

A painting of a glowing cross rising from a stable on a beach at sunset. The cross is made of light and radiates a bright orange and yellow glow. The stable is a simple wooden structure with a gabled roof, and two figures are visible inside. The background is a dark, textured sky with streaks of light, and the foreground is a dark, reflective surface.

# Stories of Faith

ADVENT 2016

## **Dear First Pres Families,**

Thank you for joining us this Advent season! Derived from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning “coming” or “appearance,” Advent is a season of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of our Savior’s birth! Our advent wreaths are lit up each week to represent the four pillars of Advent: hope, love, joy, and peace. As we join together, we are given the opportunity to focus on being joyfully content in what God has given us and patiently await and prepare for all that He has planned for us in the future.

Recapturing the rich heritage of Judaism and Christianity, through our observation of Advent, is an important part of our religious calendar here at First Pres. This devotion reminds us of God’s faithfulness to our congregation and gives us the opportunity to reflect upon God’s presence in our lives. Through the experiences and stories shared within these pages, we are able to celebrate together as a church family. This year’s devotional captures “Stories of Faith,” which are recaps of moments in which our fellow congregants experienced the act of neglecting their human nature and blindly trusting that God is who He says He is and will do what He says He will do. With each candle lit on the Advent wreath, our Savior’s presence is felt in the flickering candlelight which signifies the hope, love, joy, and peace that He provides to all who believe. Through the lighting of the Christ candle, we embrace Jesus as the light of our life and celebrate His birth, the redemption His arrival provided, and the ways that He continually remains present, especially when we place our trust in Him.

Within these pages, you will find many beautiful and moving submissions that share personal stories of the authors’ experiences, along with promises from God’s Word. It is our prayer that throughout the weeks ahead, you will find moments to surrender it all to Him and relish in the beauty of a moment overcome by wholly trusting in Jesus’ name. Be sure to reflect on these divine moments together and use this time to create memories and traditions to treasure forever. Set aside a time, perhaps at family dinners, to read the devotions, pray together, and discuss the moments God has caused you to stop during the day and reflect on His love and the joy of being in His presence. We look forward to this season of celebration and hope that you will invite others to join with us for the Advent and Christmas festivities as we gather for Advent recitals, the Christmas Cantata, Jingle Jam and worship services, where we rejoice in celebrating our Savior’s birth. The schedule can be found on the last page of this booklet. The Advent wreath is lit each Sunday in church to represent Christ’s light shining throughout the world. Perhaps you will want to create a wreath for your home as well. This is a great tradition that will undoubtedly be enjoyed for years to come.

Thank you for joining in the tradition,

The First Pres Fellowship Committee

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Sunday, November 27, 2016

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# 1ST SUNDAY OF Advent

*The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost.*

## 1 Timothy 1:15

Advent is that season of the liturgical year when the church remembers the “Coming” of the promised Rescuer, who would be a son of King David. He would also be the Son of God or King of Israel who would establish a kingdom that would never end. While we remember the “Coming” of Jesus to Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, we each have a story of how He has “Come” to us. Our Session has just examined the officers elected by our congregation to serve as elders and deacons for the coming three years. Each officer elect is asked, “How did you come to trust Christ as your Savior?” This exercise is one of the most touching and encouraging experiences our Session has each year as we hear remarkable stories of how God “Came” to our brothers and sisters and brings to mind our own stories.

Some years ago, I had a conversation with a man who had joined the church but was startled by his own experience of Jesus “Coming” to him. The heart of our faith is that the God we read of in Holy Scripture is not an impersonal force, but a personal God who knows and relates to His people adopting them, one by one, as His children. The Apostle Paul told his own story more than once in the book of Acts and the letter to the Galatians. Paul tells us in 1 Tim 1:15 “...Christ came into the world to save sinners...” My parents brought my sister and me to church. I was baptized and later confirmed in the Episcopal church I grew up in. Faith seemed to me to be a part of my ‘cultural’ upbringing, but it was not central to my identity or particularly relevant to my daily life. I grew up and became aware that friends and classmates were becoming ‘religious’ but that seemed foreign to my experience and a bit disconcerting to me.

As a college student I had friends who shared their faith with me and asked me if I “knew” the Lord. I was not sure what exactly they meant. One night I heard a speaker ask a gathered group this question, “If you could know that Jesus is real and that the Gospel is true, would you become a follower of Jesus and trust Him as your Savior who “Came” and died that your sins would be forgiven?” The question was compelling to me and the answer seemed obvious and inescapable. I prayed to God, if He was real and willing to answer, to make Himself known to me. I did not frankly expect anything. But that very night I knew something had changed. I desired to pray. I found the Bible fascinating, compelling, and transforming of my heart and character. I overnight felt drawn to worship where before worship always felt like duty and drudgery to me. Perhaps even more remarkable was that while that was my experience in 1971...it still is my experience to this day! “Christ came into the world to save sinners”...I know this to be true because of what He has done and continues to do for me.

*Dear Lord, Thank You for condescending to draw us to You even as we resist and seek to go our own way. This Advent, we are grateful for the “Coming” of Jesus, the promised Rescuer and for His work in our lives as He writes our stories and calls us to part of His Kingdom work on earth. Amen.*

Rev. Lucky Arnold

***The Lord, your God, is with you. He is a mighty Savior. He will take great delight in you. With His love, He will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with singing.***

**Zephaniah 3:17**

In grief, my heart song weakened. I earnestly prayed for God to restore the joy of the familiar rhythms and sweet melodies of life that had faded with the loss of a loved one. In seeking prayer, I asked God to reveal ways in which I could refresh and renew the tune of His calling, purpose and grace into my life. As I remained constant in prayer, and disciplined in worship, Scripture study, and stillness, I began to clearly hear and discern the voice of God. Yes, He did speak! I listened. I set out to obediently respond to His spiritual nudges, and began to mend and reconnect the broken circuit of my life that death delivered. Death had visited, but it hadn't robbed me of my spiritual longing to be alive in Christ.

I found that light of life released as I reached beyond myself to touch others in the service of sheltering hospitality and community. My heart song began to swell as I cared more, helped more, gave more and loved more. New scores of melody appeared daily with fresh resonance and timbre. This I can do... I can choose life! I can step forward in faith and obedience to respond through the given events of each new day. There exists a unique rhythm and flow in faithful living beyond your feelings. This rhythmic flow manifests itself in many ways. It is first expressed as a personal and complete surrender to God's will. It continues as we weave the threads of sorrow, pain and suffering into the garment of our life. The tempo continues in choosing gratitude, in resting in His love, in listening to His voice, in encouraging and edifying, in sharing gifts and resources, and in refusing to give in to grumbling, complaining and self-pity. When one moves in these ways, there is spiritual melody and harmony in life. The notes of this sacred song are penned in pure faith. They are transformational and honoring to God. In this music of a God-guided life, there is strength and song.

Exodus 15:2 & Psalm 118:14

The Lord is my strength and my song;

He has become my victory.

***Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for being my strength and my song. You have brought the music of peace and joy back into my grieving heart as I set my sight upon You, listen to Your voice, and express the vast measure of Your love to others. Amen.***

**Annie Dougherty**

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Tuesday, November 29, 2016

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“Beneath the strength of strings...”

### **Keep the Merry**

For the last few years American atheists have been promoting a “Christmas” message: “Keep the Merry, Forget the Myth.” This jarring promotion shows a picture of a laughing Santa, next to the suffering face of Jesus wearing a crown of thorns. I thought it was quite poignant they didn’t attack the Christ child. No, they went right for the heart of the matter, Christ on the cross. You see, for many people, apparently atheists included, it’s easy and okay to celebrate the joy and merriment of Christmas with the jolly ole’ man, the Elf on the Shelf, and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer; there’s no commitment to God, no call for repentance, nothing is required! (But, we do spend a lot of money trying to have a merry Christmas!)

Their promotion is revealing—they understand the implication of believing in the baby in the manger—it’s beautifully stated in the hymn, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*: “Born to raise the sons of earth; Born to give them second birth.” You see they know the baby grew up, and died a terrible, bloody death on the cross. There isn’t anything “merry” about that picture!

*“For our sake He (God) made Him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin,  
so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)*

To truly celebrate the Savior’s birth, we must be willing to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him (Luke 9:23). Atheists, of course, are not willing to do this. But, are we who celebrate the babe in the manger, willing to submit to the Crucified and Risen One? When the trials and suffering of life come our way, do we trust that God is in control and that nothing happens in our lives apart from the will of the Father?

These past three years have been incredibly difficult. After having my husband, Bob, survive a traumatic brain injury, I can’t imagine my family and I walking this path without the hope that God has a greater plan in mind. Many days I want to give up. Yet, where would I go? To whom would I turn? There is salvation in no one else!

Some of the “fruit of our suffering” has become evident; our family is closer and we are grateful for the extra time to love one another. I also thank God for our church family! We have been on the receiving end of love being poured out to us in a myriad of ways, all to show us Jesus-with-skin-on-love! Over and over again God has faithfully provided for us, teaching us that He is near and can be trusted.

Yes, Jesus IS the reason for the season! His birth was for His death. His death was for our birth. In Him, true Christmas joy is found! May you have a blessed merry Christmas, worshipping the ONE who loves you with an everlasting love!

*Dear Jesus, Thank You for coming to earth to give us second birth.  
Help us to have merry hearts today, tomorrow, and in the coming New Year. Amen.*

**Sarah Keith**

*I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, "Move from here to there" and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.*

**Matthew 17:20**

What is this thing called "faith"? As a 50 year old atheist lawyer, I was persuaded by my wife, Mary Lou, and some now very dear friends, that the eternal consequences of my non-belief should at least be based on an informed decision, and not on anecdotes and visceral reactions. So I undertook a year long, intense study of the Bible to resolve my "belief" issues. Early on, however, I was told that accepting Jesus Christ as my personal Savior would entail a "leap of faith." That made me very skeptical! If salvation is predicated on a concept that cannot be replicated in a laboratory, or proved by fact and logic, or satisfy human senses, how can it be the "truth"?

In time, my studies and discussions with some serious believers took me a long way in the right direction; I came to accept the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as Lord of the Universe and Jesus Christ as that same God. The faith leap became a baby step and not a pole vault across a chasm. Nonetheless, I remained "unborn." I could not honestly get over the hurdle; pride, a heightened sense of self-esteem, and fear about giving up of self, prevented me from going any further.

One warm spring day, I sat outside on my patio studying the Bible when I had a sudden urge to put it down, close my eyes and pray that Jesus Christ would enter my heart and be my Personal Savior. Immediately, an immense display of multicolored fireworks exploded within me, and when I opened my eyes an instant later, I knew I had been born-again. That troubling leap of faith turned out to be as small as a mustard seed.

*Thank You, Jesus, for the gift of faith and for answered prayers.*

**Angelo Arcadipane**

*Also, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about something and pray for it, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven. This is true because if two or three people come together in My name, I am there with them.*

**Matthew 18:19-20**

Bible commentaries note that the above Scripture is in the context of settling disputes among believers (Deut. 19:15). Nevertheless, it is appropriate to the following true story.

Flash back 40 years to March 1977. My second daughter, Barbara, was finishing her senior year at Somerset High School in Somerset, Kentucky, and was making arrangements to join a large group of her classmates who planned a spring break week at Ft. Lauderdale Beach. Un-sponsored by the school, transportation, lodging and activities were up to the students.

While my wife, Oneida, and I did not know firsthand of major problems resulting from prior similar trips, there were rumors of abundant alcohol and all night parties without supervision.

Oneida and I planned a trip at that time with our other children to Siesta Key and wanted Barb to come with us, but she thought that sounded boring compared to a week with her friends. We heard the oft repeated "All my friends' parents are letting them go, so why can't I?" We suggested she bring one or two friends with us, but she was sure they would also be bored. Barbara was a member of the girls' basketball team and also a varsity cheerleader for the boys' team. This required practice or performance every week night, yet Barbara maintained good grades and cultivated many friends. We wanted her to finish high school on a high note. We prayed for God to show us a happy solution.

As the final days for making arrangements arrived, we became more distraught. Every month we joined friends from other churches in a couple's Bible study group. Our two younger children, ages 16 and 11, stayed at home, and Barbara went to her good friend Tinnew's house to do homework. At the meeting, prior to the closing prayer, Oneida and I voiced our concern about the trip and requested prayer. The participants were all parents, although none had children in the senior class that year, and we sensed the genuine love and warmth expressed by the group as they prayed for God's intervention in our problem.

We parted and had not been home 10 minutes when the phone rang. It was Barbara's voice: "Daddy, I've been thinking about spring break and I want to come with you and Mom...Can Tinnew come with us?" "Of course!" I said as I felt the burden lift from me. I smiled to Oneida, relieved as I told Barbara it sounded like a wonderful idea.

*Heavenly Father, Thank You for sending Your son who showed us You answer every prayer, whether a group or when we pray alone. Amen.*

**Gordon Betts**

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord;  
O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.  
If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins,  
O Lord, who could stand?  
But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.  
I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.  
My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
More than watchmen wait for the morning.  
O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love  
and with Him is full redemption*

**Psalm 130**

Advent is the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event. It is a time of hope and expectation as we await the arrival of that notable person, thing, or event. I remember a time in my life that began with a lot of expectation, but I didn't put much thought into the idea that there could be waiting involved. But that time of expectation became a time of waiting and, in the midst, it felt like waiting for a very long time.

We made the decision that we were ready to have children and so each month was full of expectation and hope. After a year, it started to feel like all we were doing was waiting and so we went to see a doctor. And the waiting continued through many tests and procedures. I remember feeling frustrated and sad. In the process of the numerous doctor visits and tests, a large cyst was discovered on one of my ovaries and it required surgery to remove. I would never have known that it was there had we not been in the midst of waiting, leading us to make a decision to see a doctor.

A year after surgery I was pregnant with Ellie. Looking back, it was only a three-year span, but in the midst, it felt so much longer. After I became pregnant I was able to simply enjoy waiting for her to come. I didn't worry about planning or making sure everything was just right before she got here. I didn't spend time making her nursery just right or shopping for all the stuff I might need. This is quite contrary to my nature as I am a planner and like to have things done just right ahead of time. It was a result of the waiting we had just been through.

The waiting that had been so painful and hard had turned into a waiting full of expectation and joy! God gave me a precious gift in allowing me to simply enjoy my pregnancy waiting for my first baby to arrive. And I am grateful for the unexpected gift He gave me.

*Father, we bring to you our expectations and hopes. We acknowledge that we are each a part of a story. You are writing, a story made up of many stories. We all have hopes and expectations and we spend time waiting for things to happen in our lives. Teach us to look to You as our guide, our comfort, our storyteller. Help us to remember that we are resting in the hands of the God who created us and knows us intimately. Allow us to look back throughout our lives and recognize Your faithfulness to us. Amen.*



*I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.  
He will not let your foot slip—He who watches over you will not slumber;  
indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.  
The Lord watches over you—the Lord is your shade at your right hand;  
the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.  
The Lord will keep you from all harm—He will watch over your life;  
the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.*

**Psalm 121**

Advent is a season of waiting and expectation. During this season we spend time preparing our hearts for the celebration that is Christmas. We have all experienced seasons of waiting and expectation--a time when we were eager for something.

When Becca and I got married, we were pretty young; 22 to be exact. Becca had just graduated from college and I was in my second year at seminary. We thought we would wait a few years before we had children. We moved to West Palm in 2004 and started trying to have kids in 2006. We tried for about a year on our own and then went to see a doctor. We had Ellie in 2009. Three years doesn't seem like a long time now that I look back on it, but in the middle, it seemed like a very long time. Month by month was extremely difficult.

But during that time God was preparing our hearts for the arrival of our daughter(s)! Little did we know we would have three! In the midst of the seasons of waiting in our lives, time seems to move very slowly. Sometimes it seems as though that season just will not end.

But as we wait, God prepares our hearts. He forms faith in us. He teaches us lessons we could not learn otherwise. He brings us closer with others that we may not have known. And when we come through those seasons, we are different--changed for the better with stories of God's faithfulness and love to share with others.

*Lord, we know You are our help. We know that You are our keeper. We know that our lives are always in Your hands. We ask that You would give us strength, patience, and trust as we wait.  
Prepare our hearts to receive Your goodness and grace this Advent season. Amen.*

**Rev. Eddie Nabhan**

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Sunday, December 4, 2016

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# 2ND SUNDAY OF Advent

*For we walk by faith, not by sight.*

**2 Corinthians 5:7**

## **The Diamond Shot**

The event was a 45 minute Firearms Training Unit shooting exhibition conducted at the FBI Academy, Quantico, Virginia, in 1980. Our Director invited 75 Washington based and International Diplomats for the demonstration, along with over 100 dignitaries for a tour and dinner. It was an important event. . .the reputation and unique firearms skills of our FBI Firearms Team were on display.

I was assigned to the last novelty shooting event using a diamond ring borrowed from an audience member. The Director offered his lady friend's gorgeous diamond ring. However, it was useless. . .clouded with hand cream. . .I secretly used my wife's modest wedding ring. . .concealed in my hand.

The target was a small clay disk hanging by a clip on a target tree, 7 yards away. The afternoon sun was setting. The sights of my issued revolver were dim.

It is possible to place a diamond up close to the pupil of your eye and see images of things nearby. I lined up the sight picture, shot, and the target broke as planned. . .except that a piece the size of a poker chip remained in the clip. Not satisfied, my boss ordered me to break that one too! Great pressure fell on me. My peers watched intently as there was a great possibility of missing the chip.

I whispered a prayer (to shoot by faith and not by sight). I pulled the trigger. As He promised, the chip vaporized. Then came applause and admiration for our team.

My boss handed our Director his lady friend's ring with the comment, "Nice ring. . .it made things real easy for Special Agent Heidtke." The Director was proud and happy. I gave our Lord the credit. My peers smiled and shook my hand. We knew the truth. It was not the ring switch alone. It was Divine Intervention.

*Thank You, Lord, for showing us the way through faith and not sight alone. Amen.*

**John Heidtke**

*Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from Him.  
He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will not be shaken.*

**Psalm 62:5-6**

When I think of my own journey of faith, it often seems like a quest after an elusive peace; a rest that will come only after the next accomplishment or when the last task on the to-do list is completed. I am now 64 and the accomplishments never seem satisfying enough and the to-do list never ever gets done. So, when will I rest? Well, this verse makes it clear that my quest has been misdirected. For some reason I came to believe that rest is to be earned after hard effort and worthy accomplishment; that rest comes after the important demands of life, the ever present needs of others and when my own goals and desires are achieved.

*“Find rest, O my soul, in God alone.”*

I have a wonderful wife, two amazing daughters and three pretty incredible grandchildren. I find joy and comfort in them. I have a blessed job teaching leadership to adult students and God has allowed me to serve here at First Pres as an Elder and Chair of the Missions Committee. I believe we are doing good work together and although it is sometimes tiring, it is always meaningful. But, none of this brings the true rest of God; the rest that brings that stillness to the soul, that centered peace that says “this is good, and this is enough.”

*Lord, may I find my soul’s needed rest in You and You alone. Help me to release my need to control; my need to achieve. You alone, Lord, are my rock and my salvation, You are my fortress, in You “I will not be shaken.” Amen.*

**Jim Laub**

*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.*

**Luke 2:14**

I came from a Jewish background, and though my parents weren't strict followers of their faith, they did send me to Sunday school classes at the temple with my best friend. My father was from Russia and I still remember the stories he told me about how, as a young boy, he hid in an oven to survive death by the Russian army. Although he was not an educated man, he and his brother partnered with two other businessmen and manufactured service mens' uniforms. It was a successful enterprise.

My mother, Martha, was the youngest of 4 sisters and 2 brothers. At the young age of 17, her father matched her up and "married her off" to a man 30 years her senior. He was not a warm or kind-hearted man, and he seemed to have no real respect for women. My mother always felt that God had better plans for her than being trapped in a loveless marriage, but she waited until I was in high school before divorcing my father. My mother, always a hard worker, got a job and enrolled in business school. One evening, after work, she stopped to have dinner at the local neighborhood diner, and was surprised when a handsome gentleman tapped her on the shoulder and handed her his business card, introducing himself to her as Stanley Rotenberger. He told her that he had never been this brazen to talk to a stranger before, much less a beautiful woman, and that he had already had dinner and was out for a drive when he felt strongly led to come into the diner. After an evening of talking, he confessed that he felt their meeting was an appointment made by God.

My mother was not only attracted to him, but also to his powerful, yet humble, faith. It was the beginning of a beautiful love story. When my mother brought him home for me to meet, I also fell in love with this sincere Quaker gentleman, and was overjoyed to see my mother in a relationship with such a kind and loving man her own age. It turned out, Stanley, an uneducated man himself, was the owner and operator of The Farmer's Market in WPB, and he was in Philadelphia for business, as well as to visit his family in Quakertown, PA. He was divorced from a woman who had committed adultery and had left him sad and lonely.

Throughout their courtship, Stanley always spoke of God's love and he eventually led my mother to accept Jesus as her Lord and Savior. After they married, my mother loved working with Stanley at the Farmer's Market, and they later worked as a team in ministry helping to bring many of their friends, both Jewish and Gentile, to the Lord. When I was 20 years old, my stepfather brought me to hear Billy Graham speak, and it was there that I asked Jesus into my heart. It was the best decision of my life. Of course, my second best decision was marrying my Charles, whom I met at First Baptist Church in WPB. The Holy Spirit gave me peace in my marriage decision after many months of prayer. Charles and I have been blessed with 2 daughters, Paula and Ruth, 5 grandchildren, and now 3 great grandchildren. It was actually my youngest daughter, Ruth, who, after accepting Jesus herself at a Young Life retreat, led us to this wonderful church over 35 years ago.

I know that Jesus is with me today, tomorrow, and always. His Holy Spirit gave me peace and comfort when I went through cancer surgery, chemo, and radiation, and has been with me, just as He promised, through all the ups and downs in my life's journey thus far. What a comfort to know that God is always there for us. He has a definite plan for all of our lives. We have only to open our hearts and let Him in. In my wildest dreams, I would never have imagined this Jewish girl from Philly marrying a Baptist man from Texas and becoming long time members of a Presbyterian church. God certainly does work in mysterious ways, and I'm so glad He does!

*God bless each and every one of you as you let Jesus be the ruler in your own lives, to guide and teach you. His love will never fail you. That's a promise you can count on!*

Jan Spencer  
(Originally submitted in 2014)



*Pascal Content, Kindergarten*

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Wednesday, December 7, 2016

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***For we walk by faith, not by sight.***  
**2 Corinthians 5:7**

In May 2015, I realized if I kept up the long hours I was working, I was on my way to a heart attack. A few things started me thinking of my quality of life. First, I thought of my parents who died at ages 62 and 67 and I was turning 60. Second, one of my nephews, at the age of 35, passed away. It made my family quickly see the fragility of life, truly appreciate our relationships and see the gift of each day. Lastly, my daughter, Alicia, was graduating from high school and got accepted into Florida Gulf Coast University. Her father and I divorced when she was in 5th grade, he moved out of state and I was the full-time parent. I had been working non-stop, on call all the time, and a diligent parent. Then it struck me.... Alicia graduated, got into college...I did it, I think I can breathe!

I had an emergency fund and thought THIS is an emergency. I resigned from my job as a clinical dietitian at two nursing and rehabilitation facilities in West Palm. I got to enjoy the summer off with Alicia and wrote out my bucket list. On top of my list was working at Home Depot! Yep! Home Depot had been my HAPPY place for a long time. I thought, what if I die and I never got to work at my happy place? It seemed tragic to wait until retirement to start my bucket list.

After I took Alicia to college, I applied and was trained in the hardware department, I got hardware certified, won the Homer Award and received my one year service award. I felt like a kid. I learned to slow down, enjoy life and a new skill. When it was time to replenish my emergency fund and return to work as a dietitian, I applied for eight jobs and got eight no's. I was discouraged until I realized those no's meant those positions were not where GOD wanted me to glorify HIM. I kept applying until I got a yes from Wellington Regional Medical Center as their Chief Clinical Dietitian, by far the best position of all the others. God was at work in my life, teaching me patience and to trust in His time, not mine.

So here I am, back in health care, but work does not dominate my life anymore. I learned not to take work home, to set limits, to enjoy family and friendships and slow down.

***Thank You, Lord Jesus, for Your gift of life; may I never take it for granted.***

**Beets Pando**

*Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he promised.*

**Romans 4:20**

**Tis the Season...to Believe!**

“Believe!” Everywhere you go this time of year, you see or hear this word. The rest of the year it’s okay to doubt, but from Thanksgiving to Christmas, it’s the season to believe. And it’s a command! You don’t see signs all over the mall asking, “Won’t you just believe?” or “What do you believe?” No, right now the message is clear: Believe.

This one-word mandate offers universal approval. Whatever you believe, as long as you believe in something, is okay: Jack Frost, Frosty the Snowman, or Jimmy Stewart and his wonderful life. And in the midst of all this commercialism and fantasy, you could even believe that the Son of God was born to a virgin in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago...if you’re so inclined.

Abraham was so inclined to believe God. In the midst of a very comfortable pagan life in Haran, “Abraham went, as the Lord told him,” to the land of Canaan. He arrived to find Canaan filled with enemies and empty of food! Surely this begged the questions, “Seriously? Did I miss something?” But through this event and many other challenging situations with Sarah and Lot, Abraham’s faith grew. These tests and their outcomes strengthened Abraham’s belief in his covenant-keeping God.

When my family and I faced a very challenging situation shortly after relocating to Florida, we asked those same questions, “Seriously? Did we miss something?” And we, too, had a choice to make: to continue to believe in the promise of God or take matters into our own hands. By God’s grace, we did not waver (much) through unbelief and we trusted God to meet every need. We give glory to God for the things He has done - greater things than we could have asked for or imagined. We are “fully persuaded.”

The advertisers have it right: “Believe!” From Genesis to Revelation, this is the command God gives His people; when you do, it is a wonderful life, forever and ever.

*Almighty God, You are faithful to keep all of Your promises. Strengthen our faith through every joy and every trial that we may draw nearer to You and bring You glory. Amen.*

**Jenny Mallat**

*He reveals deep and hidden things; He knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with Him.*

**Daniel 2:22**

### **God's Eternal Love**

In the spirit of Christmas, we remember as Christians that God's love always gives us hope and purpose with continued faith in His word. The word "restore" comes to my mind when I begin to look back and remember when I just didn't feel like He was with me, during so many different seasons in life.

Life throws us all kinds of interesting curves and twists in the highway of traveling! Sometimes we just want to run as fast as we can away from all pain and hurt. Our "mechanisms" in our brain almost immediately inform us that this is uncomfortable and we should run and change our scenery. This is the time I will say is when "I" run to God. It's not really important to speak of what happened or to name names of people who have harmed your persona, but I know, for me, in those times God showed up! His love and mercy that is granted upon you where there was darkness is now a beautiful light that shines through. You can find your way through His amazing love!

*Daniel 2:22: "Even the darkness hides nothing from You, but the night shines as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to You."*

My personal journey in Christian life is no different than anyone else's. We learn to live with persecution and intimidation. We often backslide and think we fall off of God's radar, but be assured, He is always there watching with a careful and loving eye. Just when I thought the game was over, He restored me to a higher level of faith and opened glorious doors for me to walk through.

My days that were dark now are as bright as any beautiful shining star in the heavens! God's way of restoring us is not always in our time, but as He sees fit. He has revealed to me that my restoration was so important to Him that I know He truly has a plan for all. In closing, I would like to give you two of God's passages found in Psalm 139:17-18:

*"How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I could count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you."*

*Peace be with you this Christmas.*

**Barbara Lori Walton**



*And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*  
**Isaiah 9:6**

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas...I mean National Day. With all the hustle and bustle, red and green lights, school parties and holidays, Christmas trees in the store, wind chills and blankets at night, one might think we celebrate Christmas here. Frankincense wafts through the marketplaces, camels waltz about, and I think Prancer pranced and tripped right through our doorway, because folks – that sweet creature you see above is sure enough a reindeer. Poor thing.

Christmas here is a secret pleasure shared in whispers – Many people go to the grocery store to take pictures with the plastic Christmas trees on display even though they will never buy one. Even the kids at school look at me with such wonder in their eyes and want to know about Christmastime. It's kind of magical. To be honest, I think that before the movie 'Frozen' came out, there was a little bit of shying away from wintry things because of the connection they had with Christmas – so to the producers of such a fine film – thank you. It has really helped many kids talk about winter and snow and love and warmth and freedom and forgiveness and now, Christmas. We have also been singing Kristin Chenoweth's version of "Come on, Ring Those Bells" in class while making snowflakes and ornaments to celebrate the season.

This year (2015), Mohammed's birthday lands on the 24th of December – so God really provides wonderful ways to celebrate and talk about the baby we call Immanuel whose birthday we celebrate one day later – two birthdays – and two babies that would forever change the world.

So today I want to wish you all glad tidings of great joy – because even though it's a well-known cliché - Christmas is most certainly every day – and hope is eternal. Jesus was born and has died once for all and risen so that all might wonder at His love forever. When you start feeling lonely, blue, frozen inside, or have a small Grinch beating heart because Christmas just doesn't work out for you - when you can't believe because all the bells just aren't ringing anymore, – remember our King is coming. He has come and is coming. He is coming. Even the other baby believed this. So I urge you to look at this baby – the one we call Wonderful Counselor... Everlasting Father...Prince of Peace and see for yourself what kind of God we get to know. I assure you your heart will grow more than three sizes as you "Let It Go" because you all were worth melting for.

*“Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight,  
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,  
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death,  
And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.”*

C.S. Lewis, The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe

**Julie Christensen, our mission partner who teaches English in Oman**  
**(Excerpt from her newsletter written in December 2015)**

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Sunday, December 11, 2016

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## 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY OF Advent

*For with God, nothing shall be impossible.*

**Luke 1:37**

When I was very new to the faith, the Lord provided me with a miracle that some thirty-four years later still bolsters my trust in Him. At that time, I was one of the staff orthopedic surgeons at Ireland Army Hospital located at Fort Knox, Kentucky. A five year old son of a soldier stationed in Germany was transferred to us from the University of Louisville following an auto accident in which his mom was killed. He had sustained a severe head injury and had been declared brain dead by the neurosurgery staff there which included some world famous neurosurgeons. He had also sustained a femur fracture which had been neglected due to his neurological status.

His aunt and uncle had been declared his legal guardians as his father was having difficulty getting back to the U.S. When I met them, I immediately discovered that they were strong Christians. They literally begged me to repair their nephew's femur because they believed that the Lord had told them that He was going to heal his brain injury! I was a bit skeptical, but after praying about it, I agreed. He was taken to surgery, and I repaired his femur with a screw/plate construct. After I put on the dressing, I went to the head of the table. I laid my hands on his head and prayed for his brain injury. After getting him settled in the recovery room, I went home.

The next morning when I arrived on the pediatric floor, he was riding a tricycle! He called me by my name even though he had been in a coma the entire time I was around him during the previous several days. He was discharged a few days later with a totally normally functioning brain, and never had any problems afterward!

*Praise the Lord! Lord, help us to truly believe that with you, all things are possible. Amen.*

**Dr. Ron Warncke**

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Monday, December 12, 2016

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*Great is thy faithfulness, morning by morning new mercies I see.*

**Lamentations 3:23**

**What a Day Can Bring**

February 11, 2016, is a date I will never forget. That's the day our home of more than four decades suddenly was engulfed in smoke and flames. In less than an hour, everything was gone. My husband, Barry, and I were devastated.

When it happened, I was by the fireplace in my quiet time. I heard a strange sound. The fireplace was fine. But upon opening my studio door, flames leapt out! I immediately called 911 and Barry before escaping. Sadly, I didn't have time to save "Blue", our cat.

Friends and neighbors began to come, including Pastors Lucky and Steve. I remember laughing with them to keep from crying. We watched the fire department, with little water, fail to save our house.

The following Sunday, our Agape class, led by Pastor Tim, laid hands on us and prayed. People gave us the outpouring we needed. We were in the midst of Spiritual Warfare – the sort Satan means for evil but God would use for good.

For months I was torn over all we had lost – photo albums, wedding portraits, old photographs, precious letters, the paintings I created and those of my late lifelong best friend. But these things did not cast a breath or possess a heartbeat or soul.

Thankfully, the fire didn't happen at Christmas or Thanksgiving. There were no children or grandchildren asleep. There was no one there that morning but me. And God.

Since the fire, God has taught me to slow down so that I might better glean His words. This slower pace, mentally and physically, accomplishes more than a frenzied rush. When I rush, I forget who I am and whose I am. But God knows. He leads me through my troubles and responsibilities.

I have come to learn that the best response to loss is to remember that I belong to Jesus. My family, friends, health, abilities and my life are all gifts from God. Faith has taught me to be prepared to let go of all things, but never to let go of God's hand.

*Thank You, God, for enabling me to remain near to you. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Winnie Romoser**

*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*

**Hebrews 11:1**

Faith is stepping out of the box, out of our comfort zone, sometimes out on a limb. Faith in God begins with knowing God and not only knowing God, but trusting Him to be faithful to His word. How does one become the guardian of such faith? It begins with godly parents who know and love the Lord. It begins with Sunday School, youth groups, summer camps and being surrounded with Christian folks.

I am always moved by the story of Clif Perry and his leap of faith. Clif is the son of Clif and Marcia Perry, friends of First Pres. As a newly graduated college young man, Clif taught, coached football and started helping out with the equipment for the different sports at a private school in the area. Clif was feeling that he was not moving forward in his career life. A friend suggested that Clif get trained and certified as a college equipment manager. How in the world do you do that? Taking classes online, Clif became certified in the field. Certification is great, but what about a real job? Colleges were interested in experienced people only. Now, how do you get that experience? On faith, Clif set out with his wife and baby daughter for the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, to be an intern equipment manager for one year. That was like facing the unknown, as it was just an intern job. God sent Clif and his family to Annapolis as the first faith step in his career. Now what about a real job? Fear not, God had a plan, Clif had faith and all things are possible through Christ.

Clif's friend, the Lacrosse coach, introduced Clif to the Princeton Lacrosse coach. Guess what? The Princeton equipment manager was retiring and Princeton was looking for a young man named Clif Perry, just the right place for Clif. Clif has been the Head Equipment Manager at Princeton University since 2005. Faith took Clif to online classes. Faith took Clif to Annapolis, and faith took Clif to Princeton. If Clif did not know God, trust in His plan for his life, and have the faith to step out and rely on God, Clif would not be at Princeton today.

*Dear God, You have told us that we only have to have faith and believe in You.  
We know that all things are possible through You. Your word is truth. Amen.*

**Betty Percy**

***For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all.  
Who hopes for what he already has.***

**Romans 8:24**

I grew up in a wonderful Christian home of four siblings, my sister, two brothers and myself. As a young woman, I always thought I would be married to the same man for life and, like my own family, we would have four children. Those were the things I hoped for as Hebrews 11:1 says. My plan was to have four daughters. I even had their names picked out. But, as Pastor Lucky would say, "If you want to make God laugh, just tell Him your plans."

Needless to say, none of that happened. Yes, I married the love of my life and thought it would last forever; several years later we were divorced. Then came husband number two; still no children of my own and that, too, ended in divorce.

After two divorces and no children, I came to accept that was not God's plan for me. Fast forward to age 45+ when my family and friends were having grandchildren. The old wounds of not having kids of my own resurfaced. One night as I was reading the Bible, I came upon Proverbs 30:15-16, "There are three things that are never satisfied, the grave, the barren womb, the earth that is never satisfied with water." I became angry at God asking why He gave me this desire to be a mother but no children. It was then that a still small voice said to me, "Joyce, I gave you four girls." I thought about that for a while and realized that indeed I did have four daughters. My first husband had two girls and a son; my second husband had two girls. So there all along God had answered my prayers, not in the way I wanted but, indeed, in His way. Now after 27 years divorced from their father, I am happy to say that my first two step daughters are now back in my life and it is as if the years that we were apart never happened. I also have the great privilege of meeting three of my step-grandchildren and I look forward to meeting the other two someday.

As the Hebrews passage above says, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen." My hope was for children, and the conviction is for me not seeing that God had given me exactly what I asked for.

***Dear God, Thank You for answered prayers, even when we are too blind to see it. Amen.***

**Joyce Moseley**

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Thursday, December 15, 2016

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*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

**Genesis 1:1**

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.*

**Psalm 19:1**

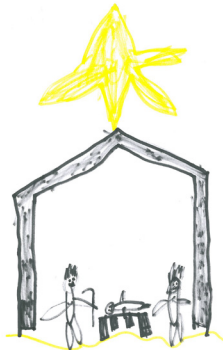
Is it not wonderful to GAZE at a beautiful sunset, SMELL the scent of a rose, HEAR the words “I love you,” TASTE a yummy piece of apple pie, and FEEL the embrace of a loved one?

So often when I am running in the early morning as the sun is rising and the world is just waking up, I am made aware of the beauty of the blue sky with tinges of pinks and oranges and the dainty little flowers and stately palm trees that wave to me as I run by. In our busy lives, we often take for granted the five senses with which most of us have been blessed! Sometimes we do not realize or appreciate what God has given us until we lose it. God has blessed us with our senses to enjoy and appreciate His creation as well as to be used to warn us of danger. Think about that!! Our eyes not only allow us to see beautiful things, they also allow us to see something that we need to avoid. Our ears allow us to hear a siren or an alarm. Our nose helps us smell smoke or something that is burning. We can taste if we are eating food that could be harmful or poisonous. Lastly, we can feel if there is an object that is too hot or cold or sharp that may cause us harm! We are truly “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps 139:14).

This Advent season, I encourage you to take time to notice and appreciate LOOKING at a flickering candle which represents the Light of Christ, SMELLING the aroma of a Christmas tree, LISTENING to your favorite Christmas carols, TASTING a delicious Christmas dinner, and FEELING the warmth of a cup of hot apple cider or cocoa and then thank our dear Heavenly Father for blessing you with your “senses”!

*Dear God, Maker of heaven and earth, Thank You for creating us and our amazing bodies!  
Help us to take time, especially during this Advent season, to appreciate all that You have  
given us and to use our bodies to glorify You through serving others.*

**Suzie Inman**



*Wylie Inman, 2nd Grade*

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*

**Ephesians 2:8-9**

It was Christmastime 1990, and we were struggling with Russ' dad's passing from cancer three months earlier at the age of 68. I grew up attending Catholic church when I was younger, but hadn't been to church in many years, after becoming disillusioned with the Catholic faith. There was a Catholic church around the corner from our house, so I decided to attend Christmas Eve service that year. I remember hearing the pastor's message about joy, but I just didn't feel any joy at that time. I continued to attend church services for a while, but I wasn't getting anything from them. The sermons and prayers seemed to be the same ones I had heard years earlier, and that was one of the reasons that I had stopped going to church.

I began reading a book about the life of Martin Luther that we had received from Russ' dad. One night, I came to the passage Ephesians 2:8-9. It was as if a light bulb went off in my head. Suddenly I understood what I had been lacking for years! I had never heard of salvation by grace; the focus was always on works, and I never felt I could measure up. It was at that moment that I accepted Jesus' call and became saved. It changed my life forever, and I started my search for a Scripture based church.

When I finally found Shrewsbury Presbyterian, I knew I found home, and I worshiped there until we moved to Florida a few years later. Where to go now? I was referred to several Presbyterian churches, but it wasn't until I came to First Pres that I felt the same sense of faith kinship, albeit on a larger scale. I was amazed at the warmth of everyone, since my experience at large churches was exactly the opposite. I attended regularly for several years, then life took a different path until I returned to First Pres earlier this year. In the interim, I read Scripture daily, and my thirst for growing my understanding of God and my faith with Him became ever stronger.

It was during this time that I read John 8:32, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." This really hit home when I read the passages in Leviticus about the sin offering and significance of blood as it applies to life. Suddenly, what I had struggled to grasp became perfectly clear. As I listen to the readings and sermons at Sunday services, I hear them in a whole new light. I am so thankful for our pastors' support and encouragement in my faith journey, and look forward to bringing this faith to others.

*Heavenly Father, Thank You for loving me so much that You sent Your Son to be my sin offering to You. Grant me the courage and grace to share this Good News of salvation with others, so that they might accept the gift of eternal life and believe in the Way and the Truth and the Life that Jesus Christ. Amen.*

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Saturday, December 17, 2016

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*When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion,  
we were like men who dreamed.  
Our mouths were filled with laughter,  
our tongues with songs of joy.  
Then it was said among the nations,  
“The Lord has done great things for them.”  
The Lord has done great things for us,  
and we are filled with joy.  
Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev.  
Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.  
He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow,  
will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him*

**Psalm 126**

For the past couple of years, our family has attended the 5:30 Christmas Eve service. At that service the children of the church act out the Christmas story. When I attend that service, I am reminded of just how many children are at our church. Walking through the courtyard after the 9:30 service and seeing all the children running around playing, quite often with a treat from the sweet table in their hands, also is a reminder of the number of young families with children that attend First Presbyterian Church in North Palm Beach.

I try to share from the pulpit little pieces of our lives at home with our kids. When you have little children running around the house, there are plenty of learning opportunities. The things they say provide constant entertainment and the way they see the world is unique to them. Having little children is extremely wonderful, but is also extremely exhausting. So many times when I handle a situation at home afterwards I'm left wondering if I handled it properly. There is so much we are unsure about as parents.

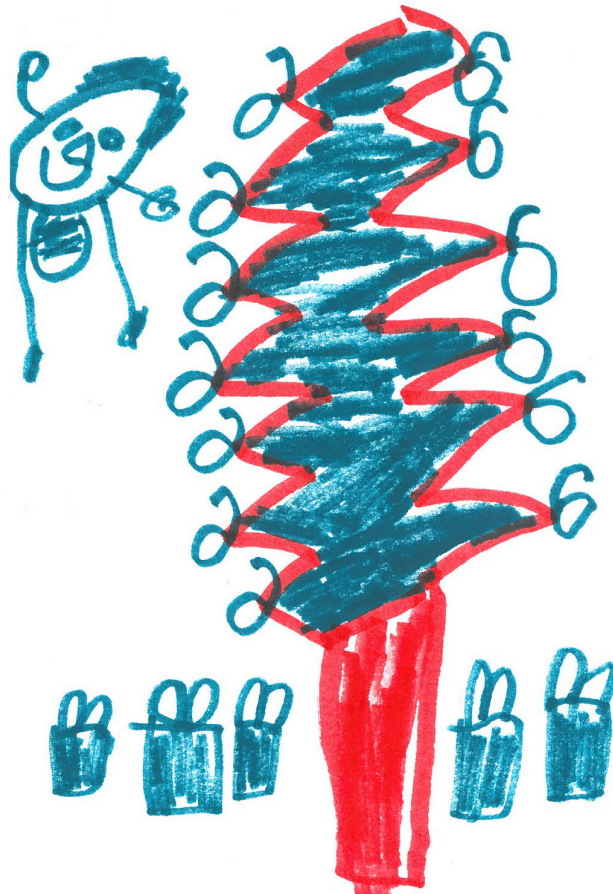
What helps is that we walk through this not alone but together with you. Folks who offer an encouraging word, reminding us that our situation is not unique, help us along. Friends who we can drink wine with while sharing stories about our children and how often we feel like we don't know what we are doing give us peace. Those who have grown children and grandchildren remind us of the payoff of faith, trust, and effort.



Knowing that there is a church walking alongside those of us raising kids lightens the load. Through this we can get a glimpse of the vision Christ has for His church. We see portions of life redeemed and repaired and God's Holy Spirit at work in and among us, all of which are the reasons Christ came and dwelt among us. And it is good.

*Dear Lord, Thank You for a church where we can support and love one another.  
I pray that You would give me wisdom and allow me to be an encourager of those  
around me. Help me to be one who builds up and not one who tears down.  
I pray for the opportunity to walk alongside those who are weary. Amen.*

Rev. Eddie Nabhan



Tommy Carrera, 1st Grade

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Sunday, December 18, 2016

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## 4TH SUNDAY OF Advent

*Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank Him for all He has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ.*

**Philippians 4:6-7**

Folding laundry in front of daytime TV was a guilty pleasure of mine when my children were young (and napping). Talk shows were all the rage, and more often than not, pretty pointless. However, there was one particular afternoon when an interview caught my attention. The guest was asked about 'worrying.' His response is one I will never forget: "Nah, I don't worry. I can worry. Or I can pray. But it would be fruitless to do both."

Those words stopped me mid-fold. How wise was this man – and where did he get his wisdom? As a young wife and a new mom, I felt riddled with worry. I certainly spent time in prayer, but on average, it was 70-30 at best. Hearing those words led me to my Bible where I found Philippians 4. Talk about conviction. How insulting to God for me to pray my concerns to Him, as though I trusted Him to do something, just to spend the next hours ruminating over the same topic!

In the years since, I have certainly focused on praying over worrying. As we enter this Season of Advent, I am reminded, yet again, to give it all to God. We must first worship Him, then thank Him, then lastly tell Him what we need – although, I can say that as I age, I am learning to pray the prayer, "Here's what I think should happen, but clearly You're in charge. Thy will be done." Only then, will we experience His peace.

*Heavenly Father, We thank You for this gift of life, for our community of believers, for this season of Advent. We ask that You bring us Your peace as You work in our lives. And in everything, please help us remember, Thy will be done. Amen.*

**Rebecca Nelson**

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Monday, December 19, 2016

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*For great in His love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.*

**Psalm 117:2**

This past year my family assembled and published a book titled *A Perry Family Portrait*. It is a story of faith of 17 people who lived and grew up in love and great hardships. My father was born in 1888 and had a seventh grade education. He was a farmer, carpenter, and very involved in teaching other men to become Masons. My mother was born in 1894 and had no formal education. Over the years during their marriage, ten boys and five girls were born and survived with the aid of an almost midwife and, later on, the local doctors. I was the 14th child. We lived on a farm in a four room home with no electricity and no inside plumbing. Cotton was our main source of income.

The closest church was a mile away. We walked there three times a week for Sunday school, church services, training union, all day sings, and any other activities the church offered. This is where I accepted Jesus and was baptized. Our faith in the Lord became more important as the older boys joined the military. Three of them served during World War II. Two others enlisted after the war ended. With five sons in the military, my mother prayed a lot for their safe return home. Her prayers were answered. One of my brothers was awarded many medals for his bravery in fighting the Germans.

My mother was the heart and soul of the family. She encouraged us to get as much education as we could. Most of the older Perrys were farmers, mill workers, chicken farmers, school bus drivers, electricians, or auto mechanics. There were six college graduates, four teachers, of which two were long time elementary school principals, a sheriff, an owner of a clothing store, a certified public accountant, and a chief of police in a local town.

I learned things about my family members in the process of gathering information for our book from the children and grandchildren who submitted information. God has blessed our family. Three of the fifteen of us are still living. As of today, there are 170 direct descendants of my parents. Each summer we have a family reunion. In 2016 there were 102 in attendance. I love the old hymn "Faith of our Fathers, Holy Faith. We shall be true to thee 'til death."

*Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your love and faithfulness.  
Help us to share our faith with others. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

**Grace Robertson**

*Who do you say I am? . . . 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'*

**Matthew 16:15b-16**

Questions. Jesus used them frequently. Sometime they are like “burrs under the saddle,” irritants that will not let us go until we answer. “Sally, when did you come to know the Lord?” the young Bible teacher asked me. “I don’t know, I can’t remember; it must have been when I was young.” The question dominated my thoughts for several days; I couldn’t shake it. Finally, realizing that there probably had never been such an event, I knelt by my bed one day and thanked the Lord for what He had done for me on the cross. Immediately I knew I had His forgiveness. I had been baptized, attended Sunday School most of my life, taken survey courses of Old Testament and New Testament in college, and still had not understood who Jesus is and what He did for me until that Bible study. The Holy Spirit had now given me eyes to see and ears to hear. I understood.

At the time, I was teaching the 4th - 6th graders in Sunday school. (The blind leading the blind?) Immediately I realized that the materials I had been given to use were not biblically-based and I asked permission to exchange them for a very solid curriculum. And I learned right along with my students, because even though I had biblical knowledge before, He indeed now was making all things new. We were studying the book of Acts and I remember saying to myself, “My life should be like this (the new church of Acts 2 and beyond), but it isn’t. Why not?” Luke tells us that the new believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.” From that time the Lord has led me to like-minded people who have nurtured my faith and discipled me. I can say that my life is, indeed, now like that, filled with joy, some sorrows, but, in all things, praising God.

*Lord Jesus, Help me to devote myself to those things which You have shown me to be good, i.e. to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with You—my Lord and my God. Amen.*

**Sally Privett**

*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

**1 Corinthians 13:13**

Much like a computer, there are times when we humans could use a complete rebooting. Following the 18 month long campaigns to elect a new President of the United States and the ugliness and divisiveness that has prevailed, I have found myself in need of a complete reboot. I feel I need to start fresh, to re-center myself. I want all the mess to fall away and to engage a new day filled with love, patience, kindness and mutual respect. So, where's the Escape button? Instead of searching the keyboard, my plan for the big reboot is first to pray to God for His guidance. He never steers me wrong. He immediately knows who's calling and He is always there, never too busy. So, He reminds me that in the Scriptures I find my answers... "Follow me," Jesus said. What? "Come to me all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest." Luke 18:22 Ah, there it is. "Heavily burdened" and then, "rest." I need an emotional rest and I bet you may as well.

*"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." 1 Corinthians 13:4-8*

*"And now these three remain. Faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." 1 Corinthians 13:13* That's it...hit that spiritual button and it is, indeed, a new day!! It's a day of renewal, fresh and full of decency, humility, love, and hope for ALL. Praise God from Whom ALL blessings come!

**Pat Neely Stewart**

(from her blog [www.LivingWithAHopefulHeart.com](http://www.LivingWithAHopefulHeart.com))



*. . . and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.  
The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.  
James 5:16*

In has been my privilege to walk alongside many people by praying for problems and concerns that touch their hearts. I have discovered that many people have never been prayed for by name. Some are surprised that I would pray for them every day until their prayer is answered.

Recently, Joni Eareckson Tada had a program on Sequoia trees, which grow up to 300 feet, but have root systems of only 3 to 6 feet. She said they always grow in groves and they are strong because they grow close together and their roots intertwine. This seems a perfect illustration of how we are strengthened by intercessory prayer. There are times that we cannot find the words ourselves. Sometimes we are so focused on the problem that it's hard to pray, but we find strength and peace from the person showing God's love through prayer. I believe there is power in the prayers of more than one. Scripture says; "For where two or three (even just you and another person) are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20)

Prayer is a ministry that anyone and everyone can participate in, from the youngest to the oldest; from the busiest to someone isolated or elderly or lonely or ill. Prayer requires discipline, which may be the hardest part. I believe it is vital to have a practice to pray consistently each day for those for whom we have committed to pray. Prayer is a blessing not only to the recipient, but for the person who prays, as prayers are answered. I so passionately believe in the power of prayer!

*Father, teach us to pray outside of ourselves and be committed to pray, for God's glory. Amen.*

**Joyce Brolsma**  
**(originally submitted in 2008)**

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Friday, December 23, 2016

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*This is the day the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

**Psalm 118:24**

On a trip to Atlanta about ten years ago, I met a young mother and her daughter. They were headed my way via Delta Airlines. We struck up a conversation and decided to have lunch together. This experience became like a little sermon which I have never forgotten.

The young mother told me the following. She awakened one morning overwhelmed with a multitude of things to do. It was Monday...It was dark...It was rainy...It was cold and four children had to be gotten ready for school.

She then exclaimed, "This is going to be a miserable day." Her four-year-old son said, "But Mom, you must never say that because, 'This is the day that the Lord has made and we must rejoice and be glad.'" This comment got her attention in a poignant way. Children often lead us.

Since that day, this Bible verse has been the opening for each story time in our children's library. It begins the session in a happy, true, thankful, and positive way. I often wish the young mother knew how her words affected my life and prayerfully the little ones who come to story time.

*Dear God, our heavenly Father, Thank You for each new day. Help us to appreciate the gift. Amen.*

**Kitty Cairo**

**(Originally submitted in 2008)**



*Brooke, 2nd Grade*

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Saturday, December 24, 2016

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***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;  
The old has passed away, behold, the new has come.***

**II Corinthians 5:17**

Not long ago I sent a birthday card to a dear friend. The card framed a sepia photograph of two female seniors standing side by side against a vintage automobile. The greeting read – “You and me... We’re gonna be friends until we’re old and senile!” Upon opening the card, one continues to read the rest of the sentiment, “And then we’ll be new friends! How great is that?! Happy Birthday.”

In living a dynamic Christian life, we understand the significance of cleansing and renewal. With each new dawn, fresh opportunities arise for us to change when change is needed, and to forgive when forgiveness is necessary. In every opening of a new day, there is time to encourage those around us, as well as take in the light of motivation and inspiration they share with us. All these daily, brand new opportunities are a gift from GOD, THE CREATOR OF ALL THINGS NEW. His presence in creation brings repair and rebirth. It is a present that opens our hearts wider and tightens our embraces. It is a spark that enlightens our minds and warms our patience, kindness, and gentleness to one another.

Yes, indeed, with each new dawn, we are born anew – refreshed and restored. We can breathe deeply into our repentance, and rejoice greatly in our salvation. Yes, we are born anew, just as the Christ Child is born anew each year in our hearts and into our lives as Christian believers.

***Happy Birthday, precious Jesus! Thank You for the light of your life among us, and for Your Holy Spirit within us. Behold, the new has come. Hallelujah! Amen.***

**Sally Insinga**



*Gio Forte, 2nd Grade*



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Sunday, December 25, 2016

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# Christmas Day



## Matthew 2:1-15

This is my recent painting of the birth of Jesus. It shows the traditional story and what it means to the people today, like us. We might not have silver and gold, but we can offer what we have.

The story of the visit of the Magi, in the second chapter of Matthew, includes the story of King Herod and his search for the Christ child in order to destroy him. The angel represents God's protection of the Christ child as he escapes the evil plotted by Herod. The Magi do not return to Herod and Joseph is told in a dream to "Get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt." In our world, evil is real, but God is sovereign and is our shield and protection.

*Dear Lord, Thank you for sending Your son, Jesus, for protecting His life until His time was come, and for defeating evil through His death and resurrection. Amen.*

OK Hee (Kay) Nam

# Prayers

by Annie Dougherty

*Dear Lord, Bless, guide and protect our loved ones on their way.  
Pave their path with beauty, mercy, sanctity, and grace.  
Lead them safely home to those they love, and those who love them. Amen.*

*Thank you, dear Father, for warmly embracing our family this Christmas.  
Bless and keep us strong and firm in our love for one another.  
May our lives continue to magnify Your goodness and glory with works  
Of loving kindness, compassionate care, and unselfish obedience.  
May we always make room for the celebration of Your grace,  
and the communion of Your guidance,  
As we prepare for a lifetime of Christ time.*



Vivi Cox, 2nd Grade

# Christmas Schedule

## **Monday, November 28**

**ADVENT RECITAL**

Noon | Chapel

Director of Music Ministries,

Jay Arnn, accompanied by

David Block, piano

## **Monday, December 12**

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

7:00 PM | Sanctuary

First Pres Sanctuary Choir & Orchestra

plus soloists

## **Thursday, December 1**

**WOMEN'S CHRISTMAS BRUNCH**

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Fellowship Hall

## **Sunday, December 18**

**JINGLE JAM CHRISTMAS EXPERIENCE**

7:00 PM | Fellowship Hall

\$5/person or \$20/family

## **Monday, December 5**

**ADVENT RECITAL**

Noon | Chapel

Bob Mayer, vocalist; Barbara Walton,  
piano; Maria Gallegos, flute; Dick Dupere,  
trombone; and Sophia Ochoa, piano

## **Monday, December 19**

**ADVENT RECITAL**

Noon | Chapel

Antonia Rincon, violin with

David Block, piano

## **Saturday, December 10**

**U.Y.I. CHRISTMAS STORE**

8:00 AM – 2:00 PM

At Urban Youth Impact

2823 N. Australian Ave., WPB

## **Saturday, December 24**

**CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES**

5:00 PM – Family Worship Service

7:00 & 9:00 PM – Candlelight Service

## **Sunday, December 11**

**CHRISTMAS CANTATA**

9:30 & 11:15 AM | Sanctuary

## **Sunday, December 25**

**CHRISTMAS DAY COMBINED**

**WORSHIP SERVICE**

11:00 am | Sanctuary



**First Presbyterian Church in North Palm Beach**  
**717 Prosperity Farms Rd., NPB, FL 33408**  
**561-622-8818 | [www.firstpresnpb.org](http://www.firstpresnpb.org)**