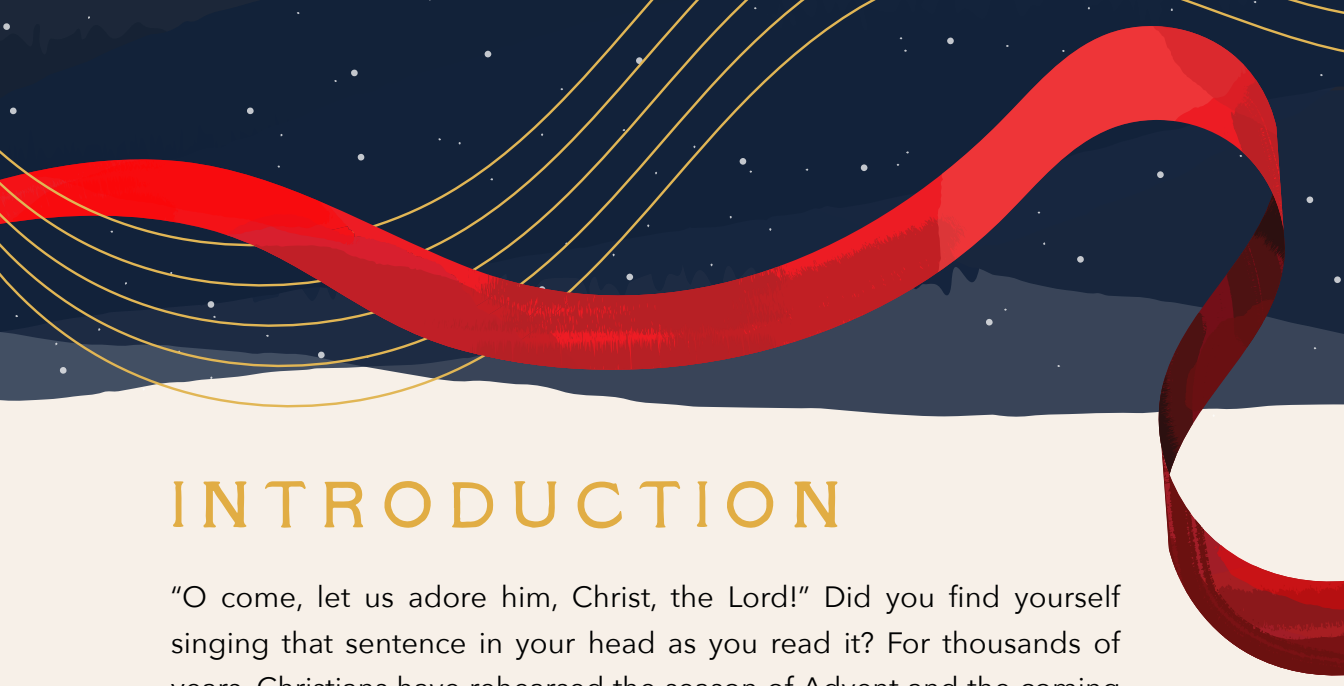
2026 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH


LET HEAVEN AND NATURE SING!





INTRODUCTION

"O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord!" Did you find yourself singing that sentence in your head as you read it? For thousands of years, Christians have rehearsed the season of Advent and the coming of Christ through music and song. For many of us, the great songs of Christmas evoke nostalgic warmth within us as we enter into the "most wonderful time of the year." And while this nostalgia is beautiful, we also ought to be alert to the possibility that our familiarity with the songs of the season can lull us into simply going through the motions of Christmas without pausing to reflect on its implications for our lives and the world.

This Advent season we will be centering our worship around songs in scripture that invite us deeper into the mystery of incarnation. The Bible is full of people who, out of the overflow of their hearts, burst forth into music and lyrics as they experience God's deliverance. Each Sunday we will meditate on some of the most profound songs in Scripture that emerge as the world discovers that its Lord has taken on flesh. Mary, Zechariah, Simeon, and a great company of the heavenly host all have a different song to sing as they discover that God's great plan of salvation weighs a few pounds and lies in a manger.

In addition to meditating on different scripture passages, we will also be reflecting on a selection of Christmas hymns that have shaped Christian communities for generations. You have likely encountered these songs before, and our hope is that in slowing down with their lyrics we might break beyond their warm familiarity to hear the good news of the incarnation with new ears. "Let every heart prepare him room" because he comes again to make all things new.



HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

This devotional is designed to help you slow down with God's word. At the beginning of each day there is a Scripture citation, and we encourage you to begin your devotional time by reading and meditating on the Bible passage assigned. God's word is alive and active, and we believe that God has something to say specifically to you through Scripture. After spending time with God's word, enjoy hearing from congregants at Covenant as they reflect on the passage.

The passages we will be reflecting on this Advent season come from a resource called the lectionary. The lectionary is a Bible reading schedule that much of the global church uses to order its devotional and worship schedules. It is a helpful tool because it offers a variety of readings each day from different parts of the Bible so that Christians gain familiarity with the whole of Scripture. We have asked our writers to reflect on one of the assigned readings, so throughout this season we will be engaging a variety of texts from the Old and New Testament. Enter into the vastness of God's story as we prepare to receive Christ once again.

BEN DAVISON
Associate Pastor for Discipleship



ADVENT EVENTS

KIDS ADVENT WREATH-MAKING EVENT & DINNER

Sunday, November 29

5:00 – 7:00 p.m. | FE200

Register at **covenant.org/wreath**

ADVENT SILENT RETREAT

Saturday, December 5

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. | FE400

Register at **covenant.org/retreat**

POEMS OF INCARNATION CLASS

Sunday, December 6

9:30 a.m. | FE100

KIDS BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR JESUS

Sunday, December 13

9:30 a.m. | FE300

THREADS OF GLORY, CHOIR CONCERT

Sunday, December 13

4:00 p.m. | Eaton Hall

YOUTH CHRISTMAS PARTY

Wednesday, December 16

6:00 – 7:45pm | FE400

YOUNG ADULT CHRISTMAS BRUNCH

Sunday, December 20

12:15 p.m. | FE400

Register at **covenant.org/yabrunch**

WORSHIP SERVICES

HANGING OF THE GREEN

Sunday, November 29

9:30 a.m. | Sanctuary

11:00 a.m. | FE200

LESSONS & CAROLS WORSHIP SERVICES

Sunday, December 20

8:15 a.m. | Eaton Hall

9:30 a.m. | Sanctuary

11:00 a.m. | FE200

CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP SERVICES

Thursday, December 24

2:00 p.m. Traditional Candlelight Service | Sanctuary

4:00 p.m. Children & Family Service | Sanctuary

5:00 p.m. Contemporary Candlelight Service | FE200 & Online

8:30 p.m. Traditional Candlelight Service | Sanctuary & Online

GIVING

TAMALE SALES FOR MANOS DE CRISTO

Order through December 6

Order online at **covenant.org/tamale**

POINSETTIA DONATIONS

Through December 13

Order online at **covenant.org/poinsettia**

CHRISTMAS GIVING TREE

Through December 20

Learn more at **covenant.org/cgt**

COVENANT.ORG/ADVENT

Visit us online to see a full list of Advent activities, initiatives, and resources.



COME, THOU LONG EXPECTED JESUS

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

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

CHARLES WESLEY

THE KING OF GLORY IS COMING

Sunday, November 29 GinnyRae Joy

Hymn: Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Blessed first Sunday of Advent! Prepare your hearts with me as we consider this call-and-response crafted from today's lectionary reading, Psalm 24, and Charles Wesley's beloved hymn, "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus."

Psalm 24: Who is this King of Glory?
Hymn: Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art.
Psalm 24: Who is this King of Glory?
Hymn: Dear Desire of ev'ry nation, joy of ev'ry longing heart.
Psalm 24: Who is this King of Glory?
Psalm 24: The LORD of hosts—our precious Jesus—He is the King of Glory!

What amazing words to begin our Advent season of worship! My prayer is that this call-and-response quickens your heart with anticipation for who is coming! Just as a child waits expectantly for Christmas morning, Wesley's hymn and Psalm 24 invite us to consider with great expectation the King that Israel awaited and the King who ultimately comes.

Charles Wesley wrote today's hymn for his 1744 collection, *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*. Rather than focusing on Bethlehem, shepherds, or the angels, Wesley turns our attention toward Israel's long expectation of the promised Messiah. Together, our Psalm and hymn proclaim the answer to Israel's and every longing heart's desire: Our long-expected Jesus—our King of Glory!

In addition to all of this wonderfulness, today we also light the Hope candle, a very fitting beginning for our Advent journey. Since Psalm 24 and Wesley's hymn both point us toward the ultimate Hope, my prayer is that you and I will be like the gates in our Psalm: that we will "lift up our heads" and open our hearts so **"that the King of glory may come in"** and **"let us find our rest in [him]."**

Prayer

King Jesus, as we worship you expectantly this Advent season, may we remember to place our hope in you—our promised King of Glory, our King come down from Heaven. We are so grateful that, as Emmanuel, you were **"born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King, born to reign in us forever,**" and we pray that **"now thy gracious kingdom bring."** May it be so. Amen.

About the Contributor

GinnyRae has attended Covenant with her family since October 2003. She has participated in Covenant's music programs for 23 years, and she currently serves as an elder. Her favorite Christmas carol is the hymn "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence."

HOPEFUL ANTICIPATION

Monday, November 30

Jennifer Cheatham

Scripture: Psalm 40:1-2, Psalm 67:1-2

Advent is a time for reflection, prayer, and hopeful anticipation. While the world rushes into Christmas busyness, our faith communities ask us to do the opposite: slow down, embrace the quiet, and practice the art of waiting. Waiting can feel hard and counterintuitive. The Psalms show us how this patient waiting transforms into deep worship and moves us to share God's love with everyone around us.

Advent always starts in the dark. Psalm 40 captures this relatable struggle: "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand."

Whether you are waiting for a medical report, a restored relationship, or peace in a chaotic world, sitting in that "pit" can feel isolating and uncertain. Advent reminds us that waiting doesn't require us to be flawlessly prepared or have it all figured out. The baby in the manger is God making himself accessible to everyone, opening his hands to feed our hungry hearts and preparing us for him. Finally, when the light of Christ arrives, it is too big to keep to ourselves. Psalm 67 offers us a powerful blessing: "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations." The Christmas story isn't a private blessing. When God's face shines on us, we are meant to reflect that light into the world.

Prayer

God, when the waiting feels long, help us trust that you hear us. Lift us up when we are bowed down, and stay near when we call out. Let your face shine on us so clearly that we reflect your life-giving love to everyone we meet. Amen.

About the Contributor

Jennifer has been a member of Covenant for six years. She is involved with fifth grade Sunday school, Lamplighters, and is a Formation Cohort leader. My favorite Christmas song is "O Holy Night" because of the beautiful lyrics and the hope Jesus brings through his birth to a weary world.

GOD'S GIFT TO US, HOPE

Tuesday, December 1 Larry Rieber

Scripture: Luke 20:9-18

The characters in the parable Jesus tells are easily identified. The owner of the vineyard is God; the vineyard is Israel; the tenants are the religious leaders; the servants are the prophets and priests sent to Israel; the son is the Messiah, Jesus; and the others are the Gentiles. Quoting Psalm 118:22, Jesus uses the metaphor to relate that he is the cornerstone, the most important stone, the Messiah. He is reflecting that God would bring judgment against those who killed his son, and share his vineyard with others instead. God was doing something new, and it was based on Jesus. Those who didn't accept it wouldn't share in the hope God gives us.

In this season of Christmas, we see Jesus as a newborn baby in a manger, and perhaps we even recognize him as God's Son sent to show us God's presence in our world and our lives. But do we recognize him at other times of the year and in our everyday lives? When he is "sent" to us? Has there ever been a time in your life when you did not recognize the Lord's presence in your life? I have. One of the darkest times of my life was after I graduated from college, having received a full scholarship for my graduate degree in rehabilitation psychology. I felt called to work with the disabled. I was looking forward to a rewarding career helping others. Then I received my draft notice into the Army during the height of the Viet-Nam War. I truly felt that this was not at all what God was calling me to do. I began to lose hope. I was trained as an infantryman, eventually received orders to go to Viet-Nam, and was assigned to a unit in the Mekong Delta. By then, I had lost hope. I felt certain I would be sent home in a wooden box. Though I was confident of my eternal life, I felt I had served God's purpose for me here on Earth, but I did not understand how. I could not see how God had any purpose for me in war! I had lost all hope.

I was wrong! It was not long before guys were looking to me for encouragement. I was asked to repair the field "pump organ" in the camp chapel and play it for all religious services when I was not in the field. The chaplain was so encouraged because service attendance at least doubled, and guys looked forward to worship. There were even some that wanted to spend time with me to learn more about my faith, and God's gift to us in Jesus, hope.

Surprising to me, the Lord used me in different ways I had never thought possible throughout my year in combat. I then recognized the Lord would always give me hope. And he has throughout my life. Certainly, I have had "dark" times in my life, but I have never lost the gift of hope God has given me through Jesus. Jesus is God's gift to me, to all of us, of HOPE!

Prayer

Dear Lord, as we enter Advent we thank you for your gift of hope. Thank you for giving us light in our lives, and reminding us that you are always with us: caring for us, being with us, giving us hope. Thank you for the gift of Jesus. Amen.

About the Contributor

Larry has been a member of Covenant for 28 years. He has served as an elder, deacon, Stephen Minister, and served on different committees. He has worked along with his wife Deb in a number of missions planting and strengthening churches in west central Mexico, sub-Saharan Africa, and Belize. He serves as a facilitator for our Walking the Mourners' Path and Trauma Recovery ministries. Larry's favorite Christmas carol is "O Holy Night!"

THE EXTRAORDINARY COMFORT OF GOD'S POWER

Wednesday, December 2 Elizabeth Christian

Scripture: Psalm 147:1-11

Many of us sit in the sanctuary on Sundays, looking around and feeling like every other person in the room has a better grip on what it means to be a Christian, how it feels to believe wholeheartedly, why questioning certain aspects of our faith seems so… unfaithful.

But consider Psalm 147, verse 5:
"Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;
His understanding is beyond measure."

For me, the most thrilling part of this psalm is the reassurance that God's understanding is beyond measure. In other words, our often-pathetic, halfhearted and unimpressive efforts to be "good Christians" are thoroughly understood by a God whose power we will never fully understand.

Luckily, the Bible gives us guidance that might be instructive. These writings offer us archetypes found in the earliest Christian believers, all of whom came to Jesus in different ways.

Paul's entire being was changed in an instant on the road to Damascus in a blinding leap of faith. He never looked back.

Peter, who went on to be the rock of the Christian church, was frustratingly mercurial in his early attempts to truly believe. He followed Jesus without question when asked, but then he took two steps forward and one step back whenever given the chance, always questioning, often indecisive.

John never seemed to have had an explosive "ah ha" moment because he didn't seem to need one. Once he met Jesus, he was all in—steady, believing, unquestioning. His deep lack of doubt is notable throughout his writing.

I see myself in Peter. Always hoping to be better, silently harboring doubts and fears.

Do recognize yourself in any of these early Christians? If you do, remember that God's understanding is beyond measure. He loves you, with all your thorns and scars and secrets. For me, that's an extremely comforting thought.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, please give me eyes to see, ears to hear and a heart to believe the promise of your steadfast love. Amen.

About the Contributor

Elizabeth Christian has been a member of Covenant since 1994. She has served on the Session, the Foundation board and the Mission Committee. Her favorite Christmas carol is "O Holy Night."

BENT TOWARDS THE MANGER

Thursday, December 3 Owen Schutte

Scripture: Psalm 18

Our rock, our stronghold, our shield, our salvation. This is how the psalmist David describes the Lord in Psalm 18. Because of imagery like this, many were hoping for a mighty king or a powerful warrior who would come and be the messiah that they had been waiting for. Surely the one who was to rescue the people of Israel would come in power, ready to destroy.

However, in the Gospel of Luke we see a different, unexpected picture. Rather than coming powerfully, our Lord came helplessly. Rather than being born into royalty, he was born into poverty. It is in the image of baby Jesus in the manger that we get the first glimpse of God's rescue plan for his people. The first chapter in the book of Colossians tells us that Christ was the "perfect image of the invisible God." This first glimpse of him entering humbly into the human condition gives us an image of God's character and purposes.

But does this contradict Psalm 18's imagery of God? Not at all. Rather, what the incarnation of Jesus teaches us is that the stronghold, shield, and salvation described in Psalm 18 is not found by looking up towards those who are in positions of power in this world. It is Jesus alone who can save, and he is found where we least expect him, down low.

So seek his face. Discover the depths of his grace not by trying to be raised up, but by choosing to be lowered. It is in bending ourselves towards the manger of Christ that we find our true rock, our true stronghold, our true shield, and our true salvation.

So come, let us adore him there.

Prayer

Father, shape us into people who desire you. Mold our hearts and minds into the image of your Son. Fill us with your Holy Spirit as you send us out into the world to do the work that you have given us to do. Amen.

About the Contributor

Owen has been at Covenant since June of this year, when he started as the Director of High School Ministry. He graduated from Baylor in 2025, spent a year in the Washington, D.C. area doing the Capital Fellows Program, and moved to Austin in June. His favorite Christmas carol is "O Holy Night."

CONVICTION & HOPE

Friday, December 4 Jen Kost

Scripture: Psalms 16, 130, 148; Luke 20:41-21:4

On my first pass through today's lectionary readings, I was overwhelmed. And a little disappointed – I had been hoping for something Christmasy. After more prayer and reading, I started to see it: conviction and hope. A world and a people in need of a Savior. A God who is worthy of praise from the entire universe. A God of unfailing love. A God who will himself "redeem his people from all their sins" and "fill us with joy in his presence." A woman going all in on God. A psalmist waiting and longing for God and his salvation.

It's beginning to sound a lot like Christmas…

But I often have a problem with conviction: I tend to think I should be on Santa's "nice" list. When I see myself that way, it's hard to truly agree with Psalm 130:3: "If you, Yahweh, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?" It can be hard (and uncomfortable!) to believe I'm that in need of a Savior.

Other times, my failures, especially in roles I feel called to, strike me to the core, and Psalm 130:3 becomes all too relatable. Thankfully the very next verse continues: "But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you." Even when my sins hurt my loved ones, and even when I fail where I am called to serve, God invites me to him. He offers me forgiveness and continues to call, allow, and enable me to serve him and his purposes.

"With you there is forgiveness." Forgiveness of sins only comes from and with God. Not from curling up into a ball of shame and withdrawing from God, his holiness, and his call. Nor from comforting myself with platitudes – 'I'm only human, we all mess up;' 'on the balance I'm still a good _____;' 'I'm doing the best I can… at least most of the time.' With all that, I'm back to arguing for my place on the "nice" list, denying my own need for a Savior. It is true that my best isn't enough and never will be: I can't put on my big girl pants, pull myself up by my bootstraps, down some caffeine, follow the right advice, and achieve righteousness or perfectly fulfill my call. But God knows that, and he has a plan.

And there it is, in the final verses of Psalm 130: Advent, Christmas, and Easter. Five times in two verses the Psalmist waits for God. Why does he wait with such longing, and exhort Israel to hope in Yahweh? Because "with Yahweh is unfailing love, and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins." Teaching about Jesus, John 1:1 tells us "the Word was with God, and the Word was God." From the beginning, Jesus is the plan: the fullness of Yahweh's unfailing love and full redemption, for each of us who will accept him. Praise Yahweh, the Lord!

Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus. This Christmas we welcome you, who are eternal God, into our hearts again as a newborn baby, in a form we can wrap our arms and love around. Don't let us stop there. Transform us by your power and love. Forgive our sins, redeem our failures, and grant us your righteousness. Humble and empower us to join you in service, doing the Father's work with compassion and diligence and joy, relying on you. Give us grace to be present and loving to those in our lives, even in the midst of busyness and troubles and pain. Grant us love past our limits. You are the path of life – make yourself known to us and teach us to follow you. Fill us and our loved ones with joy in your presence each day, and with eternal pleasures in the fullness of your life to come (Ps. 16:11). Amen.

About the Contributor

Jen joined Covenant in 2002 and has enjoyed Lamplighters and children's Sunday school for years. She is excited about the Sunday morning Parents of Teens class and participating in the Formation Cohort this year. If she had to pick one favorite Christmas carol, today it would be "Mary, Did You Know?".

THE POWER OF COMPASSION

Saturday, December 5 Curtis Page

Scripture: Psalm 72:11-14

"And let all kings bow down before him; All nations serve him.

For he will deliver the needy when he cries for help. The afflicted also, and him who has no helper.

He will have compassion on the poor and needy. And the lives of the needy he will save.

He will rescue their life from oppression and violence; and their blood will be precious in his sight."

Psalm 72 may have been written for Solomon, but its vision reaches far beyond him. It points us to Jesus, the King who brings justice, peace, and blessing to the whole world. These verses are a reminder of the power of compassion and justice in our world. This challenges me to be aware of what it looks like to be a true leader and how that connects with the compassionate care of the most vulnerable people in our society. As Christ followers we are called to actively practice these values in our lives and share with others. Our world is hungry for compassion, love, and justice.

As we anticipate celebrating the birth of Jesus, we realize he is our greatest gift. He pours out on us his love, compassion, grace, peace, and forgiveness.

Prayer

Precious Jesus, fill our hearts with your love and compassion. Open our eyes to see opportunities to serve others while sharing the Gospel by our actions. Amen.

About the Contributor

Curtis and his wife Shelley have been members of Covenant since 2018. They are blessed with three children and their spouses, five grandchildren with number six on the way, all who live in Austin. They spend as much time as possible with their grandchildren and lead together a Community Bible Study group. Curtis' favorite Christmas carol is "O Holy Night."

THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

J. M. NEALE

WAITING EXPECTANTLY OR JUST WAITING?

Sunday, December 6 Chuck Garcia

Hymn: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

The Thai people have a common saying: "Chat Nah Dawn Bye Bye – In the late afternoon of my next life." It comes from an attitude that what is happening now isn't too significant – there's always another chance in this life, the next, or the one after that.

For a brief time all three of our children lived in Austin. At one point our youngest, Katie, took a severance package offered by her current employer thinking that finding a new job would be easy. Unfortunately, 2023 was a year of mass layoffs and the few companies hiring were not rushing to fill positions. Months passed. She kept applying and doing interviews. Time dragged by - how long was this going to take?

Then one company she liked called her back to say, "you're a great candidate, but we've decided to hire a person with more back-end experience." More disappointment.

Katie replied, "I understand. You wouldn't, by chance, have openings in other offices?"

"Well, we do have an opening in Dublin, but you wouldn't..." "Oh yes I would!"

She got the job and moved to Ireland three years ago.

I'm sure that you have experienced something similar. You hit a bump in the road and end up waiting and waiting for things to get back to normal or for a new opportunity to present itself.

The first line of today's featured carol, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel," addresses a recurring theme for Israel. Exile and enslavement. Egypt, Assyria, and finally Babylon. Immediately praying for rescue. But as years pass, hope of quick release fades.

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," its minor key coloring the longing with somberness. A hope almost extinguished, barely hanging on.

Let's spend this week reflecting. Do not the suffering and injustice on the world stage and across town bother you? Let's focus on those denied peace. Let's beat our chests, join their struggle, and cry out to the suffering Savior to ransom captive people - never surrendering the Christmas promise: "Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come!" Selah (Ps. 46:1-3)

Prayer

Father. You care so much more than I do. You ache over what's happening in your world. Remind me that it is my world too. Remind me that those around me are my brothers and sisters in Christ, made in your image. Fill my heart with your love: love that yearns for rescue for those suffering, love that clings to the hope that Emmanuel is coming and in his coming will bring peace. Amen.

About the Contributor

Chuck retired in 2015 after spending 30 years as a missionary in Thailand. He and Jennie joined Covenant in the fall of 2022 and the Sanctuary Choir soon afterwards. During the week he stays busy chauffeuring their awesome grandchildren, doing handyman things, and spoiling two dogs. If you call from April to October, he'll get back to you after baseball season.

TARRY LESS

Monday, December 7 Emily Ewing

Scripture: Isaiah 5:8–17

"Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them! They have lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts, but they do not regard the deeds of the Lord, or see the work of his hands."

How prone we are to tarry – especially during Christmastime. Finding the perfect gifts by self-imposed deadlines, crossing meticulously planned Advent activities off our list, devoting late-nights to decorating, planning parties, booking babysitters, buying teacher gifts, and pinning recipes –"Just one more magical activity with my children will give me that sense of holiday completeness," I find myself thinking. Inherently "bad" things? Of course not. But all things that can distance us from "the deeds of the Lord" and "the work of his hands" in a season offering this reflection to us so beautifully, so simply.

John Mark Comer says it poignantly: "The volume of the modern world is deadening our souls. We need to de-noise our lives and follow Jesus into the quiet." In a world full of so much noise and so much to do at Christmastime, we follow a Jesus who invites us to simply be with him. And further, Jesus doesn't want to be with the presentable, outward-facing version of ourselves, but rather longs to meet us in the full range of our humanness – our real needs, negative emotions, unmet expectations, hard relationships, and various griefs that all have a way of magnifying with the heightened expectations of the season. This is where his promise and the magic of the season lies – that Christ simply came to be with us in all of it.

Prayer

"O come, O Bright and Morning Star,
and bring us comfort from afar!
Dispel the shadows of the night
and turn our darkness into light."
Amen.

About the Contributor

Emily Ewing, her husband Zack, and their four children have attended Covenant since 2024. They enjoy traveling and learning as a family. Emily's favorite Christmas carol is "Angels We Have Heard on High."

PRAISE THE LORD

Tuesday, December 8 Glenn Dukes

Scripture: Psalm 146

In "The Sabbath," Abraham Joshua Heschel warns that modern life traps us in a "tyranny of things of space" where we frantically try to control earthly outcomes while our souls starve. After the anxiety and exhausting messaging of election season, Psalm 146 similarly reminds us: "Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save." Instead, we are to "Praise the Lord" who remains faithful forever. This recurring refrain of Psalm 146 beckons us to shift our perspective from the frantic pace of chronos time into God's eternal kairos. This is the sacred work of both the Sabbath and Advent. We trade the relentless race for temporal power for what Heschel calls "a palace built in time."

Heschel explains that "there are two points of view from which time can be sensed: from the point of view of space and from the point of view of spirit. Looking out of the window of a swiftly moving railroad car, we have the impression that the landscape is moving while we ourselves are sitting still. Similarly, when gazing at reality while our souls are carried away by spatial things, time appears to be in constant motion. However, when we learn to understand that it is the spatial things that are constantly running out, we realize that time is that which never expires, that it is the world of space which is rolling through the infinite expansion of time."

Psalm 146 compels us to "Praise the Lord." The Lord is the Maker of heaven and earth who stepped out of eternity into a stable at Christmas, bypassing earthly palaces to redefine authority through a towel, a cross, and an empty tomb at Easter. Immanuel is "the Lord (who) reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations."

Praise the Lord!

Prayer

Lord, in Advent, you invite us into the quiet, defiant rhythm of Sabbath trust. We lay down our anxieties, anchor our hope in your justice, and prepare for your coming. Bless us with your Holy Spirit as we shift our perspective from space to eternity. Amen.

About the Contributor

Glenn has been a member of Covenant since 2024. He is married to Rev. Dr. Britta Dukes and they have two adult children, Caleb and Atalie. Glenn is active in Bible studies and is mission-minded, serving on the board of directors for both Manos de Cristo and Faith Ministry. He was ordained as an elder in 2014.

THE STONES WE CARRY

Wednesday, December 9 Whitney Bell

Scripture: John 7:53–8:11

Each time I read this familiar passage, I imagine myself as an onlooker, quietly rooting for the woman. Sometimes, I even imagine myself as the woman herself, standing before Jesus in desperate need of mercy.

But if I'm being honest, the characters I most often resemble are the Pharisees—the ones who drag a sinner before Jesus and demand judgment.

It's easy for us to criticize the Pharisees in this story. After all, we know how it ends. We know Jesus will respond with mercy. We know the woman will receive grace. But the Pharisees didn't see themselves as villains. They believed they were right. They believed their judgment was justified.

And then Jesus comes along and disrupts everything.

Isn't that just like Jesus?

Again and again, Jesus responds in ways that challenge our carefully constructed ideas of how God should act. We want things to be black and white. Right and wrong. Good and evil. We want clear categories for who deserves grace and who deserves judgment.

And then Jesus kneels in the dirt, and suddenly our categories begin to crumble.

I recognize this tendency in myself. It's easy to extend compassion to the woman in this story. But what about those whose actions I find reprehensible? Those whose sins seem so obvious, whose choices seem so wrong? Am I as eager to extend grace to them?
The uncomfortable truth is that sometimes I find myself standing alongside the Pharisees, stone in hand, convinced of my own righteousness.

Yet Jesus calls us to something different. We are not called to be the gatekeepers of grace, deciding who deserves it and who does not. We are called to be people who extend the very grace we have received.

Judgment belongs to God. Justice belongs to God. My work is to reflect the mercy of Christ, trusting that God's justice and grace are far greater than my own understanding.

And isn't this the beautiful disruption of Advent? We await a Savior who comes not as the powerful king the world expected, but as a vulnerable child. A God who continually defies our expectations, choosing humility over power, mercy over condemnation, and grace beyond anything we could imagine.

So this Advent, perhaps the invitation is simple: Put down the stone. Open your hands. And make room for grace.

Pr
ayer

Gracious God, forgive us for the times we are quick to judge and slow to extend grace. Help us to lay down the stones we carry and remember the mercy we have so freely received. This Advent, open our hearts to the unexpected ways you enter our world, disrupting our assumptions and inviting us to reflect your love. May we be people who extend grace as generously as you have given it to us. Amen.

About the Contributor

Whitney Bell serves as the Director of Mission here at Covenant and has been on staff since 2012. She is married to her husband Andrew and they have two kids, Calvin (9) and Lucy (6). They recently got a puppy and are working to find grace with her! Her favorite Christmas carol is “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus.”

Thursday, December 10

Henry & Ann Seals

Scripture: Psalm 62

Our lives on earth can be truly hard. We hear and read stories every day across social media and the news, but it is the struggles of our friends, loved ones, and even our own lives that really hit home. What difficulties are you facing now?

This psalm of David begins with the assurance that God will be with us no matter what we are facing in our lives. We learn from David that God is our rock and our salvation. In him we can finally have rest. Isn't this a comforting thought?

Back in 2008, our family faced one of the most difficult episodes of our lives. Hurricane Ike brought high winds and devastating floodwaters to our community. Our office supply and furniture business flooded. We suffered major damage and financial loss, as did the entire area. Our church family stepped in and overwhelmed us with their love, support, and labor. Because of their ministry to us, we were able to, in turn, help others regain their livelihoods as well. What a blessing! God provided us with everything we needed in a time of great uncertainty and stress.

God's charge to us is to trust in him at all times, both good and bad, for God has infinite power and love.

So ultimately, God is our refuge and our strength. With our fleeting lives, isn't it best to truly trust in the God who is our rock and our salvation?

Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to cultivate a sense of gratitude for the fact that we are loved by you. You are truly our rock in difficult times. Amen.

About the Contributor

Henry and Ann Seals, along with their son Bobby's family, have been members of Covenant for almost ten years. Henry serves as a deacon and group leader for Men in the Word. He is a volunteer with Manos de Cristo ESL program, Seton Hospital, and Meals on Wheels. Ann volunteers with the church Cancer Care Group, and provides a soup ministry to those needing a helping hand during difficult times. She serves on the Texas Exes Scholarship Advisory Board and mentors scholars in the Forty Acres Scholarship Program there. Ann and Henry love to travel and have visited all seven continents. Their favorite Christmas carols are "O Come, All Ye Faithful" and "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day."

FROM DARKNESS TO CHRISTMAS LIGHT

Friday, December 11 Kaitlyn Hartley

Scripture: Psalm 130

One of my favorite parts of the holiday season are Christmas lights! From classic white to rainbow icicles, I am always in awe of their twinkle and sparkle.

Coming home after a long day, as I round the corner onto my street, those lights are my beacon home and I'm flooded with feelings of happiness, safety and comfort.

Christmas lights bring people together. It is part of my holiday tradition to go look at the exhibits around Austin, making it a whole evening with family or friends. It's truly a wondrous display of community when the whole cul-de-sac commits to Clark Griswolding their homes for others to enjoy.

The winter months can be dark and lonely for many people. The days are short and the nights are long. Towards the end of the year we tend to reflect on all we have accomplished and dwell on where we fell short which can bring forth feelings of despair, guilt, and regret.

Light is cleansing. It drives away the darkness. It shows us the way.

Psalm 130 is a lament to God to bring us out of the depths and into his mercy. It's a reminder that his unending forgiveness provides a safe harbor for reverential service to him.

Light is a consistent theme in the Christmas story. An angel of light came to the shepherds to tell of the newborn Savior, a heavenly host sang his praise and peace on earth, and three wise men followed a star to a manger. They all came together to put their hope in the ultimate representative of God's unfailing love and redemption.

As we count down the days until the birth of the Light of the World, I am reminded that there is a deeper meaning to Christmas lights and why I look forward to them with my whole being every single year. This year I hope you view them in a whole new light!

Prayer

Father God, I praise you as the Light of the World. Thank you for your unfailing love and redemption, offering forgiveness when I fall short time and time again. Bring me out of the depths and into your mercy. Fill my whole being with anticipation of your heavenly kingdom and light my path towards your promised hope. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

About the Contributor

Kaitlyn has been a member of Covenant since May 2025. She leads Sunday School at 11 a.m., co-leads Sunday Singles, and is a member of Lunch Bunch and the Women's Wednesday Night small group. Kaitlyn's favorite Christmas carol is the Dolly Parton rendition of "We Three Kings."

THE GIFT OF BEING PRESENT

Saturday, December 12 Gray Luckett

Scripture: Psalm 90, Isaiah 8:13 and 2 Thessalonians 3:13

So much of our attention is spent somewhere other than where we are. We worry about tomorrow, replay yesterday, or mentally move on to the next thing while someone is talking to us. In the process, we can miss the people right in front of us and the opportunities we have to connect with them.

Psalm 90:12 asks God to teach us to number our days so that we may gain wisdom. Perhaps part of that wisdom is learning to be fully present, recognizing the people God places in our lives and the opportunities we have to encourage and care for one another.

In Isaiah 8:13, God's people are reminded to put their trust in the Lord rather than be ruled by fear. We don't have to have tomorrow figured out to live faithfully today. Sometimes that means setting aside our worries long enough to truly listen to someone else.

Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 3:13, "Be not weary in well doing." Doing good can be as simple as asking someone a question and genuinely wanting to hear the answer. It means moving beyond small talk to understand what someone is experiencing, what brings them joy, or what weighs on their heart. When we listen, we remind others that they are seen, valued, and not alone.

Meaningful relationships require more than a willingness to listen. They require a willingness to be known. It's one thing to ask someone how they're doing. It's another to answer honestly when someone asks us the same question. We need one another not only to offer encouragement, but also to receive it.

Who in your life could use a deeper conversation, and what might change if you let someone get to know you better, too? This week, move beyond small talk. Listen, share something real, and make space to pray for one another. God often works through the simple act of showing up for each other.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us release our worries about tomorrow and be attentive to the opportunities you place before us today. Give us open hearts to receive others, a willingness to share honestly, and the wisdom to recognize your presence in our lives together. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

About the Contributor

Gray has been part of Covenant for more than 15 years and currently serves as an elder, sits on the Youth Committee, and volunteers with the middle school boys on Sunday mornings. His favorite Christmas carol is "O Holy Night."

THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL

O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him
Born the King of Angels:

Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
Born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory given!
Word of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing!

Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of Heaven above!
Glory to God
In the highest:

O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

JOHN FRANCIS WADE

COME ONE, COME ALL

Sunday, December 13 Ruth Cook

Hymn: O Come, All Ye Faithful

The hymn "O Come, All Ye Faithful" is an invitation into Jesus' birth, into Bethlehem, and into the wonder and awe of the newborn King. There is no RSVP needed. There is no limitation on who can come, and there are no requirements to meet. The hymn's invitation is simple and unconditional.

"O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant…O come ye to Bethlehem."

Does it say "Only the faithful, joyful, and triumphant can come"?? I don't think so! I think that it beckons us ALL to come; to see the newborn King, and therefore BECOME faithful, joyful, and triumphant!

In the gospel writings, Jesus does NOT say:

"Come to me when you've mastered loving your neighbor."

"Come to me when you feel like you deserve my love."

"Come to me when there is no longer sin in your life."

Jesus' invitation is instead:

"Come when you're weary."
"Come when you're broken."
"Come when you're doubting."

Jesus' invitation is indeed "Come when you feel anything BUT joyful and triumphant."

The angels appeared to the shepherds - ordinary men who were dirty, weary, not fit to meet a King! Yet, they were the first to receive God's invitation to come and see the newborn Savior.

And God is calling you too.

The manger is not a place for people who have it all together. It is a place for the weary, the hurting, and for those hopeful to see the change Jesus brings. This is at the very heart of the Christmas Advent season: a Savior who says, "Come."

Prayer

Lord God, draw us toward Bethlehem's stable and the newborn King. Open our eyes to see the star and our hearts to hear the angels' song. Keep our hearts focused on the hope of Christmas and the promises of our Savior. Be the focus of our lives this Advent, and let our joyful and triumphant praise be yours. Amen.

About the Contributor

Ruth has been a member at Covenant since 1985. She is most recognizable singing in the choir loft. She has also served in Children and Youth Ministry, and more recently began serving both as an elder and on the Covenant Foundation. Ruth and her husband Roy are retired and enjoy spending time with seven (soon to be eight) geographically scattered grandchildren.

EVERYTHING WE NEED

Monday, December 14 Isabelle Berry

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:1-11

As Peter reminds us in his second letter, we have all been called to Christian life by God. If you're reading this – it seems that you've answered that call today! We have been called, or elected, by receiving the gift of faith from God. It can be easy to forget, in living day-to-day in a modern world, that faith is a gift to be supported and grown. There are so many distractions in real life and in technology. The season of Advent can be so busy that we allow ourselves to lose sight of the many gifts we have received and what we are preparing for. Peter tells us we have been given "everything needed for life and godliness." In some Bibles, this is translated as "everything that's important to live a God-centered life." To me, this serves as a reminder that we have been given the capacity to take moments, even in the busiest seasons of life, to spend time in solitude with God. It can certainly be difficult to find these moments, especially during the holiday season, but good news! Peter tells us that we have everything we need from God to answer the call.

We have the gifts of faith, grace, and peace in knowing God is with us. These gifts will allow us to follow Jesus wherever we are. Peter advises us to make every effort to support our faith to keep us from stumbling. We are called not only to have faith, but to be stewards of the gift of faith. By doing what we can to guard and grow our faith in daily practice, we demonstrate how grateful we are to God. God who has called each of us by name, who gifted us faith, who has given us everything we need.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to not only give thanks for our faith, but to intentionally support our faith through practice. We ask that you guide us through every season of life, as some seasons make it easy to sustain and grow our faith, while others challenge our ability to consistently answer the call to Christian life. We thank you for the peace and grace provided to us by Jesus Christ, whom we prepare to celebrate this Advent season. Help us to follow you wherever we are. Amen.

About the Contributor

Isabelle has been at Covenant for about three years (except for the eight months she lived in Spain, which she loves to talk about). She is a member of a young adult small group and serves on the Institute for Missional Foundation Committee. She has called Austin home for about four years, working as a pediatric speech language pathologist. In her free time, she enjoys being outside in nature, doing crafts, reading, and discovering new songs to try at karaoke. Her favorite Christmas carol is "The First Noel."

BELIEVE!

Tuesday, December 15 Gaines Bagby

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6

"For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

What a blessing to know that God has our collective backs! Adam messed up. And we mess up. But God sent his only son to save us from ALL our sins. All we have to do is BELIEVE. Romans 10:9-10.

Jesus is here for us each and every day. His gift to us is not only an eternal one, but a comfort for us while we are here dealing with all this mess! Whether we are dealing with kids or parents or work or politics or our own internal struggles, he is here to comfort us through his Spirit.

Jesus was a person, just like you and me. So he understands the human condition. But he is also God, so he bridges both worlds for us, and advocates for us with the Father.

This Advent season, as we listen to the wonderful Christmas music, let us always keep in mind the reason for the season - our Lord Jesus Christ, and his compassion for EACH of us.

Prayer

My prayer for you in this Season is that you focus on listening to the still, small (yet hugely powerful!) voice of the Spirit directing you back to the WORD, who became flesh and lived among us. May we all come to know him better through prayer and through visiting with fellow believers during this special time of celebration of all God has done for US! Amen.

About the Contributor

Gaines came to Covenant in 1970. He is currently blessed to be serving as an elder and as chair of the Congregational Nominating Committee. He has served as chair of the Youth Committee, the Discipleship Committee, and as a Trustee. He sings in the Sanctuary Choir and in Grace Notes. He and his wife, Leslie, met in the Choir, and raised their three children at Covenant. My favorite Christmas work is Handel's "Messiah," the first part of which was written in a divinely-inspired week in 1742. After singing this piece for many years, the words of Isaiah still leap off the page into the heart every time it is read or sung.

RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME

Wednesday, December 16 Mattie Hildebrand

Scripture: Mark 1:1-11

I wonder if John stood in the Jordan ready to baptize Jesus thinking, "Oh my gosh, this is it!" Here HE is right in front of me waiting for me to baptize HIM! Was he, like Mary all those years before, filled with awe and anticipation? Maybe, in his months in the desert, he'd been caught up in the doing of everything... the preaching, the preparing the way and then... there stood Jesus.

I am reminded of our first Christmas in the Middle East in 2007. We did not have the usual reminders surrounding us that Christmas was coming. Christmas carols were not playing in every mall. Nativity scenes did not decorate front yards. There were no lights on the houses or trees visible in the windows. Those of us who celebrated Christmas found ourselves sharing Christmas "sightings." There might be a Christmas tree in a hotel lobby, or a gingerbread house decorating event offered in another hotel. We arranged cookie parties and blasted Christmas carols in our own homes. Most of the dads worked on December 25th, so Christmas dinner was a big meet-up at Chili's. Even though we were purposeful with our holiday planning, it was hard to see Jesus.

That first Christmas Eve I stood at our third floor apartment living room window seeking Jesus. Our Christmas tree reflected in the glass in front of me and behind me the sounds of Trans-Siberian Orchestra's "Christmas Canon" played.

"Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas (the joy that he brings)
This night we pray
Our lives will show
This dream he had
Each child still knows…
On this night, this Merry Christmas night…"

Over and over again the song played and, as the music washed over me, I knew.

My heart filled with anticipation and wonder. Jesus was there with me. As he had always been. Despite all the traditions I was missing, the homesickness that filled me, and the busy-ness that consumed me, Jesus was there. Right in front of me.

Prayer

Jesus, no matter where we are or what we are doing please remind us that you are right here with us. We pray that we will see you and that others will see you in us. Amen.

About the Contributor

Mattie and Mike lived in the Middle East for 10 years before returning to Texas in 2017. They serve as small group leaders and have been at Covenant for almost three years. Her favorite Christmas song is "The Christmas Canon" by Trans-Siberian Orchestra.

HE WILL SEE US THROUGH

Thursday, December 17 Kirk Ashy

Scripture: Psalm 18:1-20

Have you ever found yourself overwhelmed? Of course! We all have at one time or another. The holiday season is great but it can also bring stress and challenges. These might be day to day struggles with work, family issues, or a combination of both. It can also be things more serious in nature… illnesses, accidents, injuries, a loved one going through tough times. Outcomes can be uncertain, or bleak, or worse. Life can become untenable.

Psalm 18:4-5 reads, "the cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me."

Have you ever been in a place where things were hopeless, when you were losing your battle? When we are at our most vulnerable, our most exposed, the following passage is a great reminder to look towards God and trust in him.

Psalm 18:16-17: "He sent from on high, He took me; He drew me out of many waters. He rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me."

I remember (when I was very young) hearing for the first time, "God never gives us more than we can handle." That is easy to say, but when going through the absolute worst of times, are we able to get there? Are we able to trust in him inherently and have faith? Are we able to ask of his help and accept the help he offers us?

In my experience, the path is to have the faith and trust to ask God for his help and love, and God will see us through.

Psalm 18:18-19: "they confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support. He brought me out into a broad place; he rescued me, because he delighted in me."

The passage concludes as powerfully as it opens and gives us a positive message of triumph and love. And as a friend once told me, "In the end, everything is going to be okay. And… if things aren't okay… it's not the end."

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift that is today. Thank you for all of our blessings and help my awareness of your presence in my life and the lives of others. Amen.

About the Contributor

The Ashys joined Covenant in 2023. Kirk's wife, Kristin, is one of the many talented vocalists in the band for the contemporary service. They have two children; Thomas, a senior at Anderson High School and Olivia, a recent graduate of Tulane University. Kirk's favorite Christmas carol is "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing" (with possible exception of when Kristin sang "Silent Night" at the Christmas Eve candlelight service).

Friday, December 18

Alyssa & Michael Heckmann

Scripture: Psalm 102

For some, this season arrives with childlike joy and excitement. For others, it stirs complicated emotions–gratitude and joy alongside longing, frustration, or grief. Where do we go with feelings that don't fit the season's script?

God meets us exactly where we are. In Psalm 102, the writer opens with a desperate cry for a listening ear. Even though no resolution is described, the psalmist begins to turn toward God's enduring nature. Alongside the distress, the writer expresses trust in a sovereign God who hears.

In Pixar's *Inside Out*, 12-year-old Riley struggles to cope with missing her old home after a move. When she finally shares her frustrations and sadness with her parents, they listen without fixing it and pull her close. She feels held. The situation hasn't changed, but joy begins to mix in with her sadness. We've experienced this in our own relationships. Sometimes we hesitate to share what we're really feeling, only to find that honest conversations become moments of closeness and acceptance.

We don't have to filter out the messy parts or turn them into a performance with God either. God already knows what's on our hearts and still draws close like a loving parent. The God who laid the earth's foundations is the same one who hears our raw emotions. In that kind of relationship, anger, disappointment, and questions can be spoken aloud.

What would it look like for you to come to God with whatever you're carrying today, to share what's messy or unresolved, and to rest in the presence of the one who is both sovereign over all and intimately close? How might trusting that God is big enough to hold your honest feelings make room for hope, or even praise?

Prayer

Lord, you remain forever. The picture of perfect love, your love and care for us never run out. Thank you for turning toward us in kindness when we are hurting and meeting us exactly where we are. Illuminate to us the barriers that keep us from bringing our authentic selves to you. Help us to trust in your strength to hold all the complexities of our human condition. Lift us up and sustain us when we feel weak and worn down. Amen.

About the Contributor

Michael and Alyssa have been part of the Covenant community for about two years and were quickly connected with the young adult ministry, where Alyssa now serves as a co-leader for their small group. On Sunday mornings, you can find them on the 4th floor serving in the middle school ministry, by the coffee station in the foyer, or sitting in the 11am service with their small group. Christmas songs they are excited to hear on repeat are "Last Christmas" (Michael) and "All I Want for Christmas is You" (Alyssa).

"JOY TO THE WORLD!"

Saturday, December 19

Tammy Linn Dawe

Scripture: Psalms 80 & 90

I recently discovered that Isaac Watts's much-loved "Joy to the World" that we sing at Christmas was not actually focused on Christ's birth, but on his second coming. As I reflected on the lectionary texts for this day, I realized that several verses from Psalms 80 and 90 spoke of our Savior who was to come, who has come, and who will come again.

Joy to the world! The Lord is come

"You who sit enthroned between cherubim, shine forth." (80:1b) "Awaken your might, come and save us." (80:2b)

Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!

"Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself." (80:14b-15) "Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand." (80:17a) "Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name." (80:18)

No more let sins and sorrows grow

"Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved." (80:3)

He rules the world with truth and grace

"Have compassion on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble. May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children." (90:13b-16)

As we wait to celebrate Jesus's arrival on Christmas Day, may we also be inspired by Isaac Watts's hymn to anticipate Christ's eventual return and the "wonders of his love."

Prayer

Gracious God, as we prepare our hearts to celebrate our Savior's birth, may we hold fast with joy to the One who was and is and is to come. Amen.

About the Contributor

Tammy Linn Dawe has been a member of Covenant since 2003 where she enjoys sharing her violin music during worship, participating in the Cuba ministry, and serving as a small group leader and as a deacon. "Joy to the World" is especially dear to her heart as her mom traditionally concluded Christmas Eve services with a rousing organ arrangement of the hymn at her small mountain church in Leadville, Colorado.



HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth,
born to give us second birth.

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King"

CHARLES WESLEY

HARK! VERSE THREE

Sunday, December 20 Ken Moore

Hymn: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Shortly after Easter is over, Michael will remind the Sanctuary choir that it is only a few short months until Christmas. The Sanctuary choir is always ready for Christmas. After all, we have two Carols, two Sheppards, Joy, Don (we know…), and last but not least, Hark! The Herald (Harold).

In Charles Wesley's carol, he first proclaims the newborn King, then exalts the everlasting Lord, then rejoices in the hope we have in the Prince of Peace. His biblical source for the third verse is Malachi 4:2: "But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings." A short dive down the etymological rabbit hole reveals that the Hebrew word for "wings" can be translated as literal bird wings or the corners or fringes of a prayer shawl. We can see the healing in the "tzitzit," wings, fringes of Jesus' garment in Matthew 9:20 when a woman only needs to touch the cloak of Jesus to be healed.

How many of us wish, hope, pray, long for healing especially in the season of Advent; physical, emotional, relational, spiritual healing. What if we could pray for healing not just for ourselves and our loved ones, but also for those we dislike, who are different from us, with whom we disagree, assuming that they are the ones who need to be healed? Healing can come in the space between; between us and each other, between us and God. God is always yearning to narrow those gaps; constantly coming towards us; constantly reaching out. God and sinners reconciled.

Prayer

Heavenly Lord: Glory to you the newborn King, the everlasting Lord, the Prince of Peace. We need your healing in our lives and hearts. In your life, death and resurrection, you are Emmanuel, God with us. Bring your healing to us and show us how to bring your healing to a broken and hungry world. In your loving name we pray. Amen.

About the Contributor

Ken and his wife, Robin, have been at Covenant since the mid-nineties. Ken currently serves as a deacon, deacon small group leader, member of the Sanctuary Choir, member of the Worship Committee, as a long-time participant in Men in the Word, part of the Wrecking Crew, and an usher for Memorial services. His favorite Christmas carol is the Picardy carol, "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence."

WHEN GOD INTERRUPTS OUR PLANS

Monday, December 21 Dan Martin

Scripture: Luke 1:26–38

Mary's life changed with a conversation she never expected. She was a young woman living an ordinary life when the angel Gabriel appeared with an extraordinary message: God had chosen her to give birth to his Son. Mary was confused, troubled, and had questions. Her response was not one of immediate understanding. Yet, after hearing the angel's explanation, Mary said: "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."

Mary didn't have all the answers. She didn't know how everything would work out. She couldn't see the road ahead or understand all that would be required of her. But she knew who was asking her to trust.

That is often where faith begins. We sometimes think trusting God means having confidence because we understand what he is doing. But biblical faith often means moving forward without understanding everything. God may lead us into something that doesn't fit our plans, our timing, or even our expectations.

Mary's example reminds us that obedience doesn't require complete understanding. It requires a willingness to say, "Yes, Lord." Notice also what Gabriel told Mary: "For no word from God will ever fail."

God's plans are not dependent upon our ability to see the entire picture. He asks us to trust his character when the circumstances are uncertain. What seems impossible to us is not impossible for God. Perhaps there is something in your life today that you don't understand—a change you didn't expect, a door that hasn't opened, a challenge you didn't choose, or a direction that feels uncertain. Mary's response gives us a simple pattern for those moments: Listen. Trust. Obey.

We don't need to know every detail of God's plan before taking the next step. We need to trust the One who knows the plan. Mary's "yes" changed her life—and ultimately became part of God's plan to change the world. Our acts of faith may not seem nearly as significant. But God can use an ordinary person's willingness to trust him in extraordinary ways.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help me to trust you when I don't understand what you are doing. Give me the faith to follow you even when the path ahead is unclear. Like Mary, help me to be willing to say, "I am your servant. May your word to me be fulfilled." Give me courage to release my plans, trust your timing, and follow where you lead. Thank you that nothing is impossible with you and that your promises never fail. Amen.

About the Contributor

Dan and his wife Cindy joined Covenant in 2020 during COVID, via Zoom meetings. They find it rewarding to work as a team and have done so as deacons from 2022-2025, been small group leaders and were honored to be Marriage Connection mentors. Dan is currently serving as an usher and for interest designs/builds custom furniture and is a serial do-it-yourselfer. His favorite Christmas carol is "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear."

Tuesday, December 22 Angela Bitzer

Scripture: Psalm 146

In Eugene Peterson's translation of the Bible, The Message, he notes that "Psalm 146 is the first of a cluster of five concluding psalms in the Psalter." In his translation Psalm 146 reads, "God made sky and soil." That gives me comfort to know that God made everything and knows every part of each beloved creature he made, including me. I feel deeply loved that God knows me intimately down to every hair on my head.

I work in human resources for a company with 200 employees. One day I was in our lobby, and I said hello to an employee, calling them by name. This employee looked at me with the biggest smile and said, "I can't believe you know my name." I was so shocked they thought I wouldn't know their name. I said, "Of course I know your name, you are what makes our company great." I think of that moment often when I feel defeated, alone, ashamed, and I remember how God knows me and everything I've gone through, am going through, or will go through.

Mr. Peterson writes, "The book of Psalms reflects in prayer every mood that the human soul passes through: joy and sorrow, faith and doubt, hope and despair, love and hate, security and anxiety." The end of Psalm 146 reads, "God made sky and soil, sea and all the fish in it. He always does what he says." God created earth and everything in it. He said a savior would come to the world to save it. He sent his only begotten son in the form of a baby to do just that. God is in charge, always, and that gives me the peace that passes all understanding.

Prayer

Father, I come before you with a grateful heart, echoing the words of Psalm 146:2, "All my life long I'll praise God." Thank you for your unwavering love and faithfulness. In times of trouble, remind me to place my trust in you, for you are my hope. Help me to lift others up as you have lifted me, sharing your grace with those in need. May my life be a continuous song of praise to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

About the Contributor

Angela has been attending Covenant since 2010, and a member since 2020. She currently leads a small group who has been gathering since 2021. Her favorite Christmas carol is "Go, Tell It on the Mountain."

Wednesday, December 23 Nelson Mann

Scripture: Luke 1:57-66

The waiting is the hardest part, especially during Advent.

Unfortunately, many of us get trapped with the busyness of trying to get everything done and lose focus on the reason for the season. Elizabeth and Zechariah experienced the fulfillment of God's promises by waiting so long to conceive and deliver John the Baptist. The birth of John came after many years of waiting and Christmas reminds us that God's timing is purposeful, even when we must wait. They were also obedient in naming him John, which means "The Lord is Gracious" instead of following family tradition.

Growing up as a PK (Preacher's Kid) I remember when our youth group was going to perform the Christian musical Godspell. I was disappointed that my younger brother was chosen to play Jesus and I had to settle for John the Baptist. However, God knew best and the opening song of the musical is “Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord” sung by John. I still remember how I felt singing that powerful solo and remembering God's plan is always best.

The birth of John transformed a season of disappointment and waiting into celebration and joy. Those who were around when he was born were able to recognize that God's hand was at work. John's birth was part of God's larger plan to prepare the way for Jesus. Christmas points us beyond the immediate miracle to God's ultimate gift in Christ. What God was doing through John was part of a much larger story that would affect generations to come.

We are encouraged to trust God's timing, obey him even when we do not understand everything, and remain ready for what he is doing through Jesus.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we are so thankful that we can trust in your promises and ask that you give us patience as we wait expectantly for the return of your Son Jesus to make all things right. Amen.

About the Contributor

Nelson and his wife Laurie have been at Covenant for over 20 years. He has participated in the Men in the Word Bible study as a small group leader for many years, has been a member of the 9:30 Choir and was previously a deacon and is currently an elder. He is semi-retired from his role as Partner with an executive search firm. Their three grown children have given them eight grandchildren six years old and younger. His favorite Christmas carol is "Joy to the World."





O HOLY NIGHT

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining;
it is the night of the dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!
Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!
O night divine! O night when Christ was born!
O night divine! O night, O night divine!

JOHN SULLIVAN DWIGHT

MAY OUR SOULS FEEL THEIR WORTH

Thursday, December 24 Kathryn Sedberry

Scripture: O Holy Night

In the mid-1800s, Frenchman Placide Cappeau was commissioned by a priest to write a Christmas poem to celebrate the renovation of a local parish church organ. Cappeau, a renowned literary genius and avowed atheist, researched the gospel of Luke and wrote the lyrics to "O Holy Night." Shortly after, a famed opera singer asked a Jewish friend to set the poem to music - which he remarkably did – and the finished piece premiered at a midnight mass to rave reviews. When Catholic leaders discovered the writer's atheistic convictions, however, the piece was banned.

Thank goodness "God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are our ways his ways" (Isaiah 55:8). Against all odds, this beloved poem has persevered through the centuries and continues to help prepare the hearts of believers for this holiest of nights, Christmas Eve – "the night of our dear Savior's birth."

"Long lay the world in sin and error pining, till He appeared and the soul felt its worth."

These words carry such a haunting quality – like a veiled shadow over the earth that only Jesus' light can pierce. Jesus' birth did not end sin – nor did his coming abolish the law. But rather, as Matthew tells us in his gospel, Jesus came as the fulfillment of the law. "His law is love and his gospel is peace." Our souls have worth because of Jesus, and his love and peace are now extended to us and through us.

Prayer

On this blessed night, may the light that pierced a world long pining shine afresh in your heart, and may your soul feel anew the worth Christ came to reveal. Amen.

About the Contributor

Kathryn has been at Covenant since 1996 and has had the joy of serving on staff for 10 years. She is married to John, who grew up at Covenant. They have two boys, Will (25), and Henry (20). "O Holy Night" has been Kathryn's favorite Christmas carol for as long as she can remember.

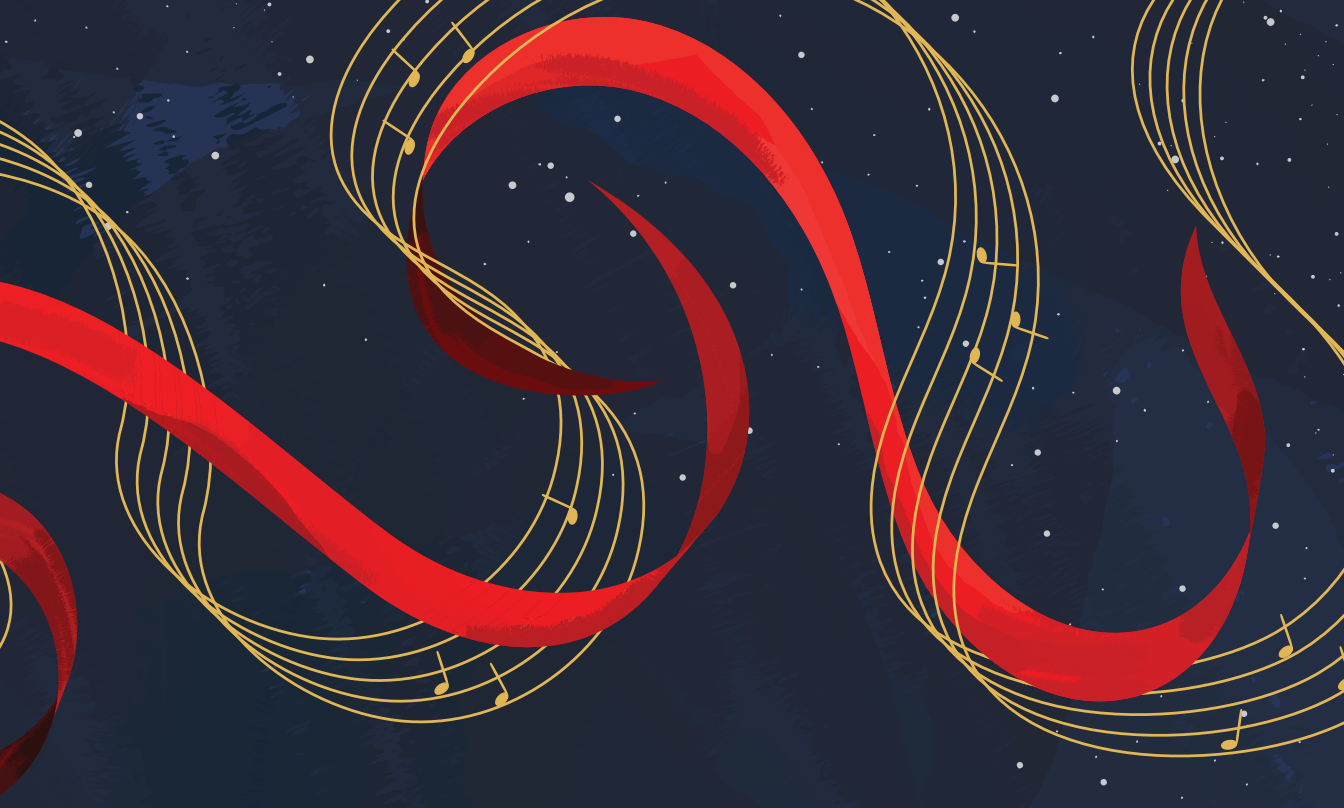
CHRISTMAS DAY

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 25

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree
that a census should be taken of the entire Roman
world. [2] (This was the first census that took place
while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) [3] And
everyone went to their own town to register.

[4] So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth
in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of
David, because he belonged to the house and
line of David. [5] He went there to register with Mary,
who was pledged to be married to him and was
expecting a child. [6] While they were there, the time
came for the baby to be born, [7] and she gave birth
to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths
and placed him in a manger, because there was no
guest room available for them.

[8] And there were shepherds living out in the fields
nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. [9]
An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the
glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were
terrified. [10] But the angel said to them, "Do not be
afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great
joy for all the people.[11] Today in the town of David
a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah,
the Lord. [12] This will be a sign to you: You will find
a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."



13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel,
praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said
to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened,
which the Lord has told us about."

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was
lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word
concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it
were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up
all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned,
glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen,
which were just as they had been told.

LUKE 2:1-20

GO, TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN

Go, tell it on the mountain,

Over the hills and everywhere.

Go, tell it on the mountain

That Jesus Christ is born.

JOHN W. WORK

WHAT'S NEXT?

As Christmas comes to an end and we move towards the new year, there could be no better exhortation than "Go!" God's desire is to be near to us, and through the incarnation we experience the God who moved into our neighborhood. He left the eternal realities of heaven and he entered into the finite realities of our world. He became as we are, assuming DNA, skin, hair, and all the other things that make us human, so that we could become as he is and gain eternal life through his life. In Jesus we experience the God who goes.

And now it's our turn to participate in his mission. God became as we are, so now we are invited to become as he is. We follow in the way of our God who goes, so now we go. We go to the mountains, the hills, and everywhere to declare the world-altering news that Jesus has indeed been born. And not only has he been born, but he continues to live and uphold the world as the resurrected Lord who sits at the right hand of the Father. We go proclaiming his love in word and in deed because Christ met us with words of life and deeds of healing. Go to those far and near to tell them of the good news that their story can be found within God's story and they are loved by the God of the universe.

CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP SERVICES

2:00 p.m. TRADITIONAL CANDLELIGHT SERVICE
Sanctuary

4:00 p.m. CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICE
Sanctuary

5:00 p.m. CONTEMPORARY CANDLELIGHT SERVICE
FE200 & covenant.org/worship-online

8:30 p.m. TRADITIONAL CANDLELIGHT SERVICE
Sanctuary & covenant.org/worship-online

To see a full list of Advent events and worship services at Covenant, visit us online at covenant.org/advent

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