

2018

Advent  
Devotional



# THOUGHTS ON ADVENT

I fantasize, sometimes, about being stuck in a broken elevator by myself.

Wherever I was headed, whatever I was doing, will inevitably have to wait. I'll go through the motions - push the red alarm button, gesticulate wildly at the security camera, and use my cellphone to call for help - but secretly, I'll be hoping that they take their sweet time. Because every minute I spend in that box is a minute that I'll be forgiven for not being more productive.

Advent is a busy season in our culture. There are presents to buy, homes to decorate, cookies to bake, and maybe some snow to shovel. But it all begins to feel a bit like shoveling snow, doesn't it, an endless effort that leaves little time for reflection or appreciation. You might find yourself taking the elevator more often at the shopping mall, hoping that it grinds to a halt and gives you a couple of hours to rest.

But it's hard to slow down, and not just because the culture seems to forbid it; in truth, we don't really *want* to. The elevator tempts me, but if I got caught without my phone I'd probably have a panic attack. Waiting awhile sounds nice, when I can use that time to read the news or check my Facebook page. But really stopping, really waiting in the way that Advent is all about, is a lot more difficult.

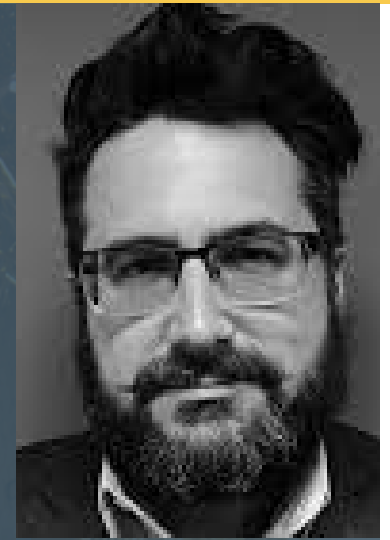
This book can help.

I hope you'll take a little while every day to read it. It can slow you down, and help you to appreciate the season, without asking you to stare at the wall. It can help you turn inward and reflect on your own existence, without forcing an existential vacuum. It's a productive use of time, in an entirely different sense of the word.

In one sense, we're already trapped in the proverbial elevator; stuck in a cultural way of being, waiting to be rescued. And help is coming soon, in Bethlehem, waiting to be born.

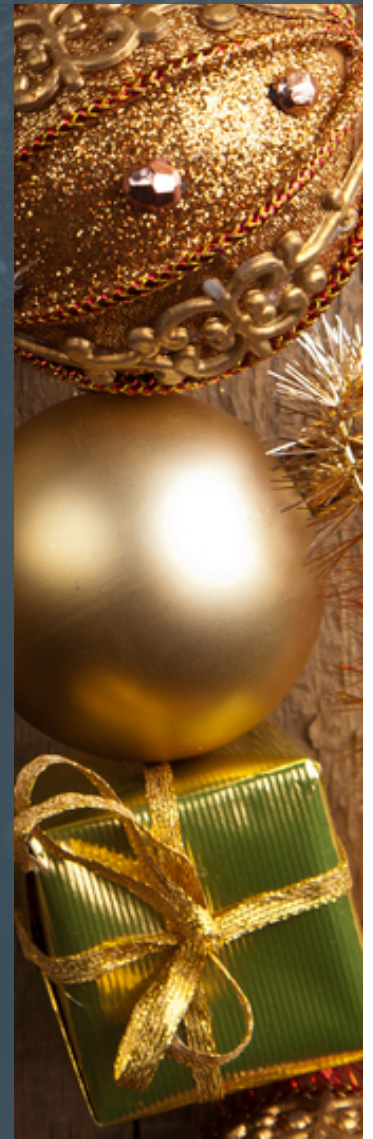
Blessings,

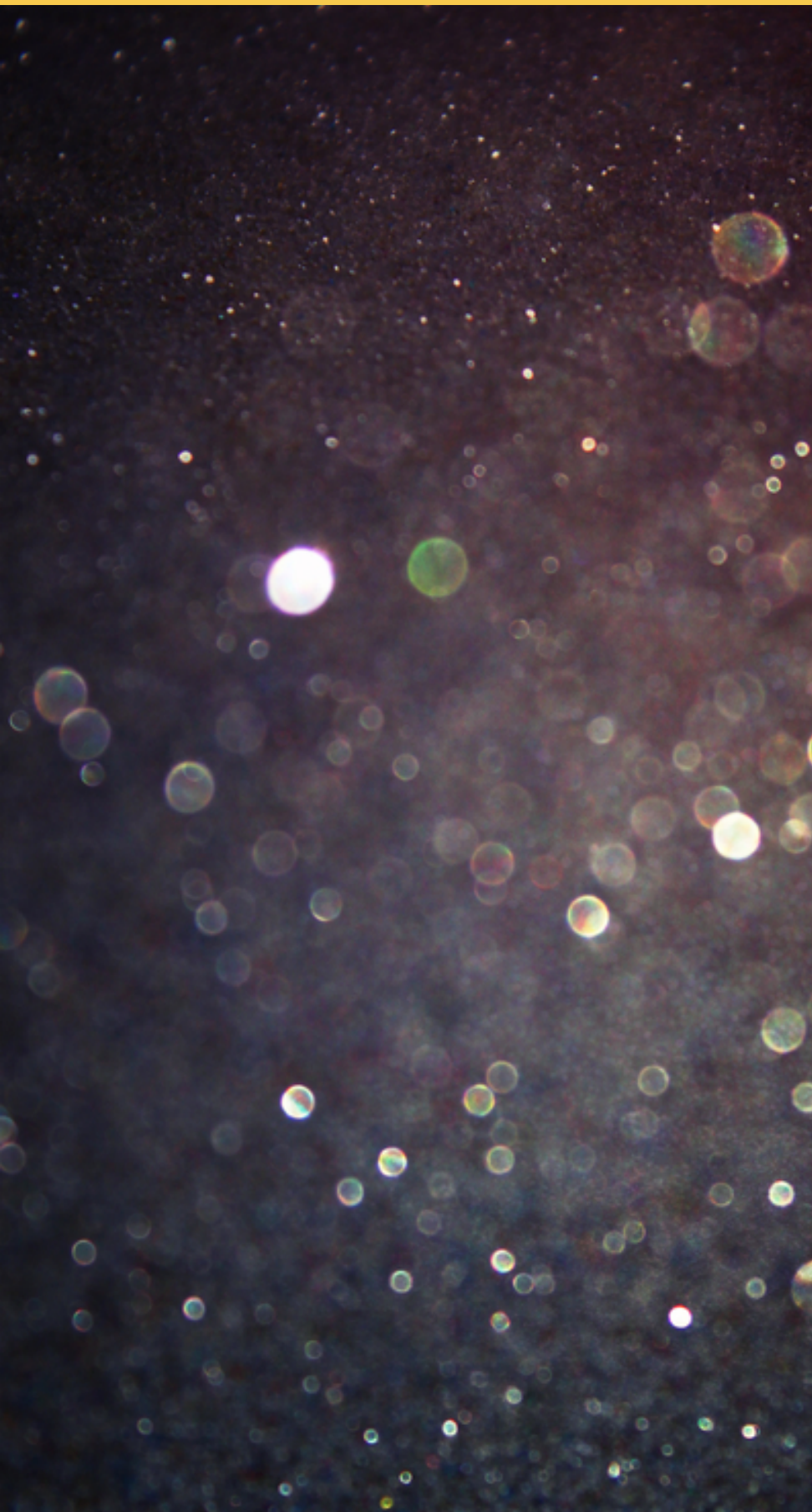
Rev. Seth Ethan Carey



*Rev. Seth Ethan Carey*

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# DECEMBER 2

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**There will signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars...Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and glory.**

When I was a young girl my church sent me to *church camp* each year. The camp was far more conservative than my church family. Bible study was always centered around the signs of the end so I would be prepared to meet Jesus. What it did was scare me so that at night when a car drove over a wooden bridge at the entrance to the camp that rumbled like thunder I was sure Christ was coming. I loved God but that thought scared me to death; morning could not come soon enough. In the Communion liturgy we declare *Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.* but we declare it with anticipation, not as something to scare little girls in the dark of night. Advent is about two times. The first time and the last. The beginning and the end. If we only rehearse the birth of Christ we miss half of Advent's meaning. What will our life mean when it comes to its conclusion? What state will our world be in when all is over and done? Jesus told a very hopeful story about the time suggesting it would be like trees breaking into bloom...*one look tells you summer is right around the corner. The same here- when you see these things happen, you know God's kingdom is about here.* ...from The Message. Our Christian faith presents a challenge to work with God in overcoming evil with good. For me Advent is a time to consider how I am preparing through participation. How do I see Christ in others? How do others see Christ in me? What am I doing in my Christian life? In what condition will I leave this earth? What will Jesus say to me when Christ comes again? I confess at times I believe our world is not in very good shape and I hear echoes of that rumbly old bridge. Then Advent comes and I hear the promise that *summer is right around the corner.*

### Prayer

***Holy God, you have come to us in the past and you will come to us in the present. We welcome you the God who is the alpha and omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Amen***



### DONNA GRAY

**Donna** is a retired Presbyterian minister who, with her husband Carl, has been attending FCCGE for several years. Prior to retirement Donna was Minister for Children and Families at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago. Carl and Donna live in Geneva and are proud grandparents of four grandchildren. They love spending their time at their cabin in the mountains of Pennsylvania, their native state.



**DECEMBER 3**

**PSALM 90**

**Oh! Teach us to live well!  
Teach us to live wisely and well!**

Mose's prayer to God is a timeless prayer, not only in the past and still needed today.

In each of our lives we have been blessed with good times that help us to survive the bad times. In my life I truly feel like it a balancing act, and very often I stumble and fall. Our family is blessed with our first Granddaughter, but she lives far away. When we are with her and her family my life is perfect. When we apart, the emptiness and sadness is overwhelming. Similarly, taking care of my elderly Mom is exhausting, yet we are so blessed to still have her, especially since we recently lost my Dad. Our family has so many wonderful memories of these very special people. Now very few good memories are being made and trying to help her as she declines is heart breaking. There are occasional sparks of joy that keep me going, surely straight from God. My time at church through prayer, music, and sermons help me sort through all this and move on.

Yes, God, you have "been our home forever" but unfortunately, I often loose sight of that. I am reminded every Sunday at our church "home", when we are forgiven, renewed, and provided opportunities to "live wisely and well." Very often I am preoccupied with my struggles, the problems of the world, and especially the disappointments of our country. God, you should be angry, as you are always there for us teaching us and encouraging us. At times, no one seems to be listening. There is much work to be done in all facets of our existence, as short as it might be. Every day is a gift and we must try to please God in everything we do.

**Prayer**

*God giver of life so often we lose focus of what it means to truly live well. Help us to see our lives through your eyes focusing on what's important and knowing you are with us in the struggles we face.  
Amen*



**GAYLE BARTELL**

**Gayle**, has been attending First Congregational church for the past twenty years. Don and Gayle live in Wheaton where they raised two children. Gayle was a former school secretary at Lombard District 44. She enjoys art classes, gardening, traveling, and her friends and family.



# DECEMBER 4

## PSALM 90:1-2

**Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God**

I was firstborn in a dysfunctional family. My dad left when I was 12 and my stay at home mom, who didn't even have a driver's license, suddenly abandoned with two kids at the age of 33, had to find a job to support my younger sister and me. As if that wasn't enough for her to manage, when my sister was a teenager she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

I grew up a fixer, what psychologists sometimes call co-dependent. I couldn't be OK unless everybody else was, and it was my job to make sure that happened. The problem with that is that there were a lot of people around me who were not OK, and wouldn't be no matter what I did. It was exhausting.

As a fixer, I was pretty good at getting things done, not so good at waiting for things to happen, especially ones that were outside my control. The Christmas season was about rushing around to find (or make) the perfect gift for everyone on my list, all the special things I needed to bake weeks in advance or it wouldn't feel like Christmas, the decorations that had to go up the day after Thanksgiving, and had to be beautiful, the perfect tree with the perfect gifts under it opened before the perfect meal was served, the race to make my family's Christmas better than the best Christmas Norman Rockwell ever painted. When Christmas was finally over, I was nearly over, too.

But not so many years ago, I learned that God is a lot better at being God than I ever was or ever could be. "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world...you are God." All of a sudden, Advent took on a whole new meaning. It wasn't just about racing around making everything perfect for the big thing to happen on Christmas Day, the experience and meaning of the season itself was just as important. It's about noticing and being thankful every day for the big and small blessings that are everywhere you look if you remember to stop long enough to notice them. To breathe, and to be in the moment, fully present for God's plan, not just yours.

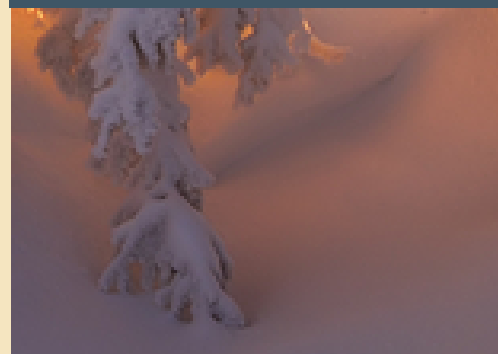
### Prayer

*God, thank you for the gift of Advent, for miracles you make available to us while we wait, and for reminding us who's really in charge. Amen*



### DEB GIAMPOLI

**Deb** and her husband Roy have been members of FCCGE since their daughter, Ashley, was born 31 years ago. Deb has served our congregation in countless ways and most recently co-leader of the Visual Arts Ministry team (with Greg Shreck). Professionally, she has had a long career as a marketing professional (most of it with Kraft Foods), and is now partner in a marketing consulting practice called Stone Soup Consultants. When she's not working on something at church or a project for a client, she is reading a juicy novel, traveling, working in her garden, training to become a master gardener, or taking classes in Botanical Drawing at Morton Arboretum.



# DECEMBER 5

## PSALM 90:1-4

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals." A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.

I don't know about you, but it seems that I could chart my days based upon the frustrations I experience. Let's see, Monday was that dolt who cut me off on Roosevelt Road. And on Tuesday, there was that person standing outside of my office talking loudly on her cell phone for a half hour. Oh, and last Friday was my boss who seems to have very little grasp on reality. Don't even get me started on that.

And then there are the daily outrages from the news. He tweeted what??? How do they think that they could possibly get away with this insult to my group? Surely, the state of the world has never, ever been this grim before. No doubt: it's the biggest crisis ever.

But then this Psalm serves as a much-needed reality check (and a much-needed kick in the pants). The psalmist directs our attention to the age of the mountains, nudging me to a little perspective about my concerns. Our God has a timespan that I simply can't wrap my brain around. And She is the core of a righteous community (or dwelling place) which tells me that kindness and justice has an equally long timespan. My daily irritations are strikingly trivial.

When I spend my time and energy being annoyed by these earthly things, it is really a sad symptom of my own egotism and self-centeredness. How could I possibly imagine that my own reaction is important? I need to set aside my blinders and try to see the world through God's eyes. I'm pretty sure that He's not too concerned with inconsiderate driving.

Let me be clear: don't disengage from the world. Use those annoyances and frustrations to point you in the right direction to keep making the world a little bit better, tiny step by tiny step. But don't forget to keep a little perspective. Our Lord and our community was here long before we arrived in this world and will endure long after we have left. In the long haul, it's going to be ok. Personally, I find that deeply reassuring.

### Prayer

*Everlasting God, As we anticipate the gift of your child this season, help us to have a little humility and a little perspective. In your community, we have a dwelling place of comfort and support that lasts an eternity. Amen.*



### STEVE JOHNSTON

Steve is a biology professor at North Central College in Naperville. He lives in Wheaton with his wife Sue and his daughter Luella. In his copious free time, he loves cycling and reading (although generally not at the same time).





# DECEMBER 6

## LUKE 1:78-79

**By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace**

### MAGGIE SIM

**Maggie** is a senior at Glenbard South High School. She has been involved with the Thistle and Heather Highland Dancers (traditional Scottish dancing) for 12 years, and she is a three year varsity member of her school's track and field team. She was a summer intern this past year and is continually grateful for our church family.

Lately, I've found myself fearing the future. Anxiety has been stemming from the pressure of college decisions, departures from my friends and my family later this year, and the general hecticness of senior year. We're all in a busy time this Advent season, and I'm sure many of you can relate to this overwhelming stress. As Advent arrives, so does the burden of the busy holidays, which are almost always a time of strain as well as joy.

I chose this scripture because it reminds me of something I would tell myself when I had a bad day, or was stressed about something going on in my life. "The sun will always rise again." These six words had such a powerful impact on me, as they always filled me with a sense of relief and security.

This scripture fills me with the same relief and security as that phrase. In this passage from Luke, Zechariah declares that because of the tender mercy and love of God, the sun will be sent down from to the Heavens to us. This sun will bring light to those who sit in darkness, or in shadows of death. By bringing this sunlight, we will be guided into the way of peace.

My so called "darkness" is my fear of the future. My fear of deadlines and decisions, greetings and goodbyes. This darkness clouds my mind so that I cannot think clearly, and I am filled with worry. I'm sure many of us have felt this "darkness" in each of our own hectic lives.

It's normal to be anxious and overwhelmed with life, but sometimes we need to put our faith into God's hands and take a step back, a step away from the stress. Stepping away is such a hard thing to do, because life can just be strenuous sometimes. However, keeping a gentle reminder in the back of our heads can greatly help. A simple reminder that the sun will rise again tomorrow, and it will guide us to a place and feeling of peace, for tomorrow will always be a new day.

#### Prayer

*Dear God, we pray to you, searching for the light that will grant a new day. A new day that will bring us relief and freedom from the stress of today. We give thanks to you O God, for your mercy and your love, and we trust that you will guide us into a place of serenity and calm.*





# 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.**

### TJ WILLIAMS-HAUGER

TJ earned his Master of Divinity at New York Theological Seminary and focuses his talents and love on issues of justice and pastoral care. TJ has authored the book *Prophetic Mourning Cries of Liberation and Justice in the Age of Chaos*.



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 role 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.*

# DECEMBER 8

## LUKE 9:1-6

And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal. And he said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money and do not have two tunics. And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.

Every year, I reflect on the contrasts the Christmas season brings. Today, I'm thinking of the differences between this "Twelve" sent out by Jesus to share the Good News and the "Twelve" we think of much more immediately at Christmas time... the Twelve Days of Christmas.

No staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no spare shirt.

FIIIIIIVE Golden Rings... four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves... And that's not even the half of it!

This season of sharp contrasts knocks me back in so many ways. The migrant newborn in the stable, the poor shepherd in the field, those who have almost nothing- set alongside the great mass of gifts we will eventually have under our tree, the rich holiday food and drink we will share. The contrasts are everywhere: abundant joy for so many, when we know it is a time of sorrow and despair for so many others. The cold and dark of winter nights, the festive glow of holiday lights... the list goes on.

DJ, my husband, and I still shake our heads over the contrast we experienced as we encountered a Buddhist monk, crossing a high pass in the Himalayas, 14 years ago. We were 180 degrees from "the sending out of the Twelve" that Luke describes. We carried the spiffiest of trekking poles, brand new packs from REI, high-tech jackets, synthetic fleece, and multiple spare shirts. We had porters and donkeys, for crying out loud! DJ was feeling the altitude and struggled over the pass in the wet, late Spring snow. Out of nowhere, a monk bounded up the trail, wearing a thin down vest over his traditional saffron robes. He was walking to Dharamshala- the home of the Dalai Lama- and at least another three days journey from that 16,000-foot pass. He carried no supplies except a pocket full of hard candies, which he showed us with a grin. He stopped and walked with us for a while, bringing a presence of peace and joy we will never forget.

### Prayer

*We pause to consider the contrasts in our lives. We reflect on the joy and the sorrow. The easy and the hard. We know that in each, we find our humanity and a connection with the other. Let us pause and walk with someone who struggles, if only for a moment, to share the peace and joy of the season. Amen*



### CATHERINE LACHAPELLE

**Catherine**, and her family, DJ, Lyla and Max, moved to Glen Ellyn in the fall of 2016 from Wichita, Kansas. She is an in-house employment and labor attorney for Molex, LCC, based in Lisle. She is originally from Baton Rouge, Louisiana..



DECEMBER 9

## PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayer for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.



GRAHAM RUDDLE

How great a privilege it is to be granted the Grace to find light during times of darkness, joy during times of pain, wisdom during times of confusion and fear, love during times of hate.

During this letter to the Philippians, we can't but notice how Paul shows remarkable fondness for a place in which he was beaten, imprisoned, and humiliated. Even as he writes from incarceration, every time he remembers Philippi, he gives thanks for the privilege of witnessing and spreading the Gospel, and watches as new faith was born in new believers.

When we read this passage, it's hard not to feel intimidated. Our fallen nature makes it a challenge for us to smile through scorn, and to remember fondly on times where we endured hurt or pain. Most of us would rather move on, build a bridge, make new memories to scrub out the ones we would rather not think about. The counter-intuitive nature of much of the New Testament challenges us to reverse worldly norms, to turn the other cheek, to pray for those who wish harm on us, and to remember fondly the times you were suffering.

However, Paul prays that those who have been touched by the Grace of Salvation may learn to overflow with Love, and that the individual may proceed on a journey to a place where their hardship turns to joy. Paul hopes our journey proceeds and continues, and is confident that we may share in God's Grace.

### Prayer

*Lord grant us the patience, endurance, and courage to continue our journey toward the day of Jesus Christ. Grant us the Wisdom, Love, and Grace to see the good in all situations and people.*

Graham lives in Glen Ellyn with his wife and young family. He joined FCCGE recently, and enjoys using his Theology education in an active Church community. He is originally from Ireland, and worked as a missionary in Asia after college. He works as a Consultant in the Automotive sector, and in his spare time enjoys classical music and motorcycling.





DECEMBER 10

LUKE 1:78-79

...Because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.

## LYN WHISTON

Lyn, joined FCCGE in 1986. He has served as a deacon, on the music committee, and a senior minister search committee. He ushers at the second service on the fifth Sunday of each month and serves as a worship leader. Lyn is treasurer and a volunteer for the Glen Ellyn Walk-In Ministry for which FCCGE is a major supporter. He enjoys photography and hiking in the mountains.

I feel a mix of emotions this Advent. I enjoy good health, friends and a comfortable life. Yet I worry because our country is deeply divided and we aren't civil to those we disagree with. Also, this year has brought a series of natural disasters as well as violence by humans on one another. It's easy to feel discouraged and worried about the future. We can't ignore these problems and the suffering of others.

We can take comfort from Luke's words that the rising sun will shine on us living in the darkness and that God will guide our feet onto the path of peace. Advent means that we will soon celebrate the birth of Christ, God becoming flesh. "God is still speaking" is very real to me. I can't close my eyes to the evil things happening in our world but I take comfort that we Christians can (and indeed are called) to tackle the issues and problems. I am particularly involved with the Walking-In Ministry helping PADS participants and Glen Ellyn residents in need of assistance. I know that others in FCCGE are involved in other important efforts and that a significant part of our church giving goes to such missions.

I become upset at the emphasis our society places on buying and giving things at Christmas, mostly to our own families who truly lack for very little. Each Christmas I write a check to the Salvation Army and visualize people having a holiday feast who otherwise would be hungry even on Christ's birthday. In my teenage years our family tradition was go caroling with several neighbor families and collect donations for UNESCO. All of us try to put our feet on the path to peace that Luke describes. None of us are perfect of course, but we can try to echo God in shedding light and peace to our troubled world.

### Prayer

*God who is still speaking, we thank you for your guiding light that penetrates the darkness and the fears we have. Make us think not of what we want but what we can do for others less fortunate. Amen*





**DECEMBER 11**

## **PSALM 126**

**The Lord has done great things for us,  
and we are filled with joy.  
Those who go out weeping,  
carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy,  
carrying sheaves with them.**

### **KAREN PULVER**

**Karen**, and her husband Tom have been active members of FCCGE for about fifteen years. In addition to volunteering at church she loves to help out with her three grandchildren, exploring national parks and historic presidential sites and travel locally by bicycle. Retired from teaching Spanish at COD, she still works as a librarian in Wood Dale, she reads, of course.



I recently, reluctantly, attended a small family reunion. Reluctantly, because there were so many factors telling me not to go: I had a full calendar, I was getting ready for a long vacation, the destination was a seven-hour drive and I'd have to do it alone. Then there were the factors calling me to the party, mainly several deaths: that of a dear friend whose husband I needed to see, siblings of two different friends taken suddenly in the same week. But most of my reluctance was due to knowing that seeing everyone would be hard.

My mother, age 94, and her brother, 86, we planning to be together for a few days. This reunion involved an arduous trip halfway across the country for my uncle, a world traveler in his younger days. He had had a stroke last year and has to get around with a cane or walker; his speech is a bit slurred and he tires easily. But, with the help of his wife and daughter, we arrived in Minnesota.

I walked into my mom's house to find two people, thrilled to be together and laughing and happily reminiscing, but clearly facing their own mortality. Although they talked a lot about the past they did not dwell on their own losses. We had a loud and uproarious dinner with cousins talking politics, books, and grandchildren. When it was time to say goodbye, we knew that it might be for the last time, but brother and sister faced it bravely.

I was expecting an undertone of sadness, and it was there, but this encounter was truly one of sorrow overcome by joy. I've come to the realization that it's important to remember that any goodbye could be the last one. My mother believes that she will see her loved ones again, and that is a joy for me.

### **Prayer**

*Help us all face our fears and sorrows and to know that joy can always be found somewhere within them.*

# DECEMBER 12

## PSALM 125

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

**As the mountains surround Jerusalem,  
so the LORD surrounds his people  
both now and forevermore.**

As humans, we are [unfortunately] naturally motivated to complicate our thoughts, our relationships, and in turn, our life. I often fear that I'm not fully analyzing an experience, not discovering each and every shade of gray that falls within the continuum. God simplifies this complicated world, and asks us to trust in that simplification, assuring us that God's presence surrounds us like the grandeur of a mountain range.

It is this trust that I must challenge myself each day to embrace. I remind myself that my trust in the Lord manifests itself in the support system that abounds in my life. I do not make decisions in a vacuum, I do not act alone, I do not succeed or fail as a lone actor. The relationships I hold most sacred are truly that: sacred and divine.

God's omnipresence and our trust in it helps us navigate our daily lives with confidence and goodness. As this trust and subsequent righteous action grows, so does the strength of the mountain. We are living in a time in which the strength of the mountains may seemingly be crumbling, but this is not true. In this divisive world, I am evermore reminded to lean on and trust the love of my God, manifested in my community: my support system. The mountains grow.

### Prayer

*Let us remind ourselves as we near a time of holidays spend with loved one's that God's love is manifested within them, and that it is strong and enduring.*



### DAMON HOLST

**Damon** has been attending FCCGE for about four years. He enjoys working with the high school youth group, teaching Our Whole Lives, and helping lead Work Camp. Damon works in product development for the most exciting products in the world: office products! He spices up his life when possible by home brewing beer and riding his motorcycle.



# DECEMBER 13

## 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,

As I reflect upon this reading and my relationship with God during this wondrous season of waiting called Advent, I am reminded that this relationship is often one sided. On a regular basis, I discovered that I ask God for good health for those that I love; I pray for healing for those who are afflicted and I ask for peace in areas of the world that are torn with strife. Oftentimes my relationship with God feels so one sided.

One of my heroes in life is Father Michael Pflieger of St Sabina parish in Englewood on the Southside of Chicago. At a conference, he recently said "that God who needs nothing; who is whole and perfect; is searching for those who would worship and give praise to him in spirit and truth." That statement had a profound effect on me; in that; I spend so little time giving Him praise.

As I read through this passage from Isaiah; I discovered the pure joy that is giving praise and worship to this wondrous God this God that asks only that I follow and give praise. I also am made aware of how much I have missed by not praising God on a daily basis. "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

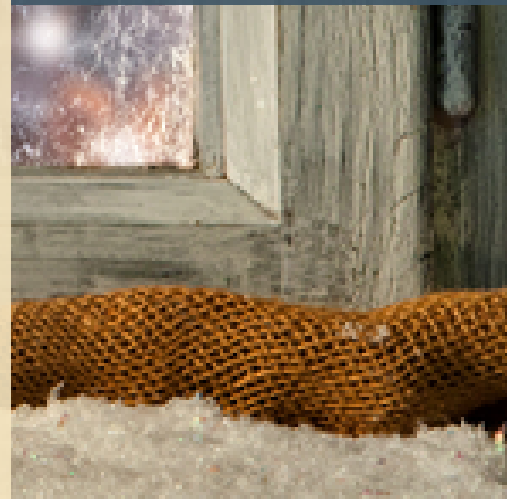
### Prayer

*Father, you are the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. You are my Creator and my Counselor, guiding me daily to make wise decisions. You are my Comforter in sorrow, pain, or distress. I praise you for drawing near to m when I draw near to you.*



### BRIAN HAMILTON

**Brian** and his wife Elaine moved to Glen Ellyn in 2012 from Toronto Ontario. They joined this energetic community of faith in the spring of 2017. They have two children; Betsy who lives in Lombard with her spouse Andy; and Greg who lives with his partner Sarah in Logan Square. They also have twin granddaughters, Veronica and Isabella who are seniors at Glenbard East. Both he and Elaine feel fortunate to be a part of the engaging community called First Congregation Church of Glen Ellyn.



# DECEMBER 14

## 2 CORINTHIANS 9:7-8

**Each of you should give what you have decided in your own heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in good work.**

It's easy for me to give during the Holiday season. It's harder to be *cheerful* about it.

Soon after the Thanksgiving dishes are washed and put away, I start thinking about giving gifts: What Christmas gifts do I need to buy this year? Who do I need to put on my "Give To" List for Christmas 2018? Am I expected to give to all our extended family members this year? Like many, I start out the month of December planning a list of what to give and to whom.

This is the season of giving, is it not? We give presents to family, friends and co-workers. We give to charities and make year-end donations. We give our time to preparing our homes to host gatherings or for cooking great Holiday feasts. Like many, I feel I need to give and give and give all December long.

The financial stresses of the season can also add to my scrooge-like feelings about giving in December. I worry about how to afford giving the kids the items on their very long wish lists. I have concerns about all the extra money for parties, food and traveling often required of this season. These very real financial concerns can wipe out any merriment I feel when giving.

Many times the only feelings I have around giving this time of year have to do with stress, obligation or guilt. Often it is harder to feel *cheerful* about it.

But here is where God calls to us. In this season of Advent, God offers us this verse as a gentle reminder of Her directive for our giving.

And this is the gift I *need* to receive in December. I want to sit with this verse and transform my thinking this year. I want to transform my thinking so that my giving is an expression of my gratitude to God. I choose to give with a grateful heart so that I do not miss the meaningful and extraordinary happiness that accompanies it. God calls us to decide in our hearts to give with love and then do so. God has and will continue to bless each of us abundantly. And in my giving I show my gratitude to God and my love for God. THIS makes me cheerful.

### Prayer

*Loving God, when we give this Christmas may we do so with a grateful heart. Help us to let go of our old feelings about giving. May we remember you will always provide for us as we provide for others. May we open our hearts to cheerfulness as we give. And in giving may we show our love for you. Amen.*



### SANDY HIBBARD

**Sandy** and her husband Shane have been active in FCCGE for ten years. She has served in Christian Education and on the Connections Committee and have participated in many church programs. Sandy and Shane have three kids and one cat and enjoy traveling to Michigan in the summer to visit their Nana and Papa.





**DECEMBER 15**

**ISAIAH 12:2**

**Surely God is my salvation;  
I will trust and not be afraid.  
The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength  
and my defense;  
he has become my salvation.**



**SOPHIA CORONELLI**

**Sophia** is a freshmen at University of Wisconsin Madison and loving her college life. Sophie was an active part of First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn going on mission trips, retreats, and more. She is a lover of poetry and people.

As a new college freshmen, one of the most significant things I've faced is the choices that come with newfound independence. What classes do I take? What do I major in? Do I hang out with my friends or do I study more? Do I have Easy Mac for the third night in a row or do I actually venture out into the cold to make it to the dining hall?

Before, these were things I hardly thought about; now every day is met with another decision that I've never had to make before. Don't get me wrong, it's an exhilarating feeling, but it's also exhausting. We've all been in that situation before where something is new and tiring and exciting and scary all at once. It becomes easy to feel overwhelmed and along. That's where this passage really hit me deep. With God, you're never alone. In the craziness of decision after decision I realized I had forgotten to factor in God. I'll spend weeks asking myself if I made the right decision (maybe I shouldn't have had the easy mac again?!), when really I just need to trust in God. Relying on God and trusting in Him makes the everyday so much easier.

We aren't perfect. We mess up. A lot. But God doesn't, so, at the end of the day, there's really no one better to trust.

**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.*



# DECEMBER 16

## PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7

**Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

The Price of Peace came to us in the most vulnerable and smallest way, as an infant. As faithful followers we celebrate Advent with appreciation for the smallest of things, and celebrate the joy found in them; the giving and receiving are to be done with joy and gentleness. The gesture of a few cookies delivered to an unsuspecting neighbor, holding the door for a mother whose arms are filled with a squirming child who didn't take her nap, or a walk in the silent snow appreciating the glistening jewel that is every flake. God is found in tiny moments of joy and also demonstrated in the trust an infant possesses. If only we could be as trusting as an infant! Try for a moment: look around, listen, smell, and breathe. Take in the smallest details of the world around you, trust in the mystery of these joys, then Rejoice! There are so many small evidences of God's love that equate to a mystery of faith surpassing all understanding. Pray your prayers trusting as an infant does, that the mystery is unfolding, even or perhaps especially, in the darkest of days when all you have is a prayer on your lips. Believe the littlest gifts of delight and wonder are God's presence unfolding before you. Pray for the courage to let go of fear and let God be near. Is this not what Mary, the traveling pregnant mother had to do?

### Prayer

*Fearless Mother God,*

*Listen to our worries and help us hear you in the silence of our nights. On bended knee we handover the worry that keeps us from rejoicing and trusting in littlest joys. Take our fear and be near so we may have faith like Mary.*

*Amen.*



### REV. MELISSA DOUAIRE

**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



# DECEMBER 17

## HEBREWS 13:15-16

**Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.**

Life can take sudden, unexpected turns. If we are fortunate, these turns are happy ones that lead us into great new places: births, new job, a new home. If we are unfortunate, these are not as pleasant: a severe illness, a loss of a family member. Sometimes, they're both. A friend of mine had one of these unfortunate turns three years ago as she lost her sister, Katie, in a car accident. But this led her family to another turn, a pleasant turn, as they have now transformed this tragedy into something uplifting.

Katie and her family are athletic and so they established the Kindness 5k, as Katie was a volleyball coach and embodied a kind spirit. They wanted an event to continue her message and give as many people as possible a change to share in the experience. For some, running/walking a 5k is an undertaking, but manageable. To include more people the family encouraged more involvement by getting creative. There is a virtual 5k, where you can run from anywhere and still be a part of spreading the message, as well as doing kind things for others, encouraging using the hashtag #kindnessforKatie. Bottom line, by hosting this event, the family is encouraging people to be our in the world being kind to others, because we need more of that, just like Katie would want us to be.

Remember this Advent season, not to get lost in the busyness that this season can bring, but to be understanding and kind to those around us. Let's not allow stress and hectic schedules to prevent us from being the loving people that God would like us to be. Some months ago, Pastor Seth gave a season asking, "Would we be kind if no one was watching?" It made me think, it still makes me think. I hope to be kind of purpose, as Pastor Seth, Katie's family, and God would want us to be. Let's all be kind on purpose.

### Prayer

*Lord, help me to be kind to those around me, even when life may make that difficult. Help me to remember that kindness should be intentional so that I can spread your Good News through my actions. In Your Name, Amen.*



### ERIC RAUCH

Eric, his wife Jessica and daughter Maddy live in Wheaton Illinois. Eric and Jessica met playing in their college band. Eric's love of music became a profession and he currently is a music teacher. Besides being a husband, Dad, teacher, Eric is also an avid runner. Make sure to wave if you see him on the prairie path!



# DECEMBER 18

## ISAIAH 11:3-4

... He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,  
or decide by what he hears with his ears;  
but with righteousness he will judge the needs,  
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.

We are a church that welcomes and accepts everyone as they are. It is easy to say, but is it easy to put into practice? For those of us who are inclined to be accepting, it may be easier to accept and welcome those with differences that are relatively easy to identify- physical disabilities, the homeless, people of color, LGBTQ, etc. Visual cues act as a reminder of our desire to accept keep us in check, so to speak. But what about everyday differences that have less to do with how a person identifies or looks? How often do we look at another individual and criticize them inwardly? *There house is a mess! Her parenting skills are awful. His politics views are wrong! She shouldn't be wearing that. What isn't he more involved with his kids? Why is she working instead of staying home with her kids?* It's human nature to criticize.

Our senses- sight, taste, touch, hearing and smell- serve to protect us physically but often get in the way of our "spiritual sense." We often don't take the time to understand someone's circumstances before passing judgment. In this passage, God is telling us not to look at others with our physical senses, but with our "spiritual sense." Righteous judgment and justice come by following the teaching of Jesus and letting his love flow forth without prejudice.

Our job is to love others  
without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy.

-Thomas Merton-

### Prayer

*God, grant me the wisdom and patience to accept others for who they are and love unconditionally. Amen.*



### THERESA HOLLY

**Theresa** and her husband Patrick have been members of FCCGE since 2004. They have 2 boys, Trey (13) and Luke (9) and live in Bartlett, IL. Theresa is an accountant at Cedarstone Holdings in Wheaton, IL doing non-profit accounting/bookkeeping. She is an active member of the FCCGE choir and enjoys reading, gardening and music.

# DECEMBER 19

## ISAIAH 11:3-4

**He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,  
or decide by what he hears with his ears  
but with righteousness he will judge the needy,  
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.**

It seems so easy for us to judge others in the world today. Even on a college campus filled with diversity, I still see students being judged for their looks, majors, backgrounds, and beliefs. And honestly, I sometimes find myself falling into this trap as well. It can be hard not to judge those that seemingly waste their educational opportunities on excessive partying. Or to get upset at those with different political beliefs that seem unwilling to have meaningful conversations on the issues.

Yet as I think about all of this, I am reminded of a famous college address given by David Foster Wallace titled "This is Water." In his speech, Wallace reminds us how easy it is for us to forget that we are not the center of the universe and that others have their own hopes, dreams, and problems inside that are just as real to them as ours are to us. It can be especially difficult to remember this in a hectic holiday season when we shop in crowded stores, wait in long lines, and listen to kids obnoxiously shout for Santa. Yet even at our most tired and taxed, we must do our best to change our perspective and not judge others. We need to keep in mind that we don't know the whole life story of others and if we were in a similar situation we might have the same reaction.

In the end, this passage reminds us that it is not our place to judge and that right is only reserved for God. As we go through our days may we do our best to see the world through the eyes of others and replace our judgment with feelings of grace and love.

### Prayer

*Lord give me the strength and patience to withhold judgment of others and through Your power may I grow to better understand others and the choices they make. Amen.*



## NATHAN GAERTNER

**Nathan** is a Senior at the University of Illinois majoring in Finance with a minor in Technology & Management. In this free time, Nathan enjoys playing card games, traveling, and playing and watching soccer. On campus, he is involved with Business Council, Illinois Business Consulting, Dean's Student Advisory Board, and Social Entrepreneurship organization called Enactus. Nathan is excited to enjoy the rest of his Senior Year and return to Chicago after graduation.

# DECEMBER 20

## LUKE 1:31

### You will conceive and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus

Encounters with angels in the Bible are usually scary events. Most Biblical characters seem to respond with “Great. Now my life is going to change and become harder.” The Annunciation story in the first chapter of Luke is a contrast with this pattern:

The angel Gabriel: “Greetings favored one!”

Possible responses:

Moses: “Oh my Lord, please send someone else” (Exodus 4:13)

Jonah: “But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord” (Jonah 1:3)

Mary: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word (Luke 1:38)

Mary had an encounter with a messenger from God on both spiritual and profoundly physical levels. This event was not arrived at by logic or a deduction from studying scripture. This was not something Mary was in control of, but was granted to her by God.

God is not the Bible. God is not the church. God is something beyond human comprehension and is different in kind, not degree, from humans. If there is to be an encounter with God, it must be graciously initiated from God’s side. Jesus was a gift to us from God as “the Word (who) became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:10). I think our job is to be in a state of receptivity and openness to any message by any means God chooses to use in communicating with us.

Some things are mysterious, but others are not. All major religions seem to agree that the central idea of good religion is *kindness*. The word used might be love or charity or compassion, but it seems clear that respect and consideration of others is one of our primary duties here on earth.

#### Prayer

*Lord, thank you for the gift of life and the gift of Jesus. Help me to remember that all people, including myself, are created in your image and are to be treated with kindness and respect. Amen.*



#### ALAN BAYERT

Alan Bayert is from Chicagoland: the city (Lakeview), Berkeley, DeKalb, Wheaton, Glen Ellyn. Interested in music since he was 5 and sang for cookies. Refined his craft in churches, weddings, coffeehouses, parties and, like so many others, the cloister of his dark, acoustically-imperfect basement. Loves playing in church: great acoustics, polite crowd, few available projectiles. Member of the Ad Hocs. Turned down an invitation to sing in Rex Carroll’s band. Not rich and/or famous but has a rock-star family: Kathy, Henry, Gretchen and Eleanor Rigby.



# DECEMBER 21

## HEBREWS 10:32-39

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God.

Do you remember the first days you received the light? I do. Almost 10 years ago I was baptized, again/ Raised Catholic, my parents Baptized me as a child. In August of '09 I choose to do it again. I remember vividly sitting in the back of a church, listening to a sermon and being overwhelmed by a sense of being loved. Unconditionally. To being connected so thoroughly to all of God's creatures.

So many these days call themselves Christians, yet some seem to forget what being a follower of Christ means. It sure ain't easy. We are called upon and challenged to care for, fight for, go to prison with and for, those treated unjustly. I am, by nature, a counter-puncher. I don't throw the first punch, but if you hit me, I hit back harder. Today's divisive, discriminatory and inflammatory rhetoric out of our political "leaders" flat out makes me angry. And yet I don't know where to start to fight back. It seems to be coming at us from every direction. I really want to quell this hate mongering.

And yet, we are also called upon to Love. Even those who oppress; even these so-called leaders. Like I said, following Christ ain't easy! So where do I start? Where do we start? I think it is with the Love. I think we must Love the oppressor- the hate monger- the liars. With our Love we can show the way by example- it won't be easy, but we must stand up. Work like crazy, have faith, but in the end not carry the worry. Then we will not shrink back, then we will stand with our persecuted neighbor, then we will be true to our faith, true to the Love Jesus has for us.

### Prayer

*Lord, we seek your guidance to be resolute in our Love for all of your creation. To be firm in the face of persecution, to be activists for ALL your children and your earth. To have faith in You, and Your abiding Love for each of us.*



### GEORGE DOUAIRE

George married to Pastor Melissa, joined FCCGE in April of 2018. He is a self described broke down former athlete who works like crazy to keep somewhat in shape so he can keep up with his young wife. He still manages to play the sports he loves. He considers himself blessed and loves the life he's been given.



# DECEMBER 22

## ISAIAH 66:7-11

"Before she goes into labor, she gives birth; before the pains come upon her, she delivers a son. Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children. Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery?" says the Lord. "Do I close up the womb when I bring to delivery?" says your God. "Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her. For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance."

This scripture speaks of the birthing of a nation; of pain with purpose; pain that will lead to something positive. It calls to mind all the changes we have seen in our country in recent years - changes that can be viewed as a re-birth brought about by pain. In our most recent presidential election, those who felt the pain of being unheard and unrepresented eagerly cast their votes and affected the outcome. As I write this, the midterm election is approaching, and the voters who now suffer the pain of the new political climate are seeking to bring about a new incarnation within our country's leadership. It is a matter of one's personal perspective when the results- the re-birthing of our nation- is positive, but the point remains that pain can bring about change.

Consider another example at a smaller scale: our own church. Over the last three decades, there have been painful episodes of one sort or another. In each instance, the people in our community acutely felt pain. Gradually, though collective prayer and discernment, their pain led to action, which in turn led to re-birth, or re-direction, of our church. As times they may have wanted to go back to the way things were before the crisis began, but like a birth, they could not go backward, only forward. After each new birth of our church community, many of us have agreed that something good came from the pain.

On an even more personal scale, some people find a parallel in their own lives in the form of a relationship that is in a painful stage. One may yearn to return to the way things were, or choose to ignore the pain in the hope that it will go away. By turning to God for guidance, one can accept the pain as an integral step toward the change that is needed. By God's grace, the strides taken in response to the pain may give birth to a revitalization, or a different relationship. Perhaps then, one can look back and thank God for the pain that made it possible.

### Prayer

*Lord, help us to view the pain in our lives as a call for change. Help us to discern the direction in which to go. Guide our actions to bring about re-birth in our lives. Amen.*



### SHARON WUSSOW

**Sharon** and her husband Paul have been at FCCGE for nearly thirty years, and raised their children Brian and Laura here. They recently welcomed their first grandchild, Skylar, into the family.

Sharon's soul sings when she is creating something, often with fabric or yarn, sometimes with wood, or occasionally with paint.





# DECEMBER 23

## PSALM 80:1-7

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us! Restore us, O God: let your face shine, that we may be saved. O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves. Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

"Despair is possible only for someone who knows what it means to hope"  
{Henri Nouwen}

Have you ever felt desperate? For love? For peace? For God? For the restoration He can bring to your heart? Maybe your life has taken a drastically different course from what you'd imagined. Maybe you've experienced a significant loss. Maybe there is tension amongst family. When we're hurting, it's easy to feel despair. It's easy to feel disconnected from your faith. It's easy to feel God is far away, to feel angry with Him or He's angry with you, just as the Psalmist here does. This feels especially true when you're hurting at Christmas. When we're drowning in tears and there's no end in sight, it can be hard to feel "merry and bright."

The Christmas after my son died, I was in this place of intense despair. I felt bereft of God, which is the experience Psalm 80 describes. Instead of going to church on Christmas Eve, I went to the cemetery. While I went with the intention of feeling some kind of connection to my son, what I found was connection to God. In my desperation, I came back to His love and the hope I have in Him. Restoration may not come in this lifetime, and yet God's love and my hope in His promises will carry me through until it does.

This is the beauty of Christmas and of this passage: We live in a broken world. Lives shatter. Hearts break. Bad things happen. Grief enters the picture. And then a beautiful thing happens - alongside the grief, God's love surrounds our hearts. Jesus is born. Through Him, we are saved. That is God's promise. Just like the Psalmist, during the Advent season we wait and wonder "How long" until God shows us His face. And like the Psalmist, we know in our hearts, even when they're hurting and crying out in despair, that our hope rests in the miracle of Christmas- in Jesus coming to save us from the brokenness of this world and to restore our aching hearts.

### Prayer

*Lord, I am struggling. I feel so far from you and yet I feel your love in my heart. Show me Your face. My hope rests in You this season and always.*



## CHRISTINE MCMINN

**Christine** joined FCCGE in 2015 and lives in Winfield with her husband, Cregen. They have one son in heaven, Rory, and one son at home Hudson, who will soon be turning one. Christine works as a therapist at LivingWell Cancer Resource Center, where she provides counseling and support to individuals with a cancer diagnosis, those caring for someone with a diagnosis, and those grieving the loss of a loved one from a diagnosis.





## 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 prairies in our wonderful forest preserves.



# DECEMBER 24

## LUKE 2:15-29

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

When I was in fourth grade my father served as the interim pastor at a little church in Hancock Maine, a tiny fishing village right across the bay from Bar Harbor. We lived an idyllic life in the snug parsonage across from the church that sat on fourteen archers connected to the bay. That year for the Christmas pageant the children of the church, as children of churches everywhere do, donned costumes, and we reenacted the nativity with Mary and Joseph and baby doll Jesus lying in the real hay of a manger.

Following the pageant my dad began to preach on Christmas and Love incarnate. Very little ones of this church roamed "free range" from pew to pew sitting with other members. Little witnesses to what it could mean to be a family of faith. In the middle of the sermon Makayla, a three year old dressed as a sheep, left where she was sitting and made her way to the manger where baby Jesus lay. It was adorably picturesque, this little one gazing down with what seemed like love on this plastic prince of peace. And then, in one fell swoop, Makayla reached into the manger grabbed Jesus by the ankle and flung him as far as she could. A thump sounded as his plastic head hit the wood floor.

It is debated what would have happened next- Makayla seemed poised to climb into the manger herself. But my dad walked over, placed this member of the lost flock on his shoulder, and recessed out with her during the final hymn.

While the lore of the sheep that killed Christ lives large in my family I wonder at the potential wisdom of Makayla. How often do I place things that are not the real Christ in my manger but some poor plastic substitutes. I wonder at Makayla's wisdom of trying to crawl into that manger. Every Christmas we celebrate Christ coming into the world again, not through presents given, or wonderfully cooked meats, or time old traditions, but we celebrate the ways that the light of Christ is born and lives in the world and in each of us. So may we clear out the clutter this Christmas, make room for Christ to be born in each of us, and celebrate Christ's light in others too.

### Prayer

*God may we be courageous enough to peel away what is hallow this season and truly search for the ways that you are being born in the world and within us. Amen.*

For so the children come  
and so they have been coming.  
Always in the same way they came-  
Born of the seed of man and woman.

No angles herald their beginnings.  
No prophets predict their future courses.  
No wise men see a star to show where to find  
The babe that will save humankind.  
Yet each night a child is born is a holy night.

Fathers and mothers -  
Sitting beside their children's cribs-  
Feel glory in the sight of a new life beginning.  
They ask "Where and how will this new life end?  
Or will it ever end?"

Each night a child is born is a holy night-  
A time for singing-  
A time for wondering-  
A time for worshiping.

-Sophia Lyon Fahs

How full was the inn at Bethlehem? Too Full!

How full are our lives? Too Full?

Too full of society and societies to have room for family?

Too full of activities to have room for accomplishments?

Too full of responsibilities to have room for simple joy?

Too full of business to have room for religion?

Too full of busy-ness to have room for thought and prayer?

Too full of self-interest to have room for common needs?

Too full of regrets to have room for hope?

Too full of fear to have room for faith?

Too full of suspicion to have room for love?

Too full of conflict to have room for peace and goodwill?

Too full of noise to have room for angel choirs?

Make room! Clear away the debris!

Open the doors to your heart!

The things that matter will not clutter and crowd your life.

The things that matter will enlarge the orbit of your being until you are large enough to contain all that is worth of being welcomed.

- Albert Q. Perry



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
OF GLEN ELLYN

# Notes and Reflection

# Notes and Reflection

A collection of silver Christmas ornaments, including stars, a round ball, and a textured ball, resting on a white, snow-like surface. The ornaments are scattered across the top half of the image, with some in sharp focus and others blurred in the background.

***Celebrate Christmas Eve  
with First Congregational Church  
of Glen Ellyn***

**9:30 am Family Service with  
Children's Christmas Pageant**

**7 pm Candlelit Lessons and Carols**

**10:30 pm Candlelit Lesson and Carols**