

2017 Advent Devotional



THOUGHTS ON ADVENT

WHEN TIME STANDS STILL

We read for many reasons. We read words, hoping to be educated or entertained. We look into the glow of our screens, our eyes scanning newsfeeds or social media updates. We turn pages, engrossed in a gripping narrative or simply to pass the time while we wait.

These words are different. You aren't reading them for any of these reasons. And if you are, you're likely to be disappointed.

These words haven't been written to educate or entertain, but to enlighten. They offer no political analysis, and they can't be summed up in the 140 characters of a Tweet. They are part of a larger narrative, a timeless one that began thousands of years ago and extends into eternity. These words aren't meant to help you pass the time.

They're meant to stop time altogether, to slow your busy day to a halt. Stop, pause, breathe, and read. Reflect. And then, as time unwinds and picks up speed again, perhaps you'll move through it with a new perspective.

Time works differently here. Advent, for the rush of activity that it tends to herald, is a season of waiting - waiting for God to manifest within time, and space, where God can be touched and seen and known. That's what we're waiting for. We wait together in these pages, in these words written by your friends and neighbors. There is community to be found in these devotions, a community that you're a part of.

And waiting is always better when we don't wait alone.

Blessings,

Rev. Seth Ethan Carey



Rev. Seth Ethan Carey

Senior Minister

First Congregational Church
of Glen Ellyn

seth@fccge.org





- November 30- Carolyn Lawrence
- December 1- Rev. Carl Gray
- December 2- Gwen Miller
- December 3- Jeff Haeger
- December 4- Emily Gaertner
- December 5- Joe Fortunato
- December 6- Sara Waterloo
- December 7- David Crane
- December 8- Lara Mamminga
- December 9- Kevin Mertz
- December 10- Celia Rodee
- December 11- Rev. Kendra Joyner Miller
- December 12- Melissa Cliff
- December 13- Mark Lutz
- December 14- Alyssa Springer
- December 15- Clara Hughes
- December 16- Paula Rada
- December 17- Sherry Flugel
- December 18- Mike Sear
- December 19- Daemon Holst
- December 20- Abby Fate
- December 21- Greg Shreck
- December 22- Jeannine Kannegiesser
- December 23- Geoffrey Shelledy
- December 24- Rev. Melissa Riley

TABLE OF CONTENTS



FIRST DAY OF ADVENT- NOVEMBER 30

PSALM 80

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine
forth

CAROLYN LAWRENCE

Carolyn's favorite passages for Advent reflection is Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). Is the seminary intern for FCCGE this year, studying at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. When not at church or school, she enjoys reading, cuddling with her cat, and hiking.

A birth is a time of great joy; it's a time to celebrate new life being brought forth in the world. But it's also a time of anticipation. From the moment the pregnancy test reads 'positive', the soon-to-be mother must carefully attend to her body's needs. She must watch everything that she consumes for fear of harming the growing life in her. She and her partner will baby-proof the house, read up on the latest safety standards for their crib and, if there's time left over, mull over parenting and pregnancy books together.

The Psalmist, too, is in a time of anticipation. He sees a world suffering, a world where God's people has drunk tears by the bowlful. The Psalmist yearns for God's saving actions on this earth through the Son of Man. He, like us, wants our relationship with God restored. I'm reminded of the lyrics from the Christmas hymn O Little Town of Bethlehem: "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight". Jesus' birth is the fulfillment of the anticipation by the Psalmist, of all those then and today who yearn for restoration with God.

What are you anticipating this Christmas season? The joy of reconnecting with family under the tree? Will this season be a time of pain, where the absence of a loved one is felt keenly during the holiday? Do you anticipate the stress of planning, of present-buying, of feast-cooking? As we begin this season, put yourself in the Psalmist's shoes. Anticipate Christ's birth, the restoration of God with all of us. Look forward to December 25 in anticipation of God's saving grace, the best gift ever given to us.

Prayer

Holy God, Thank You for the gift of Christ, the gift You so lovingly present to us. May we anticipate Your grace, Your love, with every fiber of our being as we begin this season of Advent. Restore us, Lord God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. Amen.



CARL GRAY

Carl is a retired Presbyterian minister who, with his wife Donna, has been attending FCCGE for several years. Carl and Donna are also proud parents and grandparents splitting their time between family in Wheaton and Pennsylvania.



SECOND DAY OF ADVENT - DECEMBER 1

ZECHARIAH 14:1-9

See a day is coming for the Lord... On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives... On that day there shall be continuous day... On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem...

During the season of Advent at FCCGE we often sing a Taize chant before and after the Pastoral Prayer, *Wait for the Lord, whose day is near. Wait for the Lord; be strong, take heart!*"

I believe Zechariah got it half wrong. The day we awaited was a day of victory for a Lord who commands an army of angels in defeating Israel's enemies by perpetrating the atrocities of war: looting, raping and destroying ancient civilizations. (See the full text of Zechariah 14:1-9)

And I believe Zechariah got it half right. While the means cannot be justified, the end - a day when all things will be united in God and life-giving water and light will be available for all - is where Advent leads. In that hope we take heart and do not despair.

We, of course, know where Advent leads. It leads to Jesus with us as a fully vulnerable human being, not a warrior king but a prince of peace; it leads to a day not of destruction but of acts of kindness, justice, and love.

As a retired pastor I now feel less constrained in revealing my own political persuasion and can tell you that I am not comfortable with this day in which I am living. I am not at peace with our nation's immigration policy, with the withdrawal of support for transgender sisters and brothers serving our country, with the degradation of protection of the environment, with threats of military response rather than diplomacy with increasing tolerance of racism. I need the promise of that new day more than ever; and I need to participate in its advent.

Prayer

Lord help me wait, be strong, and take heart. Amen.

THIRD DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 2

PSALM 80:3

**Restore us, O God;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.**

We don't get to control most of what happens to us. This past year, as the ramifications of a health condition mixed with the continual process of recovering from childhood trauma, the unfairness of it all became staggering. I felt like I was a ship that had become unmoored, lost deep in a tumultuous sea. In the darkest moments I wasn't able to see or believe that there was light. It was like it had been turned off, the connection lost. An empty hole existed where my faith used to be. How do we keep on living and loving when silence seems to endure? How do we share the stories of our lives, the parts that make us turn away from others, fearful of rejection or unhelpful words?

We begin by believing that we deserve connection, even if we don't feel it. We reach out in small ways, to those closest to us, the ones we know will love us and carry us forward. We might ask for help from professionals, such as counselors or pastors.

Like a person drowning, pulled out of the waters and revived, I found my way to belief again. It didn't come by forcing myself to go through the motions, though. I went to church a little but mostly I stayed away, exploring other healing activities like spending time in nature and attending meditation retreats. We can't know ahead of time what it will take to heal or recover from the pain of being human. It is mostly a stumbling along in the dark, arms reaching out, hoping that we will reach some solid place once more. In quiet moments, when I couldn't yet feel God again, I would send out a tiny prayer asking for my faith to be restored.

Prayer

We pray Lord that even in the midst of our personal and collective suffering, you would be the anchor of our souls, drawing us back to ourselves over and over, restoring our faith, our hope, and our connection to ourselves, to each other, and to You. Amen.



GWEN MILLER

Gwendolyn joined FCCGE in 2016 with her husband. She works in the child abuse prevention field and has been a leader in the local Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome Support group. She is also a member of the physically inclusive dance company, MOMENTA. Gwendolyn enjoys reading, being fed, and adventuring in the woods.

FOURTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 3

PSALM 80:1

**Hear us, Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,
shine forth**

There is never time in the future in which we will work out our salvation. The challenge is in the moment; the time is always now. ~ James A. Baldwin

God helps those who help themselves. ~ Algernon Sydney

How often in our lives do we look back and think, “If only I had seen that coming?” What steps would we have taken if we only had the perspective to heed the subtle signals of an impending plight or a predicament that is now seemingly ungovernable?

Many, if not most, of the changes we make in our lives are “reactive”. We alter our diet and begin to exercise only after our physician has issued a foreboding diagnosis. We implement a new policy at work in response to an egregious act or oversight that has devastated our organization. We allow ourselves to be distracted by trivial diversions as we tune out injustices and acts of tyranny, rhetorically disagreeing with but taking no action against those who rule through fear and hate.

When the only impetus for change is hindsight, it is likely the damage has already been done, sometimes only after we’ve hit rock bottom. However, when we open ourselves to God’s call and begin to look and listen, we are able to see that we can make a difference in our lives by initiating change proactively. We can make a difference in our world by taking measures to mitigate the damage before it becomes irreversible.

The term “Advent” is a variation of the Latin word that means “coming”. During this season in the life of the church, we anticipate the arrival of our Savior, who came to save us from our sin and perhaps from ourselves. But if we truly seek salvation, we need to look inward, open our hearts and minds, and look and listen for the signs that lead to the righteous path God calls us to walk.

Prayer

Dear Lord, grant to us both clarity that we may see and hear the signs that changes are necessary, and courage that we may follow the call to make those changes in our lives and our world. Amen.



JEFF HAEGER

Jeff, has served as the Associate for Music Ministry at First Congregational since 2001. In addition to his duties at FCCGE, he teaches music in Naperville and has composed several pieces for both choir and solo piano. In his free time, he enjoys spending time with his family.

FIFTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 4

MICHA 4:4

but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

In the musical Hamilton, there's a verse that says:

“Like the scripture says:
'Everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree
And no one shall make them afraid.'
They'll be safe in the nation we've made
I wanna sit under my own vine and fig tree
A moment alone in the shade
At home in this nation we've made
One last time”

As a Senior at Glenbard West High School, I've found the vine and fig tree that I've sat under for the past 4 years. A place where I've grown academically and socially, a true moment I've spent shaded from many of the harsh realities of the world. But, as its name serves, a moment is fleeting. These past four years have been filled with successes and stumbles, but now, I'm nearing the time to venture out beyond the vine and fig tree that I know. It's difficult to see all the activities I've enjoyed happening 'one last time': the last first day of school, the last band practice, the last Homecoming. All these 'lasts' finally culminating to the last time I can say I'm a student at Glenbard West. Ends are always scary and sometimes, beginnings can be even more frightening. It's terrifying to say the least, to know that I'm at the cusp of the next chapter of my life. That, in a year from now, I'll be at a college somewhere with friends whose names I don't know now. While all this is daunting, I've come to realize how important it is to take that moment alone in the shade and to enjoy life right now instead of worrying about the beginnings and the endings. How important it is to soak in each moment, right here and right now.

Because, after all, we never know when one more time might turn into one last time.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the opportunities to live in the moment and enjoy where we are, here and now. Give us the strength to let go and the courage to open new doors ahead of us. Amen.



EMILY GAERTNER

Emily is a Senior at Glenbard West High School. In her free time, she likes to play piano, go on walks with her dog, and hang out with her friends. At school, she is President of Glenbard West STEM Club and West Students Making a Difference, Vice President of National Honors Society, as well as a member of the Model United Nations team.



SIXTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 5

MICHA 4:8

Do not hold against us the sins of past generations. May your mercy come quickly to meet us. For we are in desperate need.

Early in autumn this year we suffered 3 horrific natural disasters (Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria) and the deadliest shooting rampage in US history.

Autumnal hurricanes are not unusual. But many climatologists concluded that the effects of these storms on Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico were intensified by the combination of overbuilding, poor urban planning, lack of appropriate stormwater management and misuse of natural resources. Did we exacerbate the problem by abuse and neglect of God's gifts of creation? In our collective arbitrary response, we share blame for the effects of these disasters on our fellows.

The Las Vegas shooting rampage, not "natural" in any sense, is remarkable because of the number of dead and wounded. Past seemingly unimaginable shootings (too numerous to list) now cause us to first feel numb, then helpless and desperate.

Yet to call such an event "evil" provides an excuse for all who stand by mute. Some argue evil cannot be legislated, despite our laws against murder, consumer fraud, and the like. Opponents of reproductive rights refer to abortion as "inherently evil" and seek legislative prohibitions; many argue against reasonable restrictions on firearms, reading only the portion of the Second Amendment that supports their world view.

But the debate over the nature of evil is not only political. Does evil exist naturally in Man? Are we to be punished for the sins of our ancestors? Why do bad things happen to good people?

The initial reaction to Las Vegas was to try to discern the motives of the shooter to try to "make sense" of a senseless act. Religions tend to try to describe evil as a turning away from God, but that doesn't explain harm to the innocent.

Evil is manifested unintentionally when we fail to protect ourselves with reasonable restrictions on unfettered rights. Neglect and poor judgment differ in scale but constitute evil nevertheless.

In this season we recall Micah's request for God's mercy to "come quickly...for we are in great need." God created the world and gave us her Son to redeem us and to prevent evil from prevailing in this world.

Prayer

God the Protector of the innocent, let us know your presence in our lives amidst evil that we cannot comprehend, and help us to eliminate the evil caused by our poor judgment. Amen.



JOE FORTUNATO

Joe and his wife of 39 years, Linda Davenport, joined FCCGE in 2007. They have lived in Wheaton since 1984. Their 3 children live nearby. Daughter Allie Beyer is married to Justin Beyer, and they live in Carol Stream with daughter Lily and son Quinn. Allie and Justin are members of FCCGE. Daughter Dana Fortunato is married to Nate Lanthrum, and they live in St. Charles with their son Joseph. Son Paul Fortunato lives on the north side of Chicago. Joe and Linda love to travel and to spend time with family and friends. Joe's book, "Getting Started as a Real Estate Lawyer", was published by the ABA in 2015





SARA WATERLOO

Sara lives in Glen Ellyn where she and her husband Tim raised their three sons. They have been active members at FCCGE since 1985.

A former elementary school teacher, Sara currently enjoys participating with the Sr. High students in their Sunday morning discussion group.

SEVENTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 6

ISAIAH 40:1-4

O God, the heathen have invaded your land. They have desecrated your holy Temple and left Jerusalem in ruins....

They shed your blood like water all through Jerusalem...

Lord, pay the other nations back seven times for all the insults they have hurled at you.

Help us, O, God and save us; rescue us and forgive our sins

I can imagine God thinking, “Really, people?? What a mess! Desecration? Violence? Retribution? Yes, I will protect you but not through these means. What kind of Parent do you think I am? Instead, I have a plan that will soften hearts.”

Those who know me know that I love children – especially babies. Always have. It is an affinity born from awe at the purity of their being. Hold a baby and feel your heart soften. Look at a baby and see their innocence. As long as I can remember I wanted to be a mother and I am so grateful that desire was fulfilled.

My own childhood was conflicting as I had parents with opposing styles. For the main, it was critical and demanding versus compassionate and accepting. I spent the majority of my life trying to be perfect enough to please my mother while I felt safe and affirmed with my father just as I was. No doubt, I am the person I am today because of both influences but it was my father’s softened heart that kept my faith alive.

Old influences die hard and at times, raising my own children, I had to struggle and ask myself, “What kind of parent do you want to be?”

I was called to shake off old hurts and BE the example I had once needed. Not easy. Never perfect.

Our three sons are now grown – strong men with soft and compassionate hearts.

How clever of God to deliver his protection through the birth of a baby. No resistance, just a message of pure love. What a gift Jesus was – a “weapon” far stronger than any act of violent revenge. Instead, a lasting message to soften hearts and remind us of a love and peace beyond our human understanding.

Prayer

Dear God,

At this Advent Season help us all to be parents to our fellow man –changing the world one softened heart at a time. Amen.



EIGHTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 7

ISAIAH 11:4

...but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth, he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

DAVID CRANE

David's passion is nature, so he resonates with this psalm as it speaks directly to the connection between the natural world and our soul's place with God. His wife Sandy and David are parents of two teenage children and he works as a Project Manager for a construction company. Their family loves to travel, so they are always eager to chart their next adventure.

The Thessalonians were some of the very first Christians, living during a period soon after Jesus' death and resurrection. This was a time of much uncertainty, stress and fear, with the early followers not sure what the future would hold. Those emotions may hit close to home for many of us in today's unsettled world. Despite our efforts to bring the light of love to the injustices all around us, affecting real change can be stubbornly difficult.

In Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians, he recognizes how critical their faith and endurance meant to the fledgling Christian movement. If they had given in to the many outside forces conspiring against them and began to doubt the truth in their hearts, other new Christians may have followed suit. I can imagine that they must have struggled with how difficult it was to maintain their belief in the new messiah. Understanding the roll of faith and endurance is a critical component to any movement toward a new and better world.

When frustrated by the momentum of something I am trying to change (global warming for one) it is easy to feel small and weak. The term I often use is "what difference can I really make"? The answer to that question jumps out at me when looking at how Paul addressed the Thessalonians. He spoke of faith, love, hope and power. He brought them back to the messages repeated time and again in Jesus' teachings. He let the Thessalonian's know that while they may not realize it, their faith in "the living and true God" and his "Son from heaven" was inspiring Christians in other areas. So for me, looking inside to the power and love of God rather than outside at the size of the issue is the way forward. The Thessalonians could never have known how critical their steadfast faith would be for the generations of Christians to follow. They played a key role in setting the stage for Christianity's early growth, leading to a current home for millions of followers around the world.

While none of us can say how the future will play out, following our passions with faith and endurance just might start a ripple that turns into a wave generations from now. The same power of God that the Thessalonians turned to is also there for each and every one of us.

Prayer

May the power of my passions, born of God's love, carry me through any resistance in the outside world. I focus on the faith that my actions will endure in the face of any injustice. Amen.

NINTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 8

JEREMIAH 1:5

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the
nations.

I gave birth to two December babies, so aside from the usual Christmas nostalgia, my thoughts this time of year often drift back to the days before our first and second daughters were born. As my belly swelled, my back ached, and the days before my delivery drew ever nearer, I wondered about the baby I carried. Would she have hair? Her Daddy's piercing blue eyes? My nose? Would she be fussy? Calm? How would we know what she needed? The uncertainties abounded.

Those precious babies (who were mostly bald, did end up with Daddy's blue eyes, and were relatively calm infants) are about to turn 9 and 11. And though the features of their faces and their personalities are now as well known to me as my own, there is still a sense of uncertainty and unknowing as we approach the tween/teen phase of their childhoods. Will she need braces? Will she be moody? Should we let her chase her dream or protect her from disappointment? How will we know when to step in or let her learn from her own mistakes? It turns out this parenting thing doesn't get any easier.

What comfort there is, then, in knowing that God has always known us intimately. From the days when we were but cell clusters in our mother's wombs, our place in God's kingdom was already set. God does not fret about who we are or who we will become. Instead, with faith in our goodness, God sets us apart to be a "prophet to the nations", a bearer of peace, a light to the world. With God there is no uncertainty, no unknowing, only love.

Prayer

Loving God, Mother of us all, your knowledge of our innermost beings and your vision for our place in your kingdom bring certainty and peace to our anxious selves. May your wisdom be my guide with each unknown phase ahead, allowing me to trust as you do in the goodness of my children and their future as members of your kingdom of love. And please, Lord, since you already know them so well, can you give me heads up on the braces? Amen.



LARA MAMMINGA

Lara, inspired by a UCC daily devotional, began attending FCCGE with her family in the spring of 2012 and became members shortly thereafter. Lara and her high-school sweetheart/husband John live in their hometown of Batavia and have three girls, Lily (10), Joy (8), and Alice (5). She loves singing in the choir, song-leading, and co-leading two community groups with her husband John.

TENTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 9

MARK 11:27-12:12

They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?" Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'"³²But if we say, 'Of human origin' ..." (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

When Jesus threw the money changers out of the Temple, it was seen as a provocation and challenge to the Pharisees' source of power. These recent events in the Temple motivated the Pharisees and scribes to confront Jesus in the temple courts:

"By what authority are you doing these things? "

Regardless of the context, "by what authority" is obviously not a friendly way to start a conversation. This question was meant to entrap and condemn Jesus, because Jesus was challenging an existing power structure through his teaching.

Upon reading this scripture I became focused on the idea of authority in relationship to power. Specifically, I thought back to a recent discussion I had about a book titled, "Thank You For Being Late," by Thomas Friedman. Friedman argues we all have power and are the most powerful we have ever been. He attributes this to the consequences of digital globalization and the rise of cyberspace. He states that, "We have entered a realm where everyone is connected but no one is in charge....No police, no judge, no courts." This is of great concern to me. Never before has one person had so much power to do harm or good.

People have infinite resources at their finger tips and instant access to all types of information. This makes them very powerful. Many times these resources are leveraged to do amazing things; however, there is a great danger tied to interactions that only occur in cyberspace. Self interest and validation of values are driving factors that steer our decision making. Insulated in cocoons constructed from social and mainstream media feeds, blogs, and friends with shared opinions, we remain rarely challenged in these spaces to reflect on our thoughts and actions. Just as Jesus's question about John the Baptist forced the Pharisees to reflect on their motivations and exposed the emptiness of the power to which they clung, we too should stop, reflect, and examine the true motivations of our actions.

Prayer

Dear God, please be with us on life's challenging journey. Help us to pause, reflect, and ask the difficult questions. Amen.



KEVIN MERTZ

Kevin lives in Glen Ellyn with his wife Jennifer and his children Spencer and Samantha. He worked as an educator for the first half of his career. Kevin now works for a large not-for-profit company in financial services. He loves music and to travel and is happy to have found a faith community in FCGE.





ELEVENTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 10

2PETER 3:14

Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish.

CELIA RODEE

Celia, who joined FCCGE in 2000, has served as Moderator and has chaired the Parish Life and Endowment Committees and Silent/LIVE Auction fundraisers. Celia loves to cook and bake and shares that passion through the Kitchen Chix, Ministry of Meals and cooking for PADS. Celia and her husband Peter Cooper are an interfaith couple and are also members of Congregation Etz Chaim in Lombard. Celia keeps busy on both ends of the train line, as an Executive Director at JP Morgan Chase and as President of the Board of Glen Ellyn Children's Resource Center. She is committed to seeking ways to 'build a longer table...'.


I had four years of High School Latin. It has not been the most useful of languages. Other than the Vatican, Latin is not an official language. But, it is invaluable in doing the NY Times crossword puzzle, and proved useful when learning plant names in my botany classes.

Latin did inform me that the word ADVENT derives from *ad-+venire* "to come." The word "Advent" describes the journey, not the destination. Yet, like most, when I think about the Christmas season, I can't help but focus on the event, itself. Christmas Eve, Christmas morning, Christmas Day. Gifts for everyone from Aunt Jessie to the postman. Preparing and sharing a lovely dinner, sweet treats galore, eggnog, and of course a dazzlingly decorated tree! But the word "Advent" should remind us that waiting and anticipating is its essence. Peter counsels us to be present, not to buy presents.

In the midst of the Advent season, I often proclaim, "well, Mary wasn't ready for the baby Jesus to arrive, so why should I be?" That is a way for me to inject humor into my self-invoked season of stress and hustle and bustle. But, I suspect it is I who am really missing the point.

So this year, during this blessed time while I await the coming of the Prince of Peace, in the form of an innocent, vulnerable infant born to poor parents, I will endeavor to embrace the peace and stillness that inhabits Advent. As the daylight grows shorter, let me find time to pause and look up at the night sky. I will still embrace the season and bake some love into dozens of cookies and meals for people I love, and even some who are guests at our PADS site. But, as I await the arrival of the baby, let me stop, be still, savor the waiting time and 'strive to be found by him at peace' by the Prince of Peace.

Prayer

God, help us to focus on the present of our presence this Advent. May we take moments to pause and breathe in the sacred that saturates the everyday. Amen.



TWELFTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 11

MARK 1:3

the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,’”

REV. KENDRA JOYNER MILLER

Kendra, joined the FCCGE team in 2014 after finishing up her education at Yale Divinity School. Kendra and her Lutheran Pastor husband, Dan, live in Wheaton with their dog Connie. When not at church Kendra loves reading novels, baking, and spending time in the beauty of God's creation- walking in the praries in our wonderful forest preserves.

She was red and rusted. I loved her. That bench seat carried me from North Carolina to Wyoming and back every summer. We had spent hours and days with one another. But we were to a point of love lost as Ruby my '92 Dodge Spirit had begun to stall every time I turned the steering wheel left. So I found myself at the mechanic in New Haven, again, on that December day. As I sat I was surrounded by the onslaught of the season, colored lights blinking, tinny music's playing a little too loud, and the television flashing the top ten hot gifts for the year. While I watched, general programing was interrupted; across the screen flashed news bulletins. Only a half-hour away, in unknown Newtown, Connecticut there was a modern day slaughtering of innocence, as evil walked the earth, and pain was made manifest, robbing this world of 28 lives, 20 of which were little-wholy-holy-innocent ones.

Everything felt so wrong, the lights, the music, the gifts, when the most precious gift of life was stolen from this world.

My heart is heavy this season too, with the pain of our broken world. But maybe that is what the season of Advent is really about, living in hope with our heavy hearts. So often we skip over this season of waiting and go straight to the instant joy and abundance of Christmas. Advent reminds us of the importance that anticipation, longing, and hope hold in our lives. During this time we hold, sometimes cling, onto the belief that the Light and Love Divine are coming, but they are not here yet. Part of the season of Advent is to prepare, the prophets in Mark cry out "prepare the way of the the Lord, make his paths straight." Maybe this season my preparations can be more than the cleaning of my home and cooking for company. Maybe my preparations for the Lord call me to live into the pain, holding onto the hope that it doesn't have to be this way for little ones in Connecticut or in the Englewood neighborhood, or in the refugee camps. Maybe together we can dream and work for a world where we feel the presence of the Prince of Peace and where we live into the call to prepare and make paths straight.

Prayer

God, in a world of pain, help us to prepare ourselves and our world to be guided by Your radical love, hope, peace, and joy. Amen

THIRTEENTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 12

PSALM 27

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

"God is my light be calm and trust in him."

My friends have often said to me , "You're so calm. Nothing seems to bother you". What a positive image to project to the world! "Are you really talking about me?" I sometimes don't feel calm, often internalizing my concerns, causing stress and self-doubt. However, I have never questioned the love of God, and his comfort in trying times.

My younger sister died suddenly at age 34, after a short illness, leaving a young child, still a concern to others.

A family split over the war in Viet Nam caused stress and pain when a cousin was killed the first week fighting there.

Our moral direction was tested in Memphis, staying in the neighborhood schools during "bussing for integration", 1973. While neighbors left the public schools in mass, we felt God's call to live by his example.

Additionally, my daughter survived cancer two times, but we never questioned her survival, believing God would be with her during treatment and successful recovery.

Finally, guiding my parents through the final days of their lives was a challenge, happily embraced. Life is never an easy road, but we can feel the comfort of God with us, if we seek him.

During Advent we celebrate the arrival of God's Son into our world, providing examples to a pattern for our lives. It has been a special time in my life, from early on, anticipating Christ's birth, celebrating family and peace in a busy world. In spite of commercialism and many distractions, it's a time to feel God's love and presence in our lives. May your 2017 season be a time of love, family, and service in the name of God and his son, Jesus Christ.

Prayer:

God you are our comfort and strength. In all that we face in this life, may we feel you there with us, guiding us through all that we face. Amen.



MELISSA CLIFF

Melissa and husband Ray have been members of this congregation since 1967. She has served as a Sunday School teacher, Mission Market committee, Kitchen Chix, Wedding Coordinator, and Search Committee member. She is a retired Elementary School Librarian, with a loving husband, two beautiful daughters, and two amazing grandchildren.

FOURTEENTH DAY OF ADVENT - DECEMBER 13

EXCERPTS PSALM 27

One thing I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,

God's ways are counterintuitive.

As I read the Bible, the instruction I hear more than any other, is to not fear. Of all the things God wants of me, why does he focus on fear? Does it have to do with my need to control? My lack of confidence that he has my back? Or that he's there at all?

In today's Psalm he does it again, celebrating a life with no fear. Encouraging me to not dread my enemies. Assuring me that those who are out to get me, can't.

God has given me significant work to do, for which I'm deeply thankful. But as a fundraiser, my performance and productivity are exposed for all to see. Everyone knows how I'm doing against my goals. They see the numbers and read the reports. I know that God has called me to be faithful, not successful. But it's natural to want success. To do and be better than those around me. To look good. To out-produce my competition.

I don't want to leave the zone where I feel comfortable. And when I do step out, I don't want to depend on untested safety nets. I've been let down and disappointed too many times – by others and by myself. Clearly, God's ways are not my ways. Rather than control, Jesus tells me to obey. Rather than fear, the Lord reminds me to trust. Rather than do, God asks me simply to be – with him. The one thing I ask of God is that I grow closer to him. I want to be content in his presence, sensing his pleasure and hearing him speak. I want to enjoy him and bring joy to him. To submit my will and cooperate with his agenda. To please an audience of one.

God is faithful and will never forsake nor hurt me. God is perfectly good and whatever he does is just. God is love and will treat me only with kindness.

Prayer

God, I believe all this to be so. Help my unbelief. Help me to be still and know that you are God. Teach me to rest and abide in you. Teach me Thy way, O Lord. Amen.



MARK LUTZ

Mark grew up in South Africa with his missionary parents. Living for 20 years under apartheid shaped him to become an advocate for justice. In his book, *UnPoverty: Rich Lessons from the Working Poor*, he tells the stories of entrepreneurs in the developing world who have received micro loans from Opportunity International, where he has been a fundraiser for 25 years. Mark and Lise enjoy the wonderful friends they are making through community groups in our church.

FIFTEENTH DAY OF ADVENT-DECEMBER 14

PSALM 42:8

By day the Lord commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.

My spiritual journey isn't a long or extremely profound one. I was just another kid who got dragged to church every morning by my parents. When I grew older and more was expected of me I realized the only way to stay awake in church would be to participate and so I started gradually with the youth group. It took a few years but the people grew on me. It took me even longer to realize what a gift from God I had received. God had opened my eyes to some incredible people and a new community that before I had been blind to. I believe God was there when a group of youth in work camp were working side by side to rehab a home in a poverty stricken area of Tennessee, when the outreach choir performed for a group of elderly, and when kids laughed with each other as they filled bags of food to feed starving people in other parts of the world. I know God has led me to the path I'm on now even when I have my doubts I know he is beside me. I can't say my faith hasn't wavered, as I'm sure most people's has, but wavering is different from losing; and even if one has lost their faith it is recoverable because God is always there whether we can see it or not. There are always going to be those days that make you feel like giving up. Days that make you question everything you thought you knew. But faith has always prevailed. God is easy to find even in the bleakest of situations he is always among us.

Prayer

To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.



ALYSSA SPRINGER

Alyssa is a freshmen at Iowa State University. She loves music and reading and has interests in Education and Theology. She was part of Senior High Youth Fellowship for four years and a summer intern with the church.

SIXTEENTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 15

PSALM 42:1

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.



CLARA HUGHES

Clara is a retired Human Resources professional. She and her husband Roger live in Glen Ellyn and have been members of FCCGE for 24 years. They have two adult children, Shannon age 31 and Elliott age 27, who both grew up in this congregation.

In the previous verses, the chief priests challenge Jesus' authority. Jesus tells them a parable of two sons. In this parable Jesus demonstrates that the chief priests are like the second son. After hearing Jesus' words, they do not have a change in heart. They do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

When I drop myself into this parable, I see myself in both sons. I also wonder if, like the Jewish leaders, I fail to recognize when Jesus shows up in my life.

I am at times the first son. God calls me to follow Jesus' teachings, to produce abundant fruit, but I am overwhelmed. I see a vineyard full of weeds. I feel no strength to take on the work. I exaggerate my responsibility beyond simply working the vineyard to being responsible for quality of fruit produced. Then, like the first son, I have a change of heart. I realize I am not responsible for the entire vineyard for my entire life. I realize I am not even responsible for the quality of the fruit produced. I simply am being asked to work in the vineyard today so God can produce abundant fruit. My heart is strengthened by hope that I can give my best today, in God's vineyard. My work is manageable when I understand the work I am called to do, and I let God do God's work.

Sometimes I am the second son. I say "yes" to working the vineyard but then I don't. Like the second son, my heart is not in the work. I have so many other things to do. I first look to do what I think will make me happy. I focus on "feeling" good rather than "being" good by "doing" good work in God's vineyard. Like the second son, I sometimes say "yes" to please someone else but I go about first doing what pleases me.

And like the Jewish leaders, I have a preconceived notion of the Messiah. Am I so wrapped up with my own view that I don't recognize the various ways the Messiah shows up in my life?

Prayer

I pray that I may be open to see the everyday ways Jesus appears in my life to care for me and walk along with me on my spiritual journey. I pray that today when I hear God's call to serve in the vineyard, I do my part joyfully and without hesitation, that the fruits of the spirit may grow in abundance in God's vineyard, today. Amen.

SEVENTEENTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 16

HABAKKUK 3:17-19

Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines;
though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food;
though the flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the
stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.

God, the Lord, is my strength

I always find this time of year maybe a little harder than I should. Oh, don't get me wrong, I enjoy it too. Working in a school district, I look forward to my winter break with a heartfelt glee I think few can understand. I love the carols, music, my family's peculiar tradition of playing/singing at just about every Christmas Eve service available. I treasure our "Traditional Christmas Eve Dinner" of Chinese food, leftovers, and Burger King. Then, a truly epic midnight snack at the end of a successful day of worship.

But.

The nights are long, and cold. Finding the emotional energy to do much besides go to work and come home to sit on the couch with a fuzzy blanket and cuddle the cat...is hard. It's the time of year when the fields truly yield no food, there are no blossoms except the tacky fake ones and my body just knows it somehow. How much of it is my brain chemistry coming back to bite me in the rear (for, oh, the gazillionth time) and what's just personality I don't know...but, sometimes I have to work really hard at not being a Scrooge.

Friend: "I love this Christmas carol!"

Me: The singers' really flat, no honestly, he's objectively bad. How in God's name did this get recorded by professionals? But what I say is "It's... uh, nice!"

When I got my selections for this day, I found myself attracted to this little passage, I didn't understand why until I looked further. I'll admit, my inner Scrooge immediately reacted with Yeah, sure. God's really with us. I'm going to rejoice in and take strength from the fact that life sucks. So, I let it sit for a while. Later while driving, which is always the place everyone has Eureka moments (it's either that or the shower really) it struck me. Exactly what it meant.

If you just keep going, just keep moving. Despite the cold, snow, darkness, tacky lights, and off-key singers... if you just keep swimming it all comes around. Your inner Scrooge doesn't always win.

And sometimes...

Sometimes, that's something you really need to hear.

Prayer

God, during this season, when our inner Scrooges start looking at the world with nasty negative glasses, give us the strength to take them off. Help us to be your light, instead of those extinguishing it. Help us to know that you are there, even when all we can see is the empty fields, the barren trees and the wilderness. Amen



PAULA RADA

Paula was baptized at FCCGE and spent much of her early life here before moving to Louisville, Kentucky for the rest of it. She moved back to the area with her family about 5 years ago. She is a graduate of the University of Louisville where she received her Masters of Arts in Teaching and Bachelor's in History with a Minor in Latin. She has sung in professional level choirs, opera choruses and is currently knocking around the community theatre scene. Her most recent calling is to the Chicago Theological Seminary where she is pursuing an M.Div. She currently works as the World Language Lab Tech at Downers Grove North and has a rambunctious black cat named Tony who owns her soul.

EIGHTEENTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 17

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-24

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Waiting. I wasn't good at it when I was a child. Heck, I'm not good at it now. The modern age supports those of us that aren't tolerant of waiting by giving us information and connection instantly, fingers flying, at the touch of a button. However, there are some things we still have to wait for, right? We wait for our flight to board, we wait for our dinner after we order it, we wait for our babies to stop crying and fall asleep so we can put our feet up for a few precious, quiet minutes and now in this season of Advent, we wait for the Christ child.

We have choices about how to spend our hours in this time of waiting. Will you fill yours with complaints? My Millennial has moved back home – have you seen the electric bill? I've put on 5 lbs. Again! The taxes on my house just went up. Politics! Prices! ARGH! Everything is terrible!

In this time of Advent, I've chosen to take a big hint from Thessalonians 5; to zip it and rejoice in this blessed life I've been gifted. To pray without ceasing. To give thanks. Let's think about things for a sec. That Millennial that burns lights all night? I am so very grateful for the joy and creativity he has brought back into my once-vibrant house. The 5 lbs.? It didn't come from nowhere, unannounced. I enjoyed undeserved abundance at fun dinners with dear friends and family. Not to mention that killer cheesecake the recently-returned Millennial baked. (Did I mention his culinary talents?) And those high taxes? Walking home, alone in the dark the other night, I appreciated the safety of my village streets, so very aware that many world citizens do not enjoy this incredible luxury.

The Baby Savior brings with Him The Good News clutched in tiny pudgy hands, the fresh smell of a newborn's head and the rapid beating of a heart big enough to give us hope 2000 years later. Come rejoice, pray and give thanks with me. Maybe I'm not so bad at this waiting thing after all...

Prayer

New Baby Jesus, give me patience and joy. Be a constant reminder of the beauty in our world and when I don't get it right, I'd appreciate a nudge. Amen.



SHERRY FLUGEL

Sherry is a life-long member of the UCC, 26 of those years at FCC. She is Director of Communications here and keeps busy singing in the Celebration Choir, co-directing the Joyful Noise Cantata and directing our Little Angel Choir. She lives in Glen Ellyn with her husband, Paul, of 28 years and treasured old dog, Mrs. Dinkins.



NINETEENTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 18

PSALM 125

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be shaken but endures forever.

But those who turn to crooked ways
the Lord will banish with the evildoers.

I wrote several drafts of this devotional. I had some philosophy, a story about my first encounter with Walter Payton, song lyrics from Zac Brown Band and the Indigo Girls, but I kept getting stuck. So I decided to take a new approach: Honesty.

Psalm 125 *scared* me.

I was excited and honored when Kendra invited me to write a devotional, but I almost called her back and canceled when I saw this passage. Psalm 125 is good news for those who put their trust in God; bad news for those who don't. But what happens if you're caught in the middle? Psalm 125 doesn't talk about part-time trust.

When life gets overwhelming, many put their trust in the Lord. I haven't been doing that lately. I internalize. Pressure at work. Worries about money. Balancing time. It's amazing how life's daily routine can become my own personal road block to the Church.

Maybe Psalm 125 is a wakeup call. Maybe being asked to write this devotional wasn't just meant to be... maybe it was meant for *me*. Oh, what a selfish thought? And maybe I'm not the only one in need of a perspective check, a spiritual reset, the need to put more trust in the Lord. And maybe that starts with sharing my burdens, prioritizing time with family and friends, getting lost in the serenity of the piano during Sunday worship, praying a little more, and giving gratitude. Lord knows I have so much to be thankful for!

Maybe Psalm 125 isn't a statement backed up with a threat, maybe it's an open invitation to re-engage.

Prayer

Lord, let Psalm 125 be the spark that brings me closer to you and the Church. Amen.



MIKE SEAR

Mike is a proud 1986 Glenbard West graduate who loves living in his hometown with his wife Linda, their two daughters Ellie and Anna, and their son Tommy. Feel free to ask him about Walter Payton, Zac Brown Band and the Indigo Girls!



TWENTIETH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 19

GALATIANS 3:23-29

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

As a society we use labels and categories to describe individuals. We find comfort in this practice. It can help us deal easily with others and frequently makes us feel good or superior. These human categories divide us by gender, socioeconomic status, mental health, sexual orientation and political affiliation. These labels are the foundation of our walls.

These walls serve to protect us, keep order, and keep us unchallenged. These walls keep us from truly understanding or associating with others. Christ asks us to break down these barriers. No matter the label, or the distinctions we create, we all find our place in society through our faith in Christ. Knowing this, strengthens our ability to walk in other's shoes, to stop and have fellowship with the unfamiliar, and to be honest about the labels we create for ourselves. Unity in Christ, enables us to stop and reconsider our actions that only promote our material wealth and personal gain. We remember that no one has an advantage or has preferential treatment in Christ's eyes.

Prayer

God help us to live into our authentic selves- being who we truly are as your beloved- just as we are. Help us to create space where others feel liberated to be themselves. Amen.



DAMON HOLST

Damon has been attending FCCGE for about three years, and was excited to officially be a new member as of October. He enjoys working with the high school youth, joined them on the last two work camps and is a small group leader. He works in product development for the most exciting products in the world: office products! He spices up his life when possible with home brewing beer and riding his motorcycle.

TWENTY-FIRST DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 20

PSALM 125

**Lord, do good to those who are good,
to those who are upright in heart.**

Last February, four of my friends were in a car accident in route to their nursing clinical placement at a local hospital. My friend Sam – one of the kindest, funniest, and well-loved people I have ever known – was killed in the crash. In the days and weeks and months following, I’ve struggled to make sense of how this vibrant, passionate, ambitious woman could suddenly just be gone. And I’ve struggled to understand how a God of love and justice could allow her to be ripped from life so soon.

Last spring, we should have been having fun, staying out late, and creating memories – with Sam. Instead, we spent the semester mourning our friend, desperately trying to figure out how to continue living when every class, every party, and the daily sight of her empty bunk in our house only highlighted her absence. Trying to comfort, friends and acquaintances kept telling me that everything happens for a reason, that it must have been part of God’s plan. But I couldn’t find God in any of it. What reason could there possibly be for Sam – the very best and brightest light – to be robbed of her future?

In his book [When Bad Things Happen to Good People](#), Rabbi Harold S. Kushner writes, “the earthquake and the accident...are not the will of God, but represent that aspect of reality which stands independent of His will, and which angers and saddens God even as it angers and saddens us.” Seeing Sam’s death as a result of living in a chaotic world, not as some divine plan, has helped me to continue living. Sam died because death is an inevitable risk that comes with being human.

So I echo the psalmist’s prayer, but I add to it as well.

Prayer

Lord, do good to those who are good—but if you can’t, bring peace and love to those who are hurt by our chaotic world. Help us as we mourn and as we heal. Amen.



ABBY FATE

Abby is a junior at Valparaiso University, studying psychology, biology, and Spanish. She’s involved in a sorority, works as a tour guide in the admissions office, and does psychology research with her professors. Abby is excited to be spending next semester studying abroad in Granada, Spain!



TWENTY-SECOND DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 21

HERBREWS 1:2-3

but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

I find it easy to forget the profundity of the fact that Jesus was there with God when God created the universe! We say it a lot, but it is truly amazing: we are made in the image of the Living, Creative God, in whom we live and move and have our being. And each of us has a unique part to play in Creation. So I imagine our community was there in the beginning. We were *blessed* with the same creative spirit within us. It is our nature to be loving and creative. Some days I'm sad because it seems so obvious how much we have messed everything up. Other days I have hope that if we as a community can just realize a fraction of our creative energy, the world will be transformed.

It is dark in December during Advent, our days get shorter, the light seems further away.

Blue, says Aristotle, is darkness coming through air. Blue is the liturgical color for the season of Advent, as the year moves towards the Winter Solstice. Soon it will be December 21, the shortest day of the year. The darkest days come just before Jesus is born. Looking to the horizon, we see a deepening, diminishing blue. But we anticipate light, even as it gets colder

.Blue is the color of the interior life. The conception of God within ourselves, and within our community, is an event that we're invited to nurture and anticipate. Mary accepts her Annunciation with joy, despite the pain and adversity that seem inevitable. Jesus is conceived in the womb, in darkness. The season of Advent, and the color blue, invite us to do the same, to conceive God, that incredible Creative Energy within us.

"Leave the door open for the unknown, the door into the dark. That's where the most important things come from, where you yourself came from, and where you will go." -Rebecca Solnit

"In the beginning was the Creative Energy, the Creative Energy was with God, the Creative energy was God." The Creative Energy became flesh and dwelt among us and continues to dwell within us.

Prayer

(Collect for Guidance, from the Book of Common Prayer):

O heavenly Father, in whom we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray thee so to guide and govern us by thy Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget thee, but may remember that we are ever walking in thy sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



GREG HALVORSEN SCHREK

Greg lives in Wheaton, with his wife, Karen, and their children, Magdalena and Teo. Greg teaches Photography and Art classes at Wheaton College. He is part of the Visual Arts Ministry at FCCGE. His favorite color is blue.



TWENTY-THIRD DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 22

HEBREWS 1:10-12

**In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands;
they will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like clothing;
like a cloak you will roll them up**

This August, my little family took a trip to see the alignment of the sun, our moon, and earth. Total solar eclipses occur regularly throughout time, although this was the first time we put ourselves in the right place at the right time to witness it ourselves. We spent two days in Shawnee National Forest, exploring ancient rock formations shaped by time, weather and water, forests regrown from exhausted farmland since the National Parks were set aside.

We awaited the eclipse on a little patch of grass at SIU for hours on a hot humid Monday. Through special glasses, we saw the moon's shadow nibble away at the sun. As the sun's light dimmed and totality neared, clouds obscured the brief, but long-awaited, view of the corona. We caught glimpses through breaks in the clouds and "light snakes" danced on the ground nearby.

My husband and three children were beside me, eyes to the skies, absorbing this wondrous moment. I remembered tales invented in the past to describe this phenomenon, grateful for humankind's ability to predict and understand this event now without fear. The next time a total solar eclipse will be visible from North America will be 2034. My children will be starting their adult lives by then. Anytime one of us is blessed to witness another eclipse, I hope we remember August 21, 2017.

It is Advent. Christmas will come soon. I have celebrated 42 Christmases (six weeks of Christmases). We are blessed to be alive for the years we are given, to behold the mysteries of our earthly home as we try to fathom the deeper mysteries of life. This season, we honor the fact that God, who is eternal, sent his son come to live as a human with all its suffering and joy and the story has new layers of meaning to me each year. This year, I expect the recent beauty of the eclipse of our closest star will come to mind as I hear the story of the star that leads the way to Jesus.celebrated 42 Christmases (that's six weeks of Christmas). God's years will never end. We are blessed to be alive for these years, to behold the mysteries of our earthly home as we try to fathom the deeper mysteries of life. Christmas is the time when we honor the fact that God, who is eternal, sent his son come to live as a human with all the suffering and joy that brings. Each year, the Christmas story has new layers of meaning to me. This year, I will be remembering the beauty of the eclipse of our closest star when I hear again the story of the star that led the way to Jesus.

Prayer

God, I believe all this to be so. Help my unbelief. Help me to be still and know that you are God. Teach me to rest and abide in you. Teach me Thy way, O Lord. Amen.



**JEANNINE
KANNEGIESSER**

Jeannine lives in Wheaton, IL with Ryan and their three children Finn, Ella, and Sean. She works for Northern Illinois Food Bank and serves on the FCCGE Admin Committee and Environmental Ministry Team. She loves to soak up the beauty of this world as often as possible, especially while traveling with her family.



GEOFFREY SHELLEDY

Geoffrey is a second year at The University of Virginia, where he studies Mechanical and Biomedical Engineering. He grew up with FCCGE, was an active leader in senior high youth group, and completed the summer student internship. FCCGE immensely has impacted his life, and he is proud to call it his home church.

TWENTY-FOURTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 23

PSALM 89: 1-4

I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever;
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.
I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

You said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to my servant David:
‘I will establish your descendants forever,
and build your throne for all generations.’”

Trust— is easier said than done- and happens to be particularly true now. The Advent season is inherently busy. For myself as a college student, it brings about the most feared time of the semester: finals. For most, it presents the chaos of the Christmas season. Kicked off by the commercial extravaganza that is Black Friday, the month of December tests of our planning skills. From buying gifts, to organizing family gatherings, to cooking for the masses, the Advent Season, as much as it shows our love and passion for the Lord and his creations, tends to pair with stress and exhaustion. We pray plans work out, the underprivileged are helped, exams are aced, and the turkey isn’t overcooked. However, as much as we can trust “the process”, some things, for better and worse, are out of our control.

A few months ago, my father became ill. As much as I want to believe that all will be well, I have no way of knowing the outcome. I pray, and I have faith in the doctors that treat him, and I know my dad is one heck of a fighter, but there is only so much I can do. Some people, with the best of intentions, tell me, “all is going to work out”. As much as I would love to agree, I have hesitations. There is no way of knowing that all will work out. However, despite the situation, I still have the utmost confidence and comfort. In the scripture, God anoints David, pledging to stand alongside him, through thick and thin. During these hard times, even when it seems like there’s hardly anybody or anything in control, I recognize the importance of faith in God- it teaches us that in the most testing of times, both good and bad, we have the comfort and support of each other. God is always by our side and so are our families, friends, and communities. We recognize the imperfections in life, and hopefully in that, we become more aware of the importance of our faith in and care for each other, and ourselves.

Prayer

God, give us comfort in your unconditional support, and help us practice faith in each other. Amen.

TWENTY-FIFTH DAY OF ADVENT- DECEMBER 24

LUKE 2:1-14

In those days a decree went out from the Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

Life arrives; not on our time and often with teachers that we would not likely look toward. The power of scripture is that it reflects many parallels of our lives. Mary and Joseph, a counter-cultural couple that stands in contrast with the moral codes of marriage, as immigrants under the rule of an oppressive government, traveling under the distress of labor pains only to seek shelter amongst the animals. Not greatly different than what many populations face today.

This oppressed couple is shrouded in literal and metaphoric darkness waiting for Light to come. Faithful that God is with them in the Darkness, that they are held in God's time with God's guidance, they wait. Mary and Joseph differentiate from many of us in how they respond to their circumstances with their fearless faith, trusting God in the darkness. When darkness comes to us are we still trusting that God is present? That Love will prevail? Willing to sit in the days of unknowing and uncertainty? Those of us in position of power often look to control, resist and fight rather than trust that the Light will come.

This is a story grounded in faith. Evidenced here by a tiny bundle, who grows into the Prince of Peace and Lord of Lords. Grace and peace slip in through the darkness in the smallest ways if we look and listen for God's presence and guidance. The light has come, and will continue to come in the most unexpected ways when we open our hearts to a loving God. Keep the faith friends; the smallest amongst us can make the biggest differences in ways that will change the world. Do not be paralyzed by fear, notions that are counter-cultural or situations that are less than ideal. Change happens on God's time in the least likely moments with the least likely people.

Prayer

God of light, hope and peace, strengthen our faith to be like Joseph and Mary; that we might trust you with all our hearts and minds to the unexpected ways of your Love.



REV. MELISSA RILEY

Melissa, Associate Minister of Pastoral Care, is a 15 year member of FCCGE. Melissa earned her Masters in Divinity at Chicago Theological Seminary in the summer of 2016 and was ordained at First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn on Sunday, October 23, 2016. She has a Bachelor of Arts from DePauw University and a Masters in Education from University of Virginia.



*Please join us in
the beauty and wonder
of*



9:30 am Family service

**7 pm Candlelight Lessons
and Carols**

**10:30 pm Candlelight Lessons
and Carols**

Of whatever angel may choose
Suddenly at my elbow. I only knew
that rook
Ordering its black feathers can so shine
As to seize my senses, haul
My eyelids up, and grant

A brief respite from fear
Of total neutrality. With luck,
Trekking stubborn through this season
Of fatigue, I shall
Patch together a content

Of sorts. Miracles occur,
If you dare to call those spasmodic
Tricks of radiance miracles. The wait's
begun again,
The long wait for the angel,
For that rare, random descent.

-Sylvia Plath



He who has come to men
dwells where we cannot tell
nor sight reveal him,
until the hour has struck
when the small heart does break
with hunger for him;

those who do merit least,
those whom no tongue does praise
the first to know him
and on the face of the earth
the poorest village street
blossoming for him
-Jane Tyson Clement



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
OF GLEN ELLYN