminding them... that they are known and loved beyond their imagination. If we see our Jesus in someone else’s life, let’s point it out – not matter how upfront it may feel it is a chance for them to see it too – and know such joy. No one has ever refused being valued. And each face has the likeness of the face of God...to remind us who they came from – and who they belong to. This is the great Adoption written about in Paul’s letter to the Romans 8:15 “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” “ Yada yada yada.

***Abba! Father! Help us know You and be known by You and see Your face in others as we celebrate the birth of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.***

**Julie Christensen**

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Sunday, December 22, 2019

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# 4TH SUNDAY OF Advent

*“...This is a sacred day before our Lord.  
Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”*  
(Nehemiah 8:10)

Every day is a day for joy. Some days rejoicing comes naturally, but even in moments of sorrow, there is reason to celebrate. Our joy is not in our circumstances, our joy is in God! We have a Heavenly Father who offers us hope, love, and a purpose when we follow Him.

As a community of believers, we have been tasked with taking care of one another; sharing and spreading the Joy of the Lord as our primary mission on Earth. A handshake, a hug, an invite, a smile, a meal, a note of encouragement – sharing joy can come in all forms. We are not made to walk through this journey alone. When we connect with those around us and share the love of Christ, we are doing God's work. I cannot count the times a friend or loved one has sent me a message with words I needed to hear in the exact moment I needed to hear them. That's not coincidence. That's God. As I've grown older, I've learned that when someone enters my mind 'for no apparent reason,' it is important to take the time to spend a few moments in prayer over that person and then to follow up with some form of communication.

This Christmas season, I encourage you to take notice of those little nudges from God. Check in on your fellow brothers and sisters--reach out and share the Joy of the Lord.

*Gracious and Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your joy- without it, we would not know Your peace, Your strength or Your love. We are grateful that we call You Father and that we can lean on You in all circumstances. Please help us to remember to keep our focus on You and Your Son as we celebrate this Christmas Season. Amen.*

Rebecca Nelson

***“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”***

**(Luke 2:10-11)**

A text came through my phone at 10:30 on a Monday night. It was a picture and an update from my friend, Brittany, assistant area director for Palm Beach County Young Life. The picture was of the ninety plus students that had come to high school Club that night to hang out and hear the Gospel message. You see, Brittany texted me because she was so very excited. She has poured three years of her life into her job, immersing herself in many of these students' lives since they were middle schoolers. She had built relationships and was sharing the joy of the Lord with them.

Joy comes from the Holy Spirit. It is an attitude of the heart. It is deep; deeper than just happiness. It is expectant and hopeful. It sets believers apart. It allows us to see the beauty of Christ in His Word and in the world. As disciples of Christ, the beauty of Christ should be seen in us, as well. Brittany has this beautiful joy and it can't help but exude from her as she shares hope with this next generation.

As the angel said to the shepherds that first Christmas, the source of this joy is the good news of Christ. We have a Savior who rescued us from our sin and has conquered death. His joy is in us as we abide in Him. This Advent season, may God fill our hearts to overflowing as we share joy to the world.

***Lord, thank you for this deep reservoir of joy You have given us.  
May the joy we have in You be evident to all. Amen.***

**Becky Isiminger**



*“We, though many, are one body in Christ”*

(Romans 12:5)

The theme of this book of Advent devotionals is “Sharing Joy,” a phrase which implies we have someone with whom to share our joy. It is a reference to the community to which we belong. In our current culture, a Facebook post including a photo of smiling faces and a caption featuring exclamation points counts as “sharing joy,” but our theology requires us to dig more deeply into the meanings of both “sharing” and “joy.”

Paul addresses the issue in his letter to the Roman church saying:

“We, though many, are **one body in Christ**, and **individually members one of another**. ... Let love be genuine.... Love one another with brotherly affection.... **Rejoice in hope**, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.... 15 **Rejoice with those who rejoice**, weep with those who weep.” (Taken from Romans 12:5-15)

Judaism and Christianity are faiths that emphasize membership in a community. Here in his letter to the Romans, Paul sets rejoicing together in the context of membership in the one body of Christ. It is as a community that loves one another, that is patient with each other and has suffered together that they also rejoice together. Their common suffering gives depth and meaning to their common rejoicing.

Our culture meanwhile emphasizes the individual and ignores suffering. We Americans cherish our independent pursuit of happiness even to the point of choosing to abort our children or to end our own lives in the case of illness or old age. This emphasis on individual happiness can result in loneliness and isolation for all ages and in deep confusion for young people who find themselves with so many choices to make and so few trustworthy guides.

Being part of a faith community helps all of us. We find help in reading the Scriptures, encouragement from those who have encountered our challenges before, companionship in suffering. We help each other in hard times, sharing resources and comfort.

It is because we are part of an intimate community in which we feel known and loved that we can share both our suffering and our joy. If we do not know each other well, we cannot share well. With technology invading our relationships, this type of community is less likely to develop. If we want it, we have to concentrate on getting to know each other. How can we share our joy unless we take the time to listen to each other?

In this season of Advent, we remember that Jesus cared enough about knowing us, that He took on a human body in order to enter into deep relationship with us, in order to share our sorrow and our joy. He invested time in personal relationships with those around Him.

*Dear God, help us to honor You by looking for those relationships in which You are calling us to invest. At Advent this year, help us seek to know each other better and to share each other's joys and sorrows.*

*Let's be one body! Amen.*

Elizabeth Nielsen



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Wednesday, December 25, 2018

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# Christmas Day

*“We know that in all things God works for good with those who love Him”*

**(Romans 8:28)**

## Sharing Joy

As I prepared to write this year’s Advent devotional on “Sharing Joy,” it’s exactly six years since my husband, Bob, fell and sustained a brain injury.

This has been a treacherous journey. However, there have been many undeniable blessings along the way. I’ve discovered that life is not a series of peaks and valleys; rather it is parallel paths of pain and joy.

Sometimes joy is wrapped in happiness. Consider the joy of Mary upon receiving the news that she would give birth to Messiah, or the joyful message of the angels to the shepherds. Yet, when Jesus endured the cross, He did so “for the joy set before Him” (Hebrews 12:2). He saw beyond His pain and knew there was a greater purpose for His suffering—to save us from our sins (Matthew 1:21). I wonder, was Mary’s happiness tempered by the babe’s mission?

Joy is a hallmark of Christian fruitfulness. James gives us a clue as to how this fruit is cultivated, “Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds . . . the testing of your faith produces perseverance . . . so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4, NIV).

It would be easy to fall into despair over my husband’s injury. Yet, we have been supernaturally sustained these many years—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. God has provided for us and helped us persevere by His Spirit and His people. There is joy in knowing we are not alone.

*Dear Lord, when we face the trials of life, help us recall the ways You have already worked for our good. Help us remember Your blessings with joyful hearts this Advent season. Amen.*

**Sarah Keith**



# Christmas Schedule

## **Thursday, December 5**

### **LADIES' CHRISTMAS BRUNCH**

10:00 AM – Noon | Fellowship Hall  
All ladies invited. Bring a dish to share.

## **Sunday, December 8**

### **CHRISTMAS CANTATA**

9:30 & 11:15 AM | Sanctuary

## **Monday, December 9**

### **CHRISTMAS POPS & SING-A-LONG**

7:00 PM | Sanctuary

\$12 in advance at [www.firstpresnpb.org](http://www.firstpresnpb.org)  
or \$15 at the door. Under 18 free.

## **Tuesday, December 10**

### **WOMEN'S MORNING CIRCLE**

### **CHRISTMAS BRUNCH**

11:15 AM | Fellowship Hall  
All ladies invited. Bring a dish to share.

## **Friday, December 13**

## **Saturday, December 14**

### **AN ANGEL'S STORY**

6:00 PM | Dec. 13 | The Way

4:00 & 7:00 PM | Dec. 14 | The Way

Seating is limited. Tickets available in  
courtyard and office. Suggested donation  
\$10 Adults / \$5 Children

## **Tuesday, December 24**

### **CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES**

5:00 PM | Family Service | Sanctuary

7:00 & 9:00 PM | Candlelight | Sanctuary

Childcare available at

5:00 & 7:00 PM



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