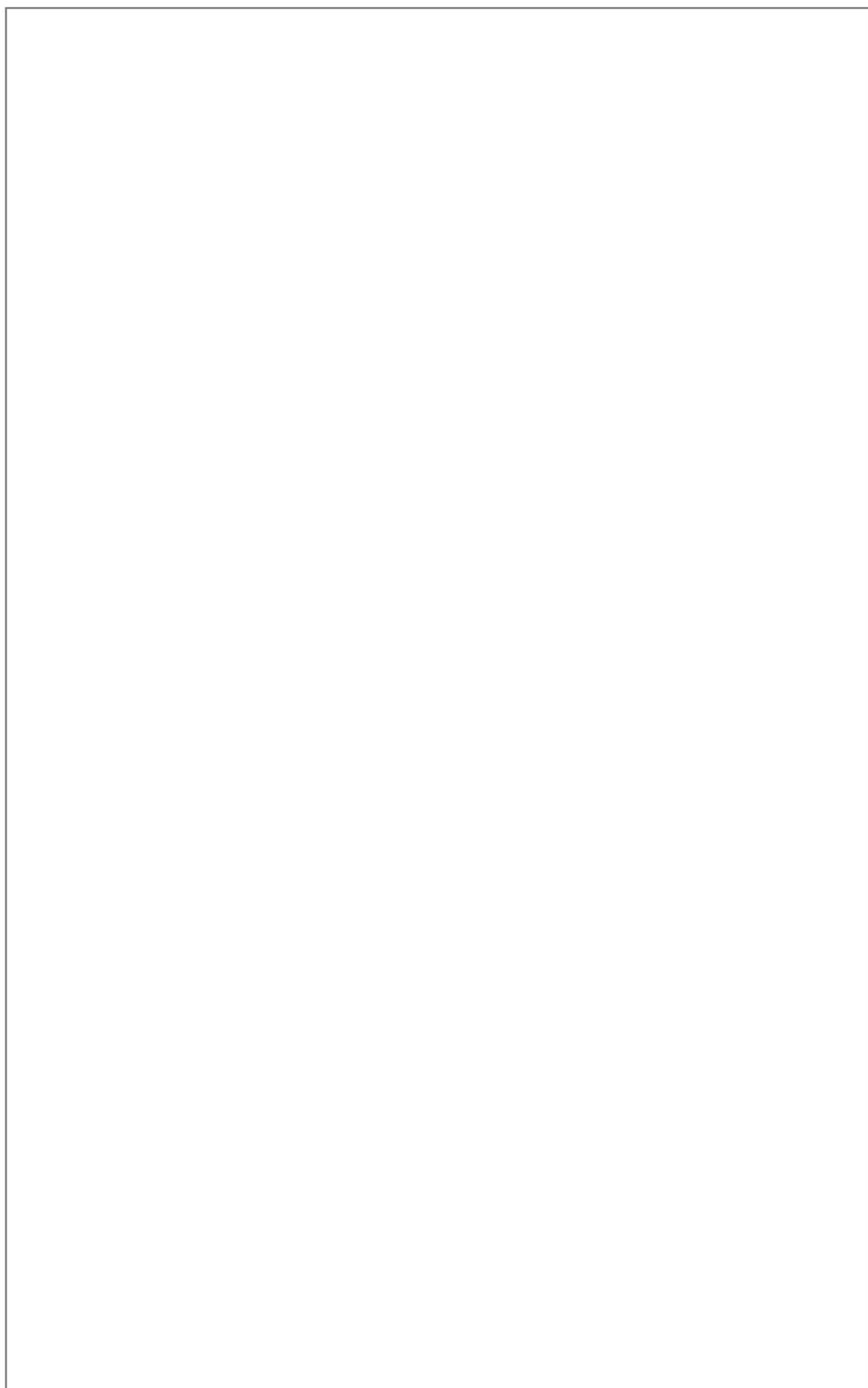


2017

*Advent
Devotional*

JAMES ISLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH





A PRAYER FOR THE ADVENT JOURNEY

In this season of expectation
we prepare to welcome Christ Jesus, Messiah,
into the bustle of our lives
and the hard to find moments of solitude.

We prepare to welcome Christ Jesus, Messiah,
into our homes and situations
along with friends and families.

We prepare to welcome Christ Jesus, Messiah,
into our hearts, and those often hidden parts of our lives.

We prepare to welcome Christ Jesus, Messiah,
for beneath the surface of your story
is an inescapable fact.

You entered this world
as vulnerable as any one of us
in order to nail that vulnerability to the cross.

Our fears, our insecurities and our sins
all that can separate us from God
exchanged by your Grace for Love.

We cannot comprehend the reasoning
only marvel that Salvation comes to us
through a baby born in a stable,
and reaches out to a world in need.

In this season of anticipation
we prepare to welcome Christ Jesus, Messiah.

(FAITH AND WORSHIP, 2017)

1st Sunday of Advent



December 3, 2017

The Gift of Music

We should speak "to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord." Give the gift of music! It is life changing!

Ephesians 5:19

Music saves me. It fulfills me. It heals me. It helps me grieve. It makes me smile....

This has never been more prevalent than these last few weeks. Our sweet Daddy, Walt Ector, was in a horrible car accident on Wednesday, October 18th, while driving to Hymnfest choir rehearsal. When I heard the horrific news, I was standing in the church hallway and could hear the choir rehearsing "Be Still and Know That I Am God." While sobbing uncontrollably, I knew everything would be alright. God was telling me so through music.

Daddy has been in the hospital for almost three weeks now. It's been tough for him to accept what is going on. Sometimes he gets very

frustrated and angry. He needs a distraction. Music! While listening to the livestream of the church services and Hymnfest, he plays along with the handbells, sings along with the hymns and anthems. He then quotes the scriptures mentioned in the music and becomes peaceful. What a gift the music is for him!

The highlights of these last few weeks has been my going to teach piano to my sweet students or to work with the kids or adults in choir rehearsal. I can focus on the music with the kids or escape into the words of the anthems. Again, music is a gift to me! It reminds me of all the many blessings I have in my life.

Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of music. It soothes, heals, and helps us reflect on your love for us. Help us share this gift with others so they will also know your love. Amen.

Barbara Ector Manaker



December 4, 2017

The Gift of a Mentor

“Ointment and incense make the heart rejoice, likewise the sweetness of one’s friend from sincere counsel.” Proverbs 27:9

The phone call ended. I put my head in my hands and big, burning tears heaved up from my soul. My friend and mentor, Jack, was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer. Even with this illness, he knows he is in God’s hands.

I met Jack at least a decade ago when I was trying to grow my business. He walked the trail long before me. As a newcomer, Jack welcomed me and took me under his wing. We served on a board together and did volunteer work together. Jack introduced me to people and processes that helped me and my business grow. He encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone. He gave me sound advice, and I often turned to him for his counsel. Along the way, we learned that we shared a love of God and a friendship grew. I met his wife and saw pictures of his beloved grandchildren. There were lunches and dinners and conversations on a multitude of topics. He guided me through some very difficult moments.

Jack hasn’t just helped me. He’s helped everyone. He has not discriminated in any way. He has a passion for job creation and Science, Technology, Education and Math (STEM) education. He starts charter schools. He runs robotics tournaments. He sits on educational boards. He raises funds to further this mission. Jack pours all his resources into other people, including his time, talent and money. He is a living example of servant-leadership. He models for me and so many others what it means to be a friend and offer counsel. Now, the torch passes and it is my turn to mentor. Fortunately, I’ve had the sweetest teacher.

Loving Father, thank you for putting mentors in our path. Thank you for those who teach and lead according to your blessed truth. Please help us grow in knowledge and wisdom so that we can be a gift to others, too. Amen

Beth Mitchum

December 5, 2017

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith---and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

Ephesians 2:8

We all love receiving gifts, don't we? Especially gifts we don't expect or deserve.

Many years ago, my husband and I were struggling financially, and had decided to make do with just one car. I rode my bicycle or walked to work every day. It was doable, but very inconvenient on the days when the weather was terrible or when I needed to run errands.

One day after work, I rode my bike in the pouring rain to go to Walmart, the library, and the eye doctor. That night, the phone rang. David answered it, and by the tone of his voice, I sensed that the caller was delivering bad news. After hanging up the phone, David sat down and bowed his head. When he looked up, there were tears in his eyes. I waited for the bad news.

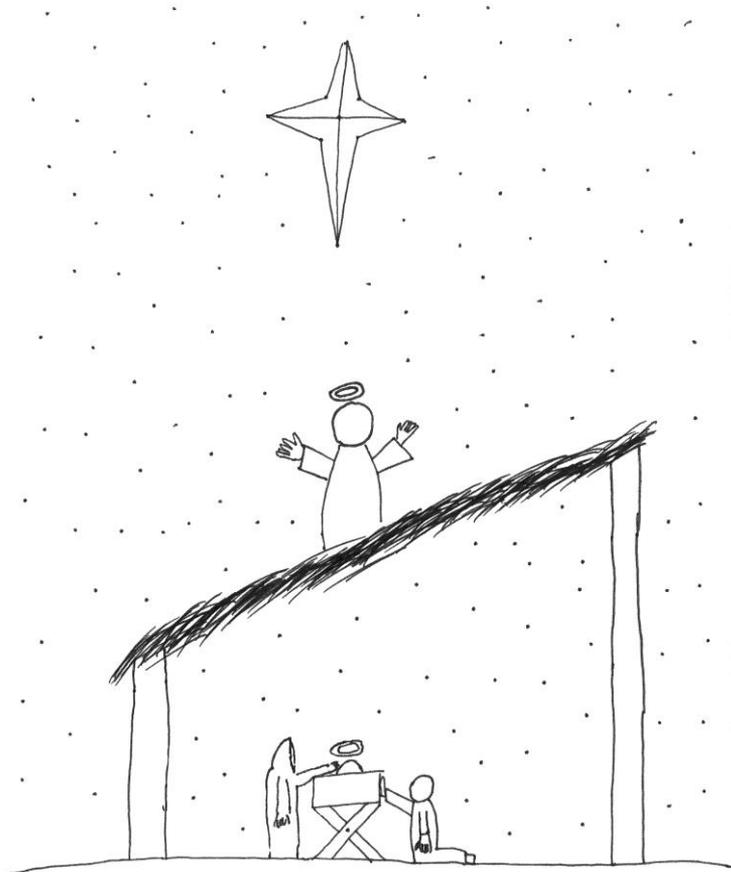
“That was Tammy,” David said. “I think she just told me that she and Bob want to give us their truck.”

It was true. Tammy and Bob had been hoping to adopt a child, but did not expect to have a baby placed with them for at least a year. But God brought a child to them, suddenly and unexpectedly, so they had to find a vehicle that was more suitable for a family than Bob's small pickup truck. They had prayed and felt God was leading them to give us their truck. What an amazing and wonderful gift! We couldn't believe the goodness of what was happening to us, and told everyone we talked to about it.

Another child came into the world suddenly and unexpectedly many, many years ago: Jesus, the most precious gift that has ever been given to us. Through Him, we receive the undeserved gift of God's grace. What an amazing and wonderful gift! Can you believe the goodness of what has happened to all of us who are believers? Do you tell everyone you talk to about it?

Dear Lord, thank you for the birth of your son Jesus Christ. Thank you for the amazing and wonderful gift of grace, which we cannot earn and don't deserve. Help us to be imitators of you by extending grace to others. Help us to tell others about the goodness of all that has happened to us by your hand.

Cathy Ardrey



December 6, 2017

“If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”

Matthew 7:11

If you were to give someone a gift to last their entire lifetime what would it be?

Some Christmas gifts do not last very long. A child might be bored with a Christmas toy by that afternoon. But other gifts might have a long and useful life. A pair of sturdy boots can last, provided that your feet aren't still growing. But what kind of gift lasts for a whole lifetime?

A musical instrument might last a person's whole life. They might outgrow a specific instrument but you could give the lifelong appreciation of music. You could give a book. You won't outgrow a book like you might a pair of pants, but the books that appeal to you when you're young may not hold the same appeal as you grow older.

Or perhaps it could be a different kind of gift...an education, a good work ethic, wisdom, or even love. A happy home and warm memories can be a gift that lasts a lifetime.

What specific gifts has God given you that have lasted for a lifetime? Ask God to help you think of what he has given you. Write them down. Thank God for the gifts He has given.

Elizabeth Souter

December 7, 2017

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of darkness a light has dawned."
Isaiah 9:2

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."
John 1:5

There's a song many of us recognize that goes: "God will make a way when there seems to be no way..." I received a gift in my college years that I'll never forget. I had two friends who were Geology majors and they invited me to join them on a Saturday afternoon trip from Furman to explore a cave in the Tennessee mountains. I think they'd been into the cave with one of their professors. I don't think we told anyone where we were going. The cave was out in the country with no civilization nearby and no one was around as we ventured in. We each had a flashlight. There were some tight spaces. We went into areas with a good bit of water. After a while, one of the flashlights died. As we were trying to head back to the surface, we realized we were going in circles! We were coming back to the same spot. I remember recognizing that anxiety was my enemy at that point and that I needed to try to stay calm. I still have the shirt I was wearing that day - it has a hole that I chewed in it.

I'm not sure how much time passed, but after a while, we saw a beautiful sight - a light off in the distance. It was a man who directed us how to get out of the cave. At the surface, I don't remember seeing a car or evidence of where he had come from. I don't know if he was an angel or someone that God directed to go to the cave that day but I am thankful for the gift!

Lord, we can helplessly wander in the dark trying to find our way to You in this life. Thank you for sending Jesus as our way!

John Pritchett

December 8, 2017

*A Psalm of thanksgiving.
Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.*

*Know that the Lord is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.*

*For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.*

Psalm 100

Music is the one art we all have inside. We may not be able to play an instrument, but we can sing along or clap or tap our feet. All of us have had the experience of hearing a tune from childhood and having that melody evoke a memory or a feeling. The music we hear early on tends to stay with us all our lives. I recently witnessed this at The Village in Summerville where my parents are now living. Every Tuesday, a wonderful pianist, Michael Murray, comes to the common room and plays for all the residents who wish to listen. The room is packed every time. He plays a variety of show tunes and classics but on this particular afternoon, he chose to pick some TV show themes. My ears lit up as I heard the theme from “The Flintstones” and “The Munsters”. It took me right back to my childhood. Many of the residents have memory problems. They might not know what day it is but when he played “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” and “You Are My Sunshine” they all sang along not missing a word. What a gift he gives to these dear people each week.

*Thank you Lord for all the people in my life who have shared their gifts with me.
Help me to look for ways to share the gifts I have been given.*

Marilyn Muckenfuss

December 9, 2017

Gifts of the heart

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:7

When I remember Christmas at my Mom's house I think of good food, lots of laughter, and the many ways she showed her love for her family. My Mom was a widow on a fixed income but she always managed to have a gift for everyone. No small feat considering there were twenty of us in all!

They weren't big presents but for each family she included a quart bag of pecans that she picked up and shelled herself. She also gave us a box of Mason jars filled with beans and tomatoes that she had canned.

"Miz" Sallie as she was called was famous in Hollywood for her coconut pies. When anyone was sick or having problems she would show up with a smile and a delicious coconut pie to brighten their day! At her funeral her pastor "Skip" said her would know he was in Heaven if there was one of Miz Sallie's coconut pies waiting for him! We might not all be able to teach, preach, or sing but God can use us in other ways to show our love for Him and those around us.

Gracious God, thank you for the gifts of mothers and grandmothers. Thank you for loving hands that cook and care for us and are the first to teach us of your selfless love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Marilyn Stark

2nd Sunday of Advent



December 10, 2017

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Psalm90:14

What if JESUS came early in the morning and offering to cut your grass, what would you say? Would you turn Him away? I did! Many years ago I was in a fight for my life! It was all my family could do to just survive, DAILY. Just let me be honest: we needed all the help we could get!

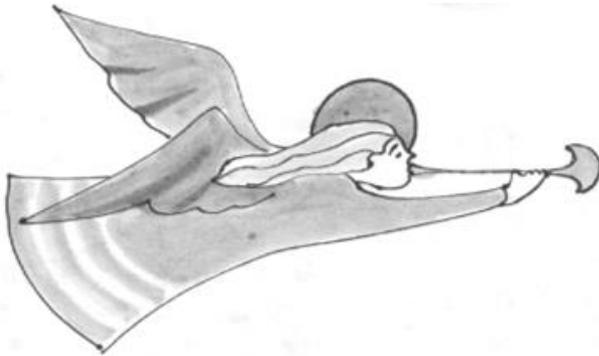
Early one Saturday morning there was a knock at my door, and a sweet neighbor ask me if he could cut our grass! Politely, I thanked him for his generous offer and told him Johnny would be home later and he would do it. He asked me the same question a second time, “Are you sure you don’t need help?” I said, “nope we are good.”

My youngest sister was there in the kitchen that day and she overheard the conversation, she gently pulled me aside and told me, “Sister, I love you to pieces but don’t you ever do that again! You just stole that young man’s JOY, he wanted to help you and you turned him away!”

JOY came that morning, straight to my front door and I turned HIM away. Lord Jesus you satisfy us early in the morning with your steadfast love. I am so very grateful.

Lord Jesus, help us to welcome your JOY into our lives every day as we see you in the faces of neighbors, strangers, and friends. Give us grace to be that JOY in someone's life today. In your name we pray, Amen.

Teresa Gamble



December 11, 2017

“Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”
Hebrews 13:1-2

Our past youth director, Duncan, made Bethelwoods really fun for me. Sometimes I don't talk a lot, so it is hard for me to make new friends. However, Duncan had a gift of kindness! When we were at Bethelwoods last year, he made sure I made friends by introducing me to some of the other kids and I ended up having a really good time!

Thank you, God for the examples of kindness that you give us every day to follow. Thank to you for door held open, the pen picked up, the hug shared, and the kind words spoken. Thank you for those glimpses of you throughout the day. Help us to always show the kindness of Christ to others through our words and actions. Amen

Dillion Dillehay, grade 8

“Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the holy spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech, and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left.”
2 Corinthians 6:4-7

One gift I gave someone was happiness when I made my aunt feel great feel before she got married. She was really nervous and was crying. I gave her my gift of cheerfulness and told her it was going to be ok. She got married to my uncle, and she was happy.

Thank you God for the gifts you have given us! Thank you especially for those special gifts that we can use to strengthen your kingdom. Amen

Alyssa Anderson, grade 8

December 12, 2017

“but blessed is the one who is kind to the sick.”

Proverbs 14:21

A gift I gave someone was hope when my granddad was in the hospital. I had all of my school sign a card if they wanted, and they were super positive. My grandfather was dying, but I still got to see his smile and a glimpse of hope in his eyes and my family's. He then got to leave the hospital and spend time with us. Even though he eventually returned to the hospital and passed away, we all had hope, and he lived for a while longer than expected.

Thank you for the opportunities in which you show us your love for us and the love we have for one another. We will try to always share your love with others.

Amen

Unknown

“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”

Hebrews 12:14

God has given me the gift of peace in my life. I have used my life to try to lift others up. I try to give what I have with those that don't. I try to help those who need it. I live my life to the fullest to glorify God!

Dear God, thank you for the wonderful life you have given me. Help me to use my life to bring you honor and share your love. Amen

Cohen Frye, grade 7



December 13, 2017

“So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”

Many children learn to sing "Away in a Manger" before they learn to read. This hymn holds a special place in many hearts, but no one knows who wrote the music. You may find James Murray's name associated with it, but you will also see that the tune was listed as (Martin) "Luther's Cradle Hymn". And if you see Carl Mueller's name as composer, they say he never existed. Even in 1945, this was a 75-year-old mystery. Tradition also says that the third verse was added later. The real author never came forward to claim this hymn. All we know for sure is that the first two verses originated in the mid-1800s by "anonymous". By the 1890s a third verse was added and printed in a Philadelphia songbook. The words were sung for a while to the old Scottish tune, "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton", but the present tune which has no composer is more popular. James Murray probably added the harmony when he published it, and he is credited for all of it.

But whoever the song writer was, whenever it was written, whoever wrote the words, the message is simple and poignant. A Savior came to earth to bring peace, joy and hope. Jesus came as a tiny baby, surrounded by God's creatures, who loved Him, and they cooed or mooed Him to sleep. It ends with a blessing for all the children of the world. What's not to love? Away in a manger, no crib for His bed, the little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head. The stars in the bright sky looked down where He lay. The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the poor Baby wakes. But little Lord Jesus no crying He makes. I love Thee Lord Jesus, look down from the sky and stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay close by me forever and love me I pray. Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care, and fit us for heaven to live with Thee there. Amen.

December 14, 2017

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.”

Acts 4:8-10

One thing God had given me is the gift of playing musical instruments. I have used this gift many times but specifically one time for letting the hearing impaired get up on the stage when our school band was playing. The reason we did this was so that they could feel the vibrations from the music since they couldn't hear.

Thank you, God for chances for us to share with others. Please give us more chances to share our gifts. Amen.

Tyler Pettapiece, grade 8

“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

We all play an equal but different part in the church. Without the usher there is not church, without the preacher, there is no church, and without the people there is no church. Without the children there is no one to come.

God, thanks for the roles you have given each of us in your body. Help us to use our gifts to strengthen your body and life others up. Amen

Matthew Smith, grade 8

December 15, 2017

FEAR NOT!

“Fear not for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy.”

Luke 2:10

Be strong, do not fear
So do not fear for I am with you
Fear not for I have redeemed you
You will have nothing to fear
But perfect love drives out fear
He delivered me from all my fears
Do not be afraid, I am bringing you good news
Fear not I am with you
Do not be afraid, for your prayer has been heard
Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God

You can find all these sayings in the Bible, no matter what version you read. Chapter and verse is only listed for the last one because all these quotes in different Bibles might have different words. But one thing is perfectly clear: if you are near to God, no matter what your fears may be, God is saying "Fear not". God's angels gave that message to the shepherds long ago when Jesus was born. "All glory be to God on high, and to the earth be peace; Good will henceforth from Heaven to men begin and never cease." Joy, hope and peace is the message of the angels. Angels are messengers of God. Are we ready to receive these Christmas gifts?

Dear Father, please help me in my journey to receive Your gifts. Amen



December 16, 2017

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip is people for works of service, so that they body of Christ may be built up”
Ephesians 4:12

When I first went on the Mid High Mission trip to CROSS, it impacted my life in how I thought about God and gave me hope. At Bethelwoods, I was taught that you are trusted with other people in your hands and to have responsibility. After I realized that God has a purpose for your life, I became happy and believe anything is possible with Christ.

God, grant us the power to understand that we can truly accomplish anything with you on our team. I'm thankful for the opportunities you have given me to learn more about you and how you have called me to serve you! Please help those who may not have realized the power of your love. Amen

David Klinger, grade 7

“And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.”
2 Corinthians 8:5

I think God has given me the gift of kindness. One day at lunch a girl was sharing her gummy bears with everyone. She didn't see one girl so I asked her if she wanted some of my gummy bears. After lunch, we walked to PE together and it turned out that we were really good friends. After that, my daddy told me that was proud of me.

God, I thank you for the gift of kindness that you have given me. I love being nice to your people! Help me to always remember how you have gifted me and to use that gift to build up your kingdom. Amen.

Lily Weatherholtz, grade 6

3rd Sunday of Advent



December 17, 2017

“Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord is giving you.” Exodus 20:12

The gift that God has given me is giving me a great family. And he gave me an awesome home. I'm thankful for all the other blessings God has given me too, like my dog and friends.

Dear God, thank you for my loving family, friends, and dog. Thank you for all the blessing you have given me. Help me to always remember that I am truly blessed not only because of the things I have on earth, but because of the eternal life you have given me through Jesus. Amen

Jacob Dillehay, grade 6

“I will not leave you; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore but you will live. Because I live, you will also live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”

John 14: 18

The gift that God has given me is my life and my family. I'm also thankful for my foster family because they take good care of me. I know you have a plan.

Dear God, please help me to see your plan. Help me to trust you. Thank you for the gifts you have given me. Amen

Harrison Adcock, grade 6



December 18, 2017

“By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.”

Galatians 5:22-26

The greatest gift I have ever received is the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost). It was a gift from God many years ago, but I didn't realize it for a long time.

Remember the question, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" In other words, "How do you become an expert at doing ...anything?"
How do you become a Christian?
How do you receive love, joy and peace?

The first question I would answer, "Practice, practice, practice." The second question I would answer from Galatians 5 (NIV). Because you live by the spirit, now that you are a practicing Christian, you receive the fruit of the spirit as a gift. It's an inheritance — it is yours, and it lives in your heart. Not only will you have love, joy and peace, you will have patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Some Bible versions change those nine words, but you cannot change the meaning.

Dear God, I thank You for these gifts. I just want You to know that I use them every day. In Your Son's name I pray.

December 19, 2017

*O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

*You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.*

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?*

*Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

*O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

Psalm 8

What is your favorite name for Jesus? What am I asking? Well, what name do you call when you call upon God in prayer? I once took upon myself to write down all the synonyms, that is, all the meanings and other names I would think of when I thought of God, or Jesus, or Holy Spirit. I ended up with 26 full pages. It opened my eyes. I challenge you to try it sometime.

Father, Son, Holy Spirit: the Three In One is all in all, and Christmas gave us that gift! Christmas gave us Jesus. Before that, there was always a higher deity, but Christmas gave us a PERSONAL Savior. Now we have Someone with us every hour of every day. We are NEVER alone. What an everlasting

gift. Just think of it. If you're starting school or a new job, or moving out to a new place, you have Someone with you! All you have to do is reach out and say, "Thank you for being here. I feel You with me." I have heard documentaries where prisoners of war say that when they acknowledged the presence of God in their cells, that they no longer felt pain, even when they were beaten and abused. God's presence is powerful. It is a gift from your Father to you. It lasts a lifetime. All you need to do is "GIVE THANKS".

Give thanks with a grateful heart. Give thanks to the Holy One, give thanks because we're given Jesus Christ, the Son. And now, let the weak say "We are strong". Let the poor say "We are rich because of what the Lord has done for us!" Give thanks. Give thanks. Amen.

(GIVE THANKS IS A HYMN BY HENRY SMITH, 1978)



December 20, 2017

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”

God gave me my friends, for which I love and care for. I adore my friends and couldn't live without the peace and happiness they bring me.

God, thank you for all the wonderful people you have given me in my life. I hope to always be the blessing in their lives that they are in mine. Amen.

Mary Kathryn Huddleston, grade 7

“Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name.”

Psalm 30:4

God gave me a voice to sing songs in church. I use my voice to worship God and sing with my friends.

Dear God, thank you for the ability to sing. I hope my voice brings you happiness. Amen

Sydney Curtice, grade 7

“A friend loves at all times”

Proverbs 17:17

I don't know what God has given me besides my friends. I guess they're the only reason I'm alive and I care about them a lot. I don't know why they still stay with me even though I can get pretty annoying at times. But it hasn't happened yet. I can consider them actual gifts and they are literally the best thing that have ever happened to me. My friends are what I look forward to everyday, and I care about them more than they know...

God, thank you for all the people that you have surrounded me with.

Please help me to mean as much to others as they mean to me. Amen.

December 21, 2017

“For God so loves 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

Eternal life. Sounds crazy, huh? As humans, there’s no way we can understand eternity. And, even in heaven, if we’re there forever, we still won’t understand it. Even if we’ve been there 10 billion years, we still won’t understand because all we can understand is 10 billion is years, a mere speck in eternity. In Christianity, we often can’t understand anything. All we can do is trust. We want to know. So you must discipline yourself to trust, to feel in your heart.

Dear God, Help us to trust you ALWAYS. Amen.

Austin Smith, grade 6

“Honor the one who serves me.”

John 12:26

During the CROSS mission trip, I gave my time and energy to help others. I enjoyed helping others pray and come together to learn more about God. I was thankful for the counselors and the gift they gave of their time so we could have this opportunity.

Dear God, thank you for the gift of time that you have given each of us. Help us to always make the most of our time and to use it wisely. Amen.

Hunter Heyboer, grade 7

December 22, 2017

“When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

Luke 2:17-20

I'll bet most of you reading this get most of your "tweets" via the computer. Those of us who are quite "electronically challenged" have never tweeted. I speak for myself when I confess that I get my tweets on the front porch. My dog tells me when it's time to go sit on the porch. She lies on her cushion, I just glide. After a minute or so, there is a "screech, screech". A hawk is bragging about something, or maybe he just wants to scare the smaller birds. Oh, there is the cardinal tweeting from my tree asking, "where are you, my love?" And another cardinal from a neighbor's tree saying, "I'm here, very close by."

A loud caw, caw, caw, and a group of crows move out. Then there's the cry of the blue jay: he's very excited. And you see him following a snake on the ground. I cannot leave out the mockingbird. He starts to sing and, you guessed it, "Repeat Tweets". They're not original — some even sound like alarm clocks.

Tweets are amazing! They are messages. They are love calls, boasting, distress signals, warnings, or repetitive. God gave His message to the angels when His Son was born. The angels gave the message to the shepherds. The shepherds went to the Baby Jesus, and when they returned, they glorified and praised God. They also told everyone, everywhere the wondrous story.

And I say, "There is nothing new under the sun". Not even tweets.

Dear Father, thank you for the birds that sing. Thank you for your Son. Thank you for our Christian friends. Thank you God for everything.

December 23, 2017

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

*"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel."*

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Matthew 2:1-12

There is a hymn that tells the story of three kings. It was written in 1857, which was not so long ago. But that was the same time when singing Christmas carols of any kind was becoming popular. You see, our Pilgrim Fathers discouraged singing about Christmas because they thought it might encourage celebrations, merchandising, or even pagan rituals! They thought that Christmas should be a time of worship. Ooh, well, I digress.

The Three kings: Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar, are mentioned in verses 2, 3 and 4 in a hymn, "We Three Kings". They arrive late on the scene, probably because they came such long distances — perhaps as many as 800-900 miles in all. Melchior came from Persia. He was an older man with a long, white beard. Caspar came from India. He was a young,

beardless man with a ruddy complexion. Balthazar came from Arabia, and he was black. These three represent all races, all people on earth. They arrive late; perhaps a few years after –

“He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them.

Isaiah 12:4

Jesus' birth. Have you ever wondered why Joseph and Mary and the baby were still in Bethlehem? Maybe Joseph was very cautious and wanted to wait until Herod died, or Mary was recuperating and nursing the Baby Jesus and did not feel like traveling.

The kings did visit Jesus and presented their gifts: gold, a symbol of God's divinity; Frankincense, a symbol of holiness and righteousness; Myrrh, symbolizing bitterness, suffering and affliction. All WE need to bring to Jesus today is our willing hearts. We three kings of Orient are bearing gifts we traverse afar. Field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star.

(M) Born a king on Bethlehem's plain. Gold I bring to crown Him again. King forever, ceasing never, over us all to reign.

(C) Frankincense to offer have I. Incense owns a Deity nigh. Prayer and praising, voices raising. Worshiping God on high.

(B) Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume breathes a life OT gathering gloom. Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding dying. Sealed in the stone cold tomb.

Father, I lay my gifts before You. I love and adore You. Amen.

4th Sunday of Advent



December 24, 2017

And he said: "truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." Matthew 18:3

As I'm writing this I'm looking over the lake at Bethelwoods Camp in York, SC. I'm here with 20 of our youth for their annual Presbytery retreat. They are running, hiking, laughing, fishing, canoeing, playing cards, poking ant beds (Hi, Cannon!), talking, helping, sharing, and I'm sure some of them are out of my sight texting. I cannot help but to be filled with joy from all the memories I have at this camp while also watching our youth make their own memories here. My heart and mind are filled with memories from my own teenage years when I attended this same retreat through adulthood serving as a leader for JIPC! Each cabin, picnic table, and rocking chair I see causes me to reminiscences of sitting and talking with friends and youth in those spots; some youth that grown into faithful disciples living lives of service and using their gifts in their everyday lives to help others. The relationships that they build in youth group and on trips are truly gifts from God. Youth group offers a safe place to grow and share. Our

youth offer one another an understanding and peaceful place to learn about the call to be a child of God. We hope they always experience unconditional love and acceptance. And not only do the kids learn from one another, but I learn from these youth every time I'm with them. They share the same acceptance, love, kindness, strengthen, bravery, and forgiveness with me. Having a front row seat in their faith journey is one of the best gifts from God that I have ever received.

Dear Father, thank you for making us your children. Thank you for the love and forgiveness that you have graciously given to us. Please be with us to help us share your love, forgiveness, and grace with everyone. Thank you for the opportunities you give us each day to grow in our faith. Thank you for each person, young and old that you have put in our lives. Help us to show them your love! Amen.

Allison Hubbard





Christmas Day

December 25, 2017

Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest? He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Matthew 22:36-40

I believe that the most important gifts for me was to be born into a loving Christian family. My grandfather, my father and one brother have all been Presbyterian Elders. However, as a boy growing up, I took religion sort of with a grain of salt. I thought that I was a Christian, but I wasn't too sure what that really meant. I tried to be good, but I just had trouble with some things like "Love your enemy" or "Turn the other cheek". Somehow these and other aspects of Christianity just didn't seem very practical in today's world. I thought I understood the Ten Commandments, but what did it really mean to love God? I didn't feel like I really knew Him, how could I love Him?

My parents made us attend Sunday School, and usually church, too. Another important gift was a King James version of the old and new testaments given when I was 10 years old. I carried this with me throughout my freshman year in college, and during my two years in the U.S. Army Air Corps during the Second World War. I tried to read one chapter every night at bed time, and I read all the way through the bible. I still have this testament 81 years later!

After finishing college and beginning Medical School, I got married. Soon we had children. I knew that I wanted my children to be Christians, so I volunteered to teach Sunday School. Gradually I began to understand that the Christian religion is not just a "pie in the sky" thing, but is a very practical way to live NOW, in this world. I began to understand that even though we would encounter some rough times during this life (Look at the lives of the Apostles), God and Christ would help us get through it. I have watched Christians weather terrible happenings, and still maintain a real faith.

Finally I centered on a passage of scripture that has meant so much to me. It has clarified so much of our religious beliefs for me. It is found in Matthew, chapter 22, verses 36 through 40. When Jesus was asked by a lawyer, who was a Pharisee, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

For me this answer, by Jesus himself, makes it so easy to understand what Christianity is all about. It's not just a set of rules that you earn "Brownie Points" for observing — and if you get enough brownie points you get into Heaven. It's a way of life. And it is a way to live the best life possible here on this earth. Not to say we won't have problems, but if we will let it, the Holy Spirit will see us through.

Everlasting Father, thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, who saves us from our sins and for the presence of your Holy Spirit who sustains us through this life. Help us to live our days loving you with all of our hearts and loving our neighbors as ourselves. In Jesus name, Amen.

Walt Ector



James Island Presbyterian Church
1632 Ft. Johnson Road
Charleston, SC 29412
(843) 795-3111
www.jamesislandpc.org
jipc@jamesislandpc.org