

In Christ
alone my
hope is found

ADVENT 2022

Thank you to the members of
Trinity United Methodist Church
of Durham,
the church on Church St.



Sunday November 27th

Definition of Hope in the Bible

Hope in English is often interchangeable for wish or desire, but it has a different meaning in the original languages of the Bible. A few different words are used for hope in the Bible. Here are the primary ones you will find and some things that make them different from the English usage.

1. Yahal — To wait, to hope, to expect, to tarry.
2. Tiqva — Literally, a cord; figuratively, hope, expectation, something to hold on to.
3. Mahase — Refuge, shelter, place of hope
4. Elpis — Expectation of good, confidence, faith

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We have all experienced these slightly different types of hope; now think about how they would feel as you apply them to hoping in God. May these definitions enrich your reading of Trinity's Advent devotionals, with the theme of "What Brings You Hope?"

Monday, November 28th

Tug of War

"I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!" Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together. To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls and security within your towers." For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you." For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good." Psalm 122

When I was growing up one of the more popular games in elementary school PE was tug of war. While I would imagine you have all participated in the game, if you haven't it simply involves two teams who each grab opposite ends of a rope and start pulling. The idea is for one team to pull the other team past a middle point in order to win. As the two teams pull there is a great deal of tension on the rope, with each side trying as hard as they can to pull the other past the middle to their side.

When I read this Psalm I think of the world God has promised us. A world of peace, love and acceptance. But then I open my eyes and see the world in which I live. I see a world often on the opposite side pulling me to be divided and pit one side against another. I see a world that sometimes lives in fear instead of hope. I see a world that wants to tell me I don't matter instead of reminding me that I am one of God's beloved children.

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During this Advent season as we move toward Christmas this Psalm helps us hold in tension this tug of war we are in between the birth of Jesus and the second coming of Jesus. We live in this tension between world in which we live and the promised Kingdom of God. We live in this tension between who the world says we should be to be successful and who the Church says we should be. We live in this tension between the violence we see each night on television and the peace that Christ that says we will have in his Kingdom. We are in a constant tug of war between what we see and what we believe in our heart.

In this season of Advent let us live, not just with expectation, but with hope. Let us live not just with a sense of waiting, but active waiting as we prepare ourselves for the coming Christ child. Let us live in this tension between where we are and what is promised. Let us live as those who find our hope and rest in the birth of a Child.

-Rev. AC Brock

Tuesday, November 29th

Baring our Swords

"...they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Isaiah 2:4

War isn't waged only with bullets and bombs, though that is certainly in the news these days. War is also personal with a different arsenal of weapons. Our words. Our lack of words. Even our absence. War isn't always caused by being there; sometimes it's about not being there. But whether we wage war with bullets or words, war is a skill that must be learned. Isaiah says as much. We must study it extensively and practice it rigorously. The only way to move away from waging war is to practice peace more extensively and more rigorously.

One of the prominent features of Isaiah's vision for peace is that we should all practice. We know war is hard to master; why should peace be any easier? We have to be taught the ways of peace and like any acquired skill, we have to practice them over and over and over again to get really good. I used to know the periodic table from beginning to end, but I don't even know the first five elements anymore. I don't use chemistry; I haven't used it since the first week of my freshmen year of college when I went to two lectures, one lab, and the drop-add office in that order. Why do we think it would be any easier for us to retain the lessons of peace—if, indeed, we'd ever learned them—when we don't practice them?

When we come into God's presence and review the grand tapestry of God's mercy throughout history, we can't help but notice its

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totality: no trouble is beyond the reach of God's mercy, no quarrel is beyond God's reconciliation, no abandonment renders us so helpless that God cannot help. Our lives look very different if we studied those truths more fervently than we study office politics, hone personal grudges, or manufacture weapons of mass destruction. We would no longer need our swords and spears, literally or figuratively. With God reaching out to enfold us, right along with all the ones from whom we believe our swords will protect us, we will find that we don't need our swords.

The Prince of Peace whose advent we announce today carries no sword or spear. He comes into our midst unprotected knowing that we've all got a sword hidden somewhere that we might use. Most of life is lived in a wide gray area of ambiguity and uncertainty. Sometimes there's a sliver of pure right or absolute wrong on the outer edges where we convince ourselves we might need a sword. But there's only been one who stood with certainty in the place of no ambiguity, the only place where a sword can rightly be put to use. And the one who stood in that place told his followers—and we are they—put away the swords.

Remember when they came for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, with swords and clubs as if he were a bandit. One of his disciples took a sword and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. But Jesus touched his ear and healed it. And he said, "No more of this."

No more of this. Amen.

-Jennifer Copeland

Wednesday, November 30th

Alarmed by the Daylight

"Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." Romans 13:11-14

I have an alarm clock preprogrammed to change the time by the old calendar for daylight savings time, so sometimes it wakes me up an hour earlier or later than I want. But I know what time it is—eventually. I keep it because I'm comfortable with all its other features, so I'm willing to excuse this unfortunate "feature." Some years I remember to correct for its misinformation, but when I don't, I'm out of synch for a bit.

In Alison Krauss' song Daylight she sings, ..."I'm afraid of the Daylight," a reversal of the expected childhood fear of darkness.

Putting on the armor of light is not as easy as hitting the snooze button for another long stretch of languidly lolling in comfort.

It gives me hope that so many people are waking up now, to God's dream of being Christians who love each other and even more importantly, love those different from us or who have even harmed us. Being awake means going forward with full accountability for following God's commandments to love our

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neighbors, those we don't quite understand, and even those we call enemies.

“Woke” has become a scary word to some, twisted by fear mongers. We need not fear the daylight, or “getting lost in the big parade-“ as Krauss sings. Daylight is where God finds us, looks fully upon his beloved creation and declares it good. Be awake and follow the example of Christ. It is in wakeful daylight that our hope grows and blossoms.

Loving those of different skin color, sexual characteristics or expression, or taking accountability for our actions that trap the sun's heat and change our planet, and in many other ways, we must be awake and live honorably in the light, confident in the example, commands, and Love of Jesus Christ.

Dear Lord, please help us to feel hopeful for a world in which we see everyone in the light of your love, recognizing the humanity and the divinity of every person and thing you have created and love. Let us not fear what we see in the daylight but know fully that you love us, even with complete understanding of our imperfections.

-Mark Daughtridge

Thursday, December 1st

Keeping Watch with Hope

Read Isaiah 11:1-9 and Matthew 24:36-44

“The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding ...with righteousness He will judge the needy, with justice He will give decisions for the poor of the earth.” Isaiah 11:2,4

The prophet Isaiah delivered God’s promise of hope and deliverance to a people who were in great need of both. Then, as now, injustice, oppression, human trafficking, violence, hatred, persecution, poverty, unrest, fear and despair were rampant—the consequences of not having put God before selfish interests. Isaiah’s message foretold the coming of God’s long-promised Messiah who would save His people and show them (and us) how our loving God intended for life to be. The people of that time were asked to put their faith and hope in God while they waited. Some listened and realized the blessing of living in God’s presence. Others, desiring instant gratification, ignored the message and missed the blessing.

During Isaiah’s lifetime, waiting for the Messiah required faith, a fervent hope in things unseen. With the birth of the Christ child, the unseen dwelled among mankind. Jesus is hope realized, yet not everyone accepts this truth. So our gracious, omniscient God patiently waits.

In Matthew 24:36-44, Jesus says that the Lord will come again, and--once again--only the Lord knows when that will happen. The day may seem ordinary since we will be going about our lives—eating, working,

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celebrating, or perhaps, like Noah, being heckled for our faith. But into the midst of everyday life—at its best or at its worst, the Lord will arrive, gathering believers from every corner of the earth to join Him. For now we still need to wait in hope for that day promised by God when “The wolf will live with the lamb; the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them....the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” (Isaiah 11: 6-9). This wait births a new hope with responsibilities—that our trust in God shines His holy light into the darkest corners of everyday life, drawing unbelievers into His presence. Then maybe the other “woman at the grinding mill” [or the women we know at the other end of a Zoom call] and the other “man in the field” [or the guy sitting next to us at the basketball game] will be prepared to join all the other believers when Christ comes again. Hope is knowing that holy investments have unparalleled and eternal returns.

Father, may your hope dwell in our hearts and guide others to invite you into their lives. We ask this in the Name of Jesus, Amen.

-Gwen Palmer

Friday, December 2nd

Love Letters

When was the last time you received a letter in the mail – not a bill or ad -- but a letter written by family or friend? While I was overseas for a couple of years my mother would write to me regularly. It was so great to get that mail. She'd tell me about my whole family and often include stories titled "Bob and Rose and How They Spend Their Weekends," subtitled "We Took a Ride and Only Made Right Turns." One story about my nephew was 'Remember the Time Scott Got Sent to the Principal for Only Eating Two Life Savers for Lunch.' He had a weigh in for playing football and was a bit overweight. When Scott's teacher realized he wasn't eating, Scott was sent to the principal who admonished him not to do it again, but explained that he should keep spitting so he would get rid of some water weight before the weigh in. The letters Mother wrote held questions about what I was doing, wishes like wish you were here and I can't wait to see you. She always started by writing "Dearest Gail" and ended with "All My Love, Mother.'

Recently I was part of a Bible study and the leader of that group said he thought the Bible was a love letter to us. Think about that. Not only does the Bible contain history, narratives, songs and poetry, but also love letters to us. While you are living your life here in 2022, God is sending you messages from across time and place and we can find them in the Bible.

I thought of just a few of the very personal loving, messages that we can read in the Bible. Each of the following items contains a message God might send today. The inspiring Bible verse follows.

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1. I've got plenty of room for you in a large house and I'm fixing your room.

My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? John 14:2

2. I really mean it when I say that I want you to let me know if you need anything.

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:16

3. I think of you as my family, my child actually.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 1 John 3:1

4. I know you will love everyone just as I love you.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. John 15:12

5. I loved you even when you were doing things that hurt me and weren't good for you.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

6. I have sent you the very best present. I can't wait for you to know My Son Jesus. He will save you.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

Friday, December 2nd ...continued...

So, with these messages in mind, I'd like to send God this love letter.

Dearest God,

It is wonderful every time I hear from you. To know you are close and listening to me makes everything so much easier to bear. Keep in touch and I will do the same. Thanks for all the gifts you have given me especially your Son, Jesus Christ. I love hearing your voice. I will be so happy when we get the whole family together. Can't wait to be with you.

*All My Love,
Gail*

-Gail Barrett

Saturday, December 3rd

Hope at Christmas

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in Hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance character; and character Hope now Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Romans 5:1-5

The word Glory here is used twice.

In Luke 2 The angels sang at Jesus birth to the Shepherds " Glory to God in the highest". The word Glory means rejoice. We have so much to sing about and Rejoice at Christmas time.

Anticipation of the day is exciting especially for kids. Family gatherings and reunions are very special at Christmas time. But we must remember those who are suffering and grieving during Christmas. Many folks have little to celebrate with all the poverty and sickness we have around us.

Many people have suffered this past year with the shootings and violence and war going on. We can give Hope to anyone we know who are suffering. We can give gifts to different funds for the needy in our church projects . And we can give to UMCOR the United Methodist Committee On Relief. 100% of those contributions go directly to the needy. Some here in NC and some global.

Saturday, December 3rd ...continued...

One time years ago, here at Trinity the children in the elementary Sunday School had a project of sending shoe boxes with personal items in them for the needy in South America. My son who was involved with this project sent a personal note in his box. We never thought we would hear back. We received a personal thank you note written by a Nun. It was in Spanish. Someone else had to read it to us. That little note made my son very happy. We never know how our gifts affect others. We just trust we make a little difference. My son is 45 years old today.

We must never give up on Hope.

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' Blood and Righteousness. Amen

-Liz Allred

Sunday, December 4th

My Hope is Built

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

On Christ the solid rock I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness veils his lovely face, I rest on his unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.

On Christ the solid rock I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

His oath, his covenant, his blood support me in the whelming flood.
When all around my soul gives way, he then is all my hope and stay.

On Christ the solid rock I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

When he shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in him be found!
Dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne!

On Christ the solid rock I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

Monday, December 5th

Prepare Ye the Way

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Matthew 3:1-12 (King James version)

We know that John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin; therefore, he knew Jesus was the Son of God, the One for whom the Jews had been waiting. He traveled throughout the wilderness of the land, beseeching the people to repent and be baptized in preparation for the coming of Christ.

Monday, December 5th ...continued...

Repentance is the prerequisite to joining Jesus in His quest to spread love, peace, justice, and dignity throughout the people and the Earth. As Methodists, we repent and seek forgiveness each week during worship to ready ourselves for the challenges we will face in the coming week. Repentance readies us for the Kingdom of God, whether on Earth or in Heaven. As Christians, we spend the Advent season each year considering and examining how our world is, and what we need to do to spread love, to make peace, to stand for justice, and to bring dignity to all of God's children. It is an annual season of anticipation, repentance, and renewal. It is an annual season for which John the Baptist readied us.

Almighty God, we repent and seek your Divine Guidance to bring love, peace, justice, and dignity to a world damaged by hate, war, oppression, and dishonor. Lay on our hearts Your will for us as Your child and as Your People. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

-Annette Baker

Tuesday, December 6th

Living In Hope

"... by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

...and again Isaiah says, 'The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the gentiles; in him the gentiles shall hope.'

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:4,5,12

One of my favorite hymns, not just for Advent, is "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus," written by Charles Wesley. Every time I sing the song or even just hear the tune it brings a smile to my face. Each verse and even each phrase reminds me of the freedom, joy and hope that so many in our world seek for their lives.

In this passage, Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah telling us that the Root of Jesse will bring us hope. This Root is a reference to Jesus, a descendant of Jesse through David.

Too often we try finding hope in things the world says are important. Whether it be jobs or money or prestige or power or any other number of things, we think they will bring us joy, peace and hope. Somehow, they don't. The good news is we can abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. It isn't something we acquire through our own efforts, but out of God's grace and love.

Tuesday, December 6th ...continued...

The irony of ironies is that for us as people of faith, our hope is found in this infant we expectantly wait for, not in any of the other things the world considers powerful.

*“Come, Thou long expected Jesus born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.”*

May you be filled with peace, joy and hope in this Advent Season.

-Rev AC Brock

Wednesday, December 7th

Tradition, Tradition!

"I remain confident of this:

I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." Psalm 27:13-14

One of my fondest memories that I often find myself reminiscing over from time to time is when I performed in my 1978 High School musical production of "Fiddler on the Roof". The story of Tevye, a poor milkman who struggled with his family through life while imagining of becoming a wealthy man. "If I were a rich man", as the iconic song is titled in the musical. The Jewish family in the village of Anatevka was targeted by the Russian Empire. Now in 2022, Ukraine is enduring the same deplorable acts of hatred in a war with Russia.

I think about that high school musical with the other cast members. A cast made up of different races, religious backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. All portraying people living in a poor Jewish community. Social inclusion made this extracurricular activity very enjoyable. Unalarmed by several tragic events of the present times, the school's only had 2 fire drills per month and the doors were left unlocked until the school closed at the end of the day.

Not only did Tevye wish for prosperity, he prayed for peace between the people of Anatevka and Russia. The goodness of the Lord continues to give us hope with acts of love and strength.

Wednesday, December 7th ...continued...

May we celebrate the the birth of Christ with hope and prayers for the Ukrainian citizens along with the children of our nation. May we all live our lives with gratitude and promise.

-Jacqueline Brown

Thursday, December 8th

Waiting for the Bus

"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." Isaiah 40:31 NIV

The other afternoon I was waiting for my son Daniel's bus to get home from school. The time he got home varied greatly and depended on how many other kids were riding that afternoon. Unfortunately, the bus app on my phone that I used to determine when I needed to be at the bottom of the street to meet the bus wasn't working and I sent a quick text asking the driver to let me know when the bus was close.

But as time went on I still hadn't heard anything and I panicked and just headed to the bottom of the street to wait. I figured I could get a little exercise in while I waited, so I started walking along the street where I would see the bus when it came. It seemed quiet and peaceful as I walked, but then five, ten, and fifteen minutes passed and still no bus. As I began to get more anxious, I decided that this waiting thing wasn't any fun, even if I was getting exercise.

I wondered why waiting was so difficult, and then a surprising thought crossed my mind. I knew exactly how this scenario would work out. If I would keep waiting and not give up, something good would actually happen. Daniel would get home at some point, even if I didn't know when. And with that realization my whole mood changed. Even if I didn't know any of the details of when it would happen, I was certain that the bus would bring him home safely.

Thursday, December 8th ...continued...

It is amazing how just that one little realization opened my mind to an entirely different way of thinking. Instead of feeling overwhelmed, I could feel a little spring in my step as I continued to walk. I found myself with a whole new frame of mind. Focusing on the end result that Daniel would get home filled me with hope and the next 10 minutes passed quickly. And sure enough, just as I had requested, the bus driver did send me a text to let me know the bus was just about home. I need not have panicked and I could have waited in the house.

Hebrews 11:1 says “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” When I think back to all of the stories about God’s people in the bible and those listed in Hebrews 11, I find hope in knowing that God has been with each of his children in the past and that he will be with me in the future. God is always guiding, always helping, always calling us to listen to his voice. And when we listen, God’s hope transforms our entire outlook giving us the ability to go beyond what we can do on our own. Just as I realized waiting for the bus, no matter what challenges we face in our lives, we know the outcome. God has always helped us, and he will always be there to help us even when we can’t see him. Hope changes everything.

Lord, change our focus and fill us with hope this Advent season.

-Lauren Crowell

Friday, December 9th

Serving with Hope

"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." Isaiah 40:31

What does it mean to “wait “ for the Lord?

"They also serve who only stand and wait," said the poet, John Milton.

During one of the “great” wars, my grandfather was assigned to stay home and continue farming and be part of the civil air patrol keeping watch for German bombers, etc. One great-uncle was in the infantry, and told us how naive he had been, thinking that at 20 he would go and save the world, but later found his service on the European front-line infantry hard to talk about. Another uncle flew an airplane over Europe carrying both bombs and supplies. He preferred the story he told with my aunt of how they went AWOL to get married in France after VE Day, while she served as a nurse in a hospital unit that had moved while they eloped.

All of these beloved patriots served the American effort, in the hope of making the world better and freer.

Waiting for the lord means knowing your effort is for a good and righteous cause. Of course, you will get weary of running and walking and waiting, but you will be renewed by the loving power of God. Perhaps the waiting really is the hardest part, day after day watching and worrying for bombers that thankfully never came, and longing sometimes to be more directly involved.

Friday, December 9th ...continued...

Why we persist matters more than how we are engaged in the work. Knowing we have God and righteousness on our side gives us hope, and renews us to wake up the next day and go at it again. If Russia prevails in Ukraine they can look forward to years of anxiety and being on guard in a land where the people resent them. Ukrainians are fighting to be able to let down their guard and enjoy a picnic in their own back yard, a much more powerful motivation.

After being liberated from a concentration camp, Victor Frankl wrote that “man can survive any ‘what’ if he has a sufficient ‘why.’” Let us trust in the steadfast love of God as our why- our reason for hope

Dear Lord, please give us patience and hope this day by reminding us that it is your kingdom we are fighting for. Remind us of your steadfast love and let us feel renewed to wait, walk, run and soar in loving all of your creation. Let us be and become the people that you would have us to be, people of love and hope.

-Mark Daughtridge

Saturday, December 10th

Fortress

"Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken." Psalm 62:5-6 (NIV)

My mental image of a fortress is of a medieval castle sitting on a hill. Its walls are tall and thick and no enemy dares attack it for doing so would mean sure defeat. Those who reside inside the castle live with a sense of calm because they know they are safe and secure. The writer of Psalm 62 compares God to a fortress because we too can find a sense of calm, a moment of rest for our souls, when we abide in Him.

My all-time favorite hymn is the Martin Luther classic, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God". I love the tune, especially when it is played on the powerful pipes of a church organ like the one at Trinity. But as stirring as those chords are coming from the organ, I find the words really resonate with me in way that very few other songs do. The first verse grimly portrays the predicament we are find ourselves in – evil is ever present in the world and we seem to be fighting against it in vain. The tide turns in the second verse as we hear the good news that God has sent Christ Jesus to win the ultimate battle against evil. The third and fourth verses then continue to depict our triumphant march into final victory in God's eternal kingdom.

Both the Psalm and hymn describe the hope we have as Christians. No matter what the world throws our way, we "will not be shaken" because God is constant and true from generation to generation and has promised to deliver us through the blessed gift of His son,

Saturday, December 10th ...continued...

Jesus. As we await Jesus this Advent season, let us hold on tightly to the hope that comes from living in the mighty fortress that is our God.

Lord, amid the flood of mortal ills, help us keep sight of your Son and your kingdom. Amen.

-Alex Crowell

Sunday, December 11th

A Mighty Fortress

1 A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
does seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

3 And though this world, with
devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has
willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.

2 Did we in our own strength
confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right Man on our
side,
the Man of God's own choosing.
You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name,
from age to age the same;
and he must win the battle.

4 That Word above all earthly
powers
no thanks to them abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours
through him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
the body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever!

Monday, December 12th

Refreshment

"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing ... Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; ...And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Isaiah 35

How many of us can resonate with walking through a season of “dryness”, like walking through a desert land where there is scarcity of water? Have you experienced moments this year of feeling overwhelmed? Can you relate to the reality of anxiety creeping in? You are not alone. Today, we experience the same types of emotions as those from ancient Israel. The source of our anxieties may be slightly different than those that Isaiah the prophet spoke about here in this passage, but the remedy is the same.

The God we serve today is the same as the God the Israelites served. He has spoken a hope over His people both then and now, “He will come and save you,” and the “ransomed of the Lord shall return...with singing!” Let us take a moment to remember the promise that “everlasting joy shall be upon their heads” and “sorrow and sighing shall flee”.

Monday, December 12th ...continued...

What are the anxieties that bog you down?

Take a moment to lift those to the Lord in prayer. Release them to the Lord, for He is strong enough to carry them. Now, allow his peace and joy to fill you in this quiet moment of reflection.

-Nicole McDonald

Tuesday, December 13th

Patience

"Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Brothers and sisters, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." James 5:7-10

My dad had an interest in gardening for as long as I can remember, but it really blossomed when I entered my teenage years. He bought the land across from our house and each year slowly expanded the area his garden would occupy. He liked to experiment with many different crops, but the one that gave him the most joy (and heartache!) was his prized "silver queen" corn. At the end of the summer there was nothing quite as delicious as a fresh ear of tender corn slathered in butter with a sprinkling of salt.

Of course being able to reap that scrumptious corn was no small feat. You started in the spring by planting your seeds and hoping that the crows don't get them before they germinate. You thin the seedlings so one main plant in each plot can grow tall and strong. Then you pray for rain, hoping it comes at the right times. Often the rains don't come and you irrigate to try and keep the plants alive. Then there are those summer thunderstorms with winds so ferocious that they knock your stalks down to the ground. And yet through the droughts and the storms, the farmer remains patient.

The Apostle James used a farming metaphor because it would have

Tuesday, December 13th ...continued...

been intimately familiar for his audience. Jesus frequently did the same in his parables. In both today's passage and in Jesus' parables, it is God who has planted the seeds of faith for new disciples and we are the farmer who toils to nurture them to maturity. Sometimes those who are new to the faith get knocked to the ground by the storms of life. In those times, we are called to be the farmer who goes around and helps stand the stalks back up, just like my dad would do in his garden.

The big question for us is how do we remain patient? As clearly evidenced by my 11-year-old son, our society is one that desires instant gratification. If we don't have success right away, we quit trying. The reason that the farmer works so hard every day is because he has the hope that at the end of the season that crop will be bountiful. We too have hope because God has promised us a bountiful crop of fellow disciples. All it takes is hard work and lots of patience on our part. In the end, the Lord will reap the harvest and we pray that He will look to us and say "well done, my faithful servant!"

God, you have called us to make disciples in your name. Help us to remain patient, knowing that at the end of the season there is a feast awaiting us.

-Alex Crowell

Wednesday, December 14th

Miraculous Hope

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." Luke 1:46b-55

On meeting her cousin Elizabeth, Mary was full of the Holy Spirit, her heart lit by hope in the coming birth of Jesus. Her hope led her to rejoice in God's mercy, power, and blessing, and this rejoicing poured out in a song of praise and gratitude.

Hope is the heart-knowledge that blessing is coming, that God's favor still lights our way despite the inevitable problems of life which confuse our minds, shadow our hearts, and strain our relationships. Hope dispels the loops of false thoughts, feelings, and circumstances that we all sometimes find ourselves in. Hope is the realization that there is light ahead, even if we have grown so accustomed to the darkness that we cannot yet see what is coming in that light.

Through Jesus, the renewal of our hope stills our doubts and our fears, and it calms our grief. Hope in God steadies our ambitions and our plans. Hope renews our openness to our fellow-travelers

Wednesday, December 14th ...continued...

in this life, and it gives us a glimpse of the light in which God is working on our loved ones.

The natural response to hope is gratitude. Just as Mary's song came outpouring from her heart long months before Jesus was actually born, gratitude can well up within us despite our inability, sometimes, to see when God's promises will be fulfilled. "The Mighty One has done great things for me," Mary declared, though the sequence of miracles that would see her the mother of Christ had only just begun.

Hope is the conviction that, for us as for Mary, the miracles are only just beginning.

*Jesus, may your hope be a light in me:
Dispel the ruminations of my soul,
my circumstances, my anxieties.
May hope free me to see others anew,
and to work with the light that shines on them.
May the Holy Spirit bring forth in me
rich harvests of hope, gratitude, and love.
May your miracles light my way always.*

-Stephen Armstrong

Thursday, December 15th

Let It Show

"Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!" Psalm 146:5-10

Justice for the oppressed... Food for the hungry... Setting the prisoner free... Opening the eyes of the blind... These are some of the mighty acts of our Good God! His mercy endures forever. It is true that we serve a God who is long-suffering. He cares deeply and He moves mightily in our lives, and in the world around us. The suffering of this world is never overlooked in His eyes. He calls His people to be His hands and His feet in our corner of the world, working in the same ways that move his heart so deeply for the vulnerable and helpless. This is one of the ways that He displays His hope to those who don't yet know His goodness! "Blessed is he whose hope is in the Lord!"

How are you displaying His HOPE in your circle of influence? Take a moment to reflect on these words. What is one small way that you can embody the "hope of the Lord" today?

-Nicole McDonald

Friday, December 16th

The Pine-straw is Telling

*"For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him." Psalm 62:5, (NRSV)*

*"The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork." Psalm 19:1, (NRSV)*

Sometimes Nature gives me hope. Seeing the sun after a long night or a long rain. Hearing birds start the day, or hearing frogs celebrate a summer evening. Getting some fresh air after being stressed by work on the computer.

After spending so much quarantine time at home, one of my 2022 resolutions was to hike in new places. On an October Saturday, I walked the blue trail of the New Hope Overlook at Jordan Lake. Within those first steps, I was struck by the softness of walking on pine-straw compared to asphalt.

While not as beautiful a phrase as the psalmist's "The heavens are telling the glory of God," that day I felt like the pine-straw was telling the glory of God to me. It was saying Peace be with you; let the beauty of God's creation shows you his love; walk softly and breathe deeply. There were several overlooks of the lake, including some gentle whooshing sounds from a boat's wake lapping the shore. These provided perfect backdrops for a deep breath and a prayer lifting up all my worries and giving thanks for nature's calm beauty.

Friday, December 16th ...continued...

The Psalmist finds hope by waiting in silence and knowing God will speak. In today's world it can be difficult to find silence. But out in the woods, I came close. That day's walk gave me hope through renewal and the power of prayer.

Thank you, Lord, for moments of peace within your creation. Help us remember to breathe deeply and pray. Amen

-Elizabeth Benson

Saturday, December 17th

On Our Way Home

*"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
His mercies never come to an end;
They are new every morning;
Great is your faithfulness.
'The Lord is my portion,' said my soul,
'therefore I will hope in Him.'
Lamentations 3:22-24 NRSV*

In one way or another, we are all waiting for and hoping in a new home. We are all waiting for and hoping in a place to finally lay our heads and rest. By this I do not mean a physical home... although there are many in our broader Durham community who seek daily for a safe physical space where they can finally rest and separate themselves from the turmoil of the streets. In this context, I mean a Kingdom-home... a state of being in which we can finally find a holistic sense of peace, physically, psychologically, and spiritually. We are all, throughout our lives, looking towards and longing for the complete manifestation of God's Kingdom-home within our present realities.

We long for and seek after God's Kingdom-home in nearly every area of our lives. We long for and seek after God's Kingdom-home in our family lives whenever the brokenness of trauma and relational dysfunction rear its ugly head and cause us to hurt, or be hurt by, the people who we hold closest to our hearts.

We long for and seek after God's Kingdom-home in our physical and psychological health whenever our bodily limitations and

Saturday, December 17th ...continued...

ailments besiege us and prevent us from living the lives we desire to have.

We long for and seek after God's Kingdom-home in our workplaces whenever we clash with our coworkers or feel incapable of performing our jobs altogether, doubting our abilities to provide for ourselves and our families.

We long for and seek after God's Kingdom-home within Creation whenever we experience the bitter effects of climate change on the invaluable habitats of our Earth.

We long for and seek after God's Kingdom-home within our systemic structures whenever we witness the harmful impact of poverty, violence, and other forms of injustice that are perpetuated through our patterns of harm towards one another.

We even long for and seek after God's Kingdom -home within our own spirits... whenever we lose our sense of purpose and direction, and find ourselves questioning our faith and our relationship with God altogether.

Through it all... through all the fear, the anxiety, the grief, and the despondency that the brokenness of our world oftentimes brings us... we long for and seek after the final consummation of God's kingdom-home.

At times, it may feel agonizing to sit still within our world as we know it, with all of its beauty and brokenness tangled up together in a single, common thread. We may feel like we cannot help but focus on all the broken shards of this world that continually pierce

Saturday, December 17th ...continued...

our own hearts. We oftentimes find ourselves exactly where our author of Lamentations meets us today... in a place of despondency, in need of new hope and new mercies.

Just before our verse for today, our Lamenter agonizes over his own suffering, stating that God himself has filled him with bitterness and sated him with wormwood (vs. 15). God himself has made his spirit entirely bereft of peace (vs. 17). "Gone is my glory", our Lamenter cries, "and all that I had hoped for from the Lord. The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me" (vs. 16-20). Our Lamenter, leading up to our passage for today, cannot help but focus on all the hurt and the pain that has bruised his soul and led him into a state of spiritual homelessness within a world that feels void of God's kingdom.

Even then... almost as suddenly as night turns to day, as if someone has turned a switch on within his heart, our Lamenter turns his attention away from his suffering and towards the God who created him. "But this I call to mind," our Lamenter proclaims, "and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion... says my soul, therefore I will hope in him" (22-24). Through our Lamenter's agonizing longing for all things to be made new, his own spirit reminds him of where his home can truly be found... where he can find peace within a world of perpetual chaos.... And where he can find a newfound hope to sustain him through his present afflictions...

Saturday, December 17th ...continued...

Our Lamentor directs his readers towards God's new morning mercies... those continual blessings that never cease to uplift those who are broken in spirit. Our Lamentor urges his readers to wait for the Lord in steadfast hope as they endure their present afflictions, with the confidence that those who wait for the Lord will not be forsaken (25-32).

As we enter into this present Advent season, what does it mean for you to wait for the Lord? How does your own story parallel the story of our Lamentor as he awaited a new Kingdom-home through God's everlasting mercies? How does your story of waiting replicate the story of the Israelites as they awaited the Messiah who was prophesied to deliver them from their afflictions? What new morning mercies offer you a taste of God's Kingdom-home, made incarnate through the person of Jesus Christ, and sustained through our hope for everlasting redemption?

God's mercies are ever new. By sending the Son to become one of us, God has offered us a glimpse into God's profound desire to be with us and surround us with never-ending mercies. During this Advent season, may God remind you of God's everlasting love. May you experience God's new morning mercies, and be reminded of your destiny for eternal peace in the consummation of God's heavenly Kingdom throughout all of Creation. Through every mercy, may God point you towards a new redemptive hope and offer you a glimpse of your eternal Kingdom-home in Christ. Amen.

-Samantha Boyce

Sunday, December 18th

Great is Thy Faithfulness

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided;
great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided;
great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided;
great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Monday, December 19th

Preparing for the Coming of Christ in Bethlehem and into Our Lives

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ: To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Romans 1: 1-7—King James Version 1611

"¹ Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, ³ the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, ⁶ including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷ To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Romans 1-NRSV Trinity's pew Bible 1989

Monday, December 19th ...continued...

"Greeting 1 From Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for God's good news. 2 -3 God promised this good news about his Son ahead of time through his prophets in the holy scriptures. His Son was descended from David. 4 He was publicly identified as God's Son with power through his resurrection from the dead, which was based on the Spirit of holiness. This Son is Jesus Christ our Lord. 5 Through him we have received God's grace and our appointment to be apostles. This was to bring all Gentiles to faithful obedience for his name's sake. 6 You who are called by Jesus Christ are also included among these Gentiles. 7 To those in Rome who are dearly loved by God and called to be God's people. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Romans 1- Common English Bible (CEB) 2011

One sentence—yes, verses 1-7 just one sentence— summarizing the Gospel, here in three versions. Paul wrote to the Romans but speaks across time to readers yesterday, today and tomorrow. Note the publication dates. The last, and most recent (CEB), comes with a subtitle “a fresh translation to touch the heart and mind.” Does Paul speak to you afresh?

The CEB “Preface,” noting the numerous translations since the King James Version indicates that “it has proved difficult to combine concern for accuracy and accessibility in one translation that the typical reader or worshipper would be able to understand. Therefore, readers in the twenty-first century, four hundred years after the creation of the KJV, need and deserve a new translation that is suitable for personal devotion, for communal worship, and for classroom study.”

Monday, December 19th ...continued...

Compare the force of verse 5 in the three translations.

KJV By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: NRSV through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name,

CEB Through him we have received God's grace and our appointment to be apostles. This was to bring all Gentiles to faithful obedience for his name's sake.

Each claims apostleship for us. But doesn't the CEB speak more powerfully to us now—of God's forgiving grace for us, of the personal power of Christ's redemptive sacrifice, of our calling to exercise transformative service to other persons and to our society, of the necessity of our living a gracious, redemptive, transformative, and faithfully obedient Christian life?

The short passage carries us briskly through the entire Bible, over the Christian life, and into our hopes for the eternal kingdom. V. 1 "From Paul" invites our consideration of the spread of the Gospel, inaugurated with Paul's own conversion. Vv. 2-3 point back through the Prophets to Genesis and Creation. V. 4 brings God to earth in Jesus Christ. Vv. 5-6 remind us of our great debt to Paul and colleague apostles (then and now) actively carrying the Christian message from Israel to the world. And vv. 6-7 might be read as pointing to Revelation, the last things (eschatology), and our hope that we will join Christ in heaven.

Monday, December 19th ...continued...

For your devotion time read through one or more of these versions.

Read noting the flow of Paul's guidance.

Read tracking the Apostle's compression of the Christian message into one sentence.

Read asking God through Paul to guide our Advent preparation for a new coming of Christ.

-Russell Richey

Tuesday, December 20th

Psalm 80

*"Hear us, Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.*

*You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,
shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.*

Awaken your might; come and save us.

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

*How long, Lord God Almighty,
will your anger smolder
against the prayers of your people?*

*You have fed them with the bread of tears;
you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.*

*You have made us an object of derision to our neighbors,
and our enemies mock us.*

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

...

*Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand,
the son of man you have raised up for yourself.*

*Then we will not turn away from you;
revive us, and we will call on your name.*

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

Wednesday, December 21st

Restore us

Re-read Psalm 80 from yesterday

For many years until its run ended, I was a regular viewer of the TV show, “Mythbusters.”

Every episode systematically debunked urban legends. Like: Can you build a boat out of duct tape? Can a surfboard be powered by a rocket engine? Can you fire a cannon with coffee creamer? It was a fun and creative show, but also fundamentally dedicated to a rational, experiment-based approach to testing ideas and seeing if they’re valid.

I saw an interview recently with one of the stars of that show, Adam Savage, in which he unexpectedly mentioned that his least favorite time of year is mid-December. The long, cold, dark nights just get to him: like many folks, he suffers from “Seasonal Affective Disorder”, an actual clinical condition that, yes, spells out SAD. As creative and rational as he is, he just can’t stand that time. And he’s so happy on December 21st, when the days start getting longer.

So you see how this ties into a devotional passage about Psalm 80, right? No? Ok, here you go:

Here we are, stuck in the lengthening nights, like Adam Savage. And like him, we’re both rational and emotional - and

Wednesday, December 21st ...continued...

sometimes our emotions get to us. We feel overwhelmed. We feel our tears. We feel our isolation. We feel others judging us, maybe even mocking us.

We're stuck. And we're waiting.

Waiting to turn the corner, to have the season shift. To feel things change for the better.

And that's what Advent really is.

To reach the point where we say as the Psalm says, "Restore us, Lord God Almighty, make your face shine on us, that we may be saved."

To reach the point where we feel Advent giving rise to a new birth.

Like the sun staying up longer every day.

And then we can feel the depth of the Psalm's words: "Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name."

And revived - with gratitude - we can greet the rising - of the son.

Dear Lord, help us to feel your presence. Help us to see that the path ahead isn't always dark. Help us to know that things will get better. Help us to feel restored. Amen.

-Ted Benson

Thursday, December 22nd

Artwork by Karen Bullock



Friday, December 23rd

Wait Upon the Lord

*Our soul waiteth for the Lord: He is our help and our shield.
For our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have trusted in his Holy Name.
Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in Thee.
Psalm 33:20-22, KJV*

Wait upon the Lord! Oh, my goodness, how hard it is to Wait Upon the Lord! The anxiety. The uncertainty. The misgivings. How do REJOICING and HOPE get in?

Many years ago, I created for myself two mantras:

1. "There's God's timeline, and there's my timeline. Handling the anxiety of the distance between the two is what's called FAITH."
2. "God will show me what to do."

I have had to repeat these mantras to myself many, many times throughout the last 40 of my 60 years of life. During those 40 years, many times I have had to wait upon the Lord: What am I doing with my Duke degree? Will I get into grad school? Will I get a job when I graduate? How will I know when I'm in labor (when I was pregnant with Jane)? How will the bills get paid? How will I make life work for Jane and me as a single mother (when Rick and I separated)? How will I pay my staff at my practice? Where will Jane get into college? How will THAT bill get paid? Oh, the anxiety, the uncertainty, and the misgivings of this earthly life.

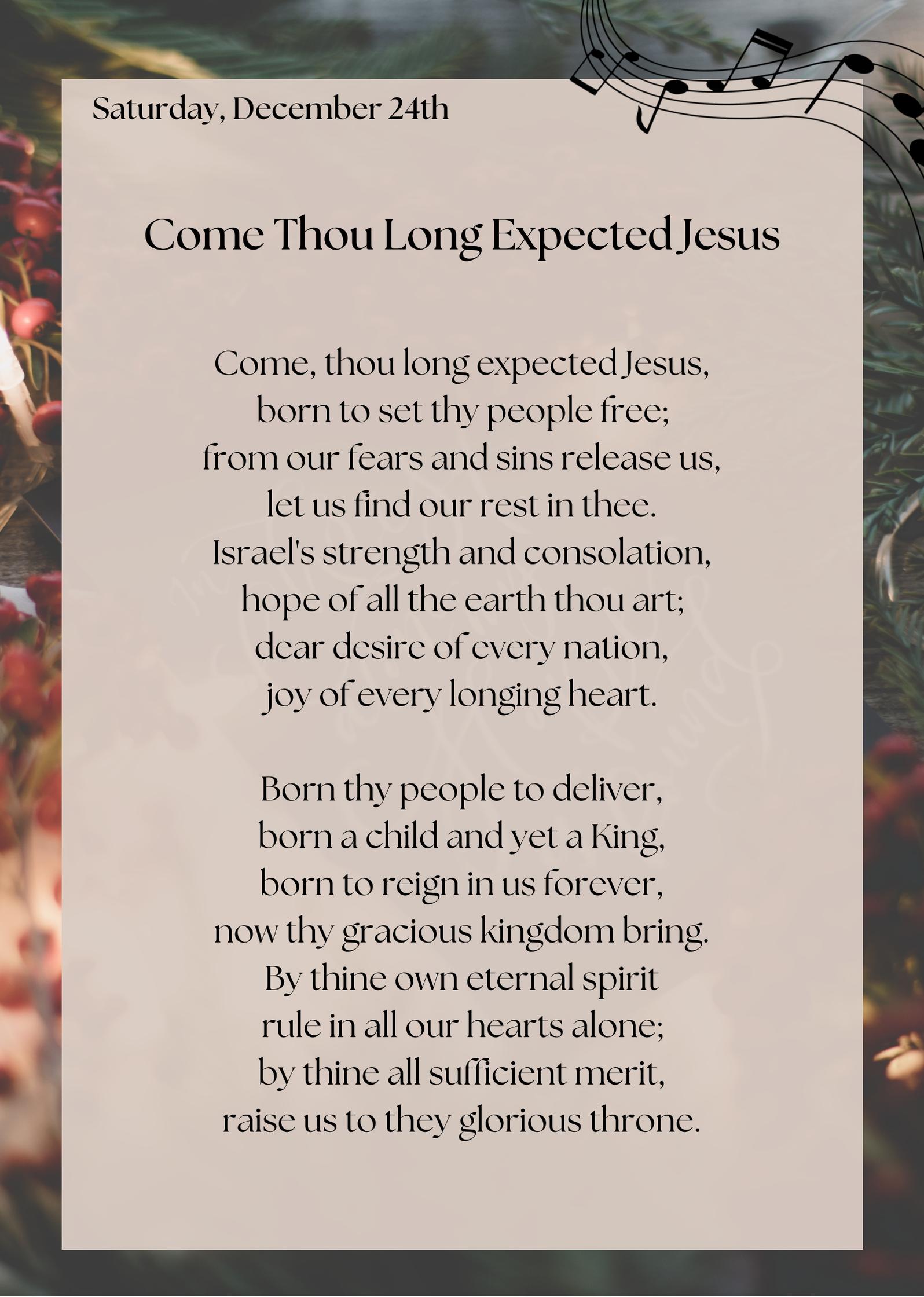
Friday, December 23rd ...continued...

Mary surely felt anxiety, uncertainty, and misgivings in her young life before she gave birth to Jesus. Who is this Angel? How will I tell my parents that I remain a Virgin, and yet I am with child, a child who is the Son of God? Who will marry me and assist me with this birth, this charge from God? I am so great with child, how will travel to Bethlehem affect the baby?

The 3rd verse in this passage is especially reassuring: “Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in Thee.” This verse explains to us God loves us and has mercy upon us while we wait and hope. In other words, God is with us always, in our misgivings, in our rejoicings, and in all the times in between.

Almighty God, in this Advent season when we are particularly filled with expectation for the Birth of Your Son, may we be considered in our waiting upon You, and intentional in our hope in You. May our hearts rejoice with knowing You are our help and our shield. With trust in You, O God, there are no anxieties, no uncertainties, and no misgivings that we cannot handle. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

-Annette Baker

A decorative border at the top of the page features a black musical staff with several notes and a treble clef. The background is a soft-focus image of Christmas decorations, including red berries and green foliage.

Saturday, December 24th

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to they glorious throne.

Sunday, December 25th

May you be blessed,
and be a blessing, this Christmas!



"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.
Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and
shall call his name Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14