



Advent Guide

2023

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH LUFKIN

Advent Guide

The Advent hymn, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel is traditionally one of the first Advent hymns we sing each year, often on the first Sunday of Advent. Some might say it's a bit dark, slow, and oh so gloomy and ancient! The final verse of the hymn, however, is ever so applicable to our day. "O come, Desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind; bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease; Fill the whole world with heavenly peace." One heart and mind in heavenly peace...oh what a thought and yet, it seems but only a dream. I need the season of Advent. I long for the promise of hope, peace, joy, and love to consume and overwhelm me once more.

Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "coming or arriving." Advent not only focuses on Jesus birth – his first coming - but also on his second coming, which is yet to happen. Advent is a season of waiting, anticipating, expectation, and longing for Christ's return.

The church has celebrated the various traditions of Advent since the 6th century. Advent is a four-week celebration beginning on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and continuing until Christmas Day. In worship we will use an Advent Wreath with a new candle being lit each week in anticipation of lighting the Christ Candle on Christmas Eve.

We are thrilled to publish our 2023 FBC Lufkin Daily Advent Guide. During Advent 2017, we began this new First Baptist tradition which now has become a highly anticipated and significant part of the Advent season. This guide is written by our own First Baptist members and illustrated by our children. The guide contains 23 short devotional thoughts and a scripture passage for each day. The four traditional themes of Advent will take you on a journey toward Christmas day.

It is my prayer that Advent 2023 will be a most holy and worshipful time for you and your family. Do not rush through the Advent season and miss out on the beauty and glory of these days. We wait. We hope. We worship. As you read and reflect on the devotionals prepared, may you be brought into the very presence of Jesus our Savior.

A special word of thanks and deep appreciation to those who provided the timely and sincere devotions as well as the children who illustrated the Advent themes so beautifully.

- Pastor Mark

Hope

WEEK 1

HE is our HOPE!



Adalyn Belschner, 10 years old

Hebrews 10:22-23 (NIV)

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Hope

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3

In these verses, we find a message that echoes deeply with our faith journey. When we look at our lives, we tend to notice our own failures, shortcomings, and faults, but instead we should be holding tightly to the unwavering promise that God has given. Life is filled with moments of uncertainty and trials that can challenge our faith. This verse urges us not to tremble in our hope, regardless of the circumstances.

Our world is changing more than ever, but our hope in Him remains constant. God is faithful so we can be steadfast with our Hope. His Love for us has remained and has not changed.

Central to this verse is the unwavering faithfulness of God. He is the promise-keeper. When we place our hope in Him, we anchor ourselves in the unchanging character of the Almighty. This steadfastness in His faithfulness gives us confidence during life's storms. Not only has my faith been shaken, but there was also a time in my life when I lost Hope. At 23 years old I suffered a massive stroke. My neurosurgeon didn't know if I was going to walk again while I was in a medically induced coma. When I finally came to, I was filled with joy and happiness that I got to see my wife (11 months into our marriage journey). Quickly after the initial joy went away, my hope slowly started to fade. The inability to do normal tasks and now living with partial blindness in both of my eyes left me with more questions than answers.

This verse encourages us that there is a promise that has been given and can never be taken away. While in the middle of the storm it's possible for our hope and faith to be strengthened. This verse is powerful because it provides a source of encouragement. Our own life experiences can inspire others to hold onto their hope as well. A community of believers sharing their experiences has been a great source of inspiration to me personally.

Hebrews 10:23 reminds us that our hope is securely anchored in the unchanging faithfulness of God. Therefore, let us hold onto our hope with unwavering confidence.

-Dustin Hill

When you see Dustin around the church, he is usually surrounded by his three young sons, Deacon, Conrad, and Monroe. Dustin and Jessica are heavily involved in all aspects of our young adult ministry. Dustin is in the sound booth most Sundays during worship.

Hope

MONDAY, DECEMBER 4

I have found myself staying completely away from the news as much as possible these days. It seems no matter where I look whether it be on social media, the newspaper or traditional television news channels, we are being flooded with stories of hopelessness, turmoil and grief. These stories become overwhelming to encounter knowing that my two young children are growing up in this world. However, it is my children, Declan and Maeve, that help to ground me in what is important.

Declan's love language is communication/talking every waking moment of the day. He seems to share everything that pops into his head, and I have never heard him talk about worry or fear of any sort. Maeve is fearless. She tries new things without apprehension and with a smile. Their hopeful and fearless lease on life inspires me to live in the same way. They are resilient, loving and hopeful each morning. No matter what has happened the day before, they wake up with hope for what the day will bring. The world trains us to live in fear, but God places an innate sense of hope in our inner being. We don't have to search for hope. It is already within us. It is our job to embrace Hope each day. As we enjoy this Christmas season with our families, I wish for each of you to find Hope in your own lives.

-Casey Adams

Psalms 31:24 (NASB)

*Be strong and let your
heart take courage,
All you who hope in the
Lord.*

Casey has been a part of FBC since birth. She and her husband, Matt, teach in our children's Sunday School ministry. Casey and Matt are proud parents of Declan and Maeve.

Romans 15:13 (NLT)

"I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him.

Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit."

Hope

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5

WE SHOULD CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS EVERY DAY.

We often express dismay about the commercialization of Christmas. The Christmas decorations and displays seem to appear earlier each year. The television productions blare forth an unending stream of holiday themes starting in August. We are urged to shop early for that perfect gift that will ensure everlasting happiness. We get caught up in a whirlwind of activity that leaves us emotionally and physically exhausted. The true meaning of the celebration seems to be captured by our secular culture.

As Christians we know that the celebration is for that greatest gift, one we have already received, that gift of love through Jesus Christ. So, we, as Christians, should celebrate Christmas every day of the year.

This precious gift from God gives us hope that is solid, enduring and eternal. This is not the shallow hope of our society that things will get better, but the certain hope in the absolute knowledge that our faith gives us the grace and love of Jesus on this earth and a special place for each of us in eternity.

God wants us to "overflow" with hope. (May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope. Romans 15: 13.) No matter what trials and tragedies we endure, we know that deep inside us there is the certain and enduring hope of Christ, with which we can face suffering, sacrifice, and setbacks. As we do this, we give hope to those who observe us. God wants us to be both givers and receivers of hope.

Remember as a child how eagerly you anticipated Christmas morning and the wonderful gifts you would receive? Well, the greatest gift is there each and every morning. Let us celebrate Christmas every day!

—Dr. Billy Kistler

Dr. Kistler has been a beloved medical professional in Lufkin since 1973. He and his late wife, Emily, have impacted our community in so many ways. You will often see several of his five children sitting with him in worship weekly.

Hope

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6

The inability to write while trying to complete a doctoral dissertation is not good. In fact, it is awful. So I did the next best thing, I began to run. In fact, I began running longer and longer distances. Just anything to keep from writing.

I soon fell in with a bad crowd—guys who were preparing to run a marathon. Blindly, I followed the crowd.

My wife was tremendously supportive in trying to get me to write. She would cajole, fuss, ignore - everything she knew to do to encourage me. Nothing worked. She was alarmed and afraid my running would keep me from finishing my writing. She said I was running from writing.

It was a bad time. But, I ran.

During a twenty mile run at about the sixteenth mile, I turned to my running buddy and wheezed, "I am completely shot, I don't know if I can finish."

To which he replied, "Remember what Isaiah said." I asked, "Isaiah who?" I didn't know any runners named Isaiah. I knew Frank Shorter and Bill Rogers, leading long distance runners of that period. But no Isaiah.

"No dummy," he said, "Isaiah from the Bible ... those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they should walk and not faint."

Who knew that in the latter stages of a twenty mile run one could find such hope and at the same time pure JOY!

We went on to run literally hundreds of miles together, several marathons, and when we would get really tired, we would remind ourselves that Isaiah probably wasn't a runner but was very insightful.

As indicated, I did finish the marathon and completed my dissertation and successfully defended it and earned my Doctorate, but I think the reminder from Isaiah may have been my best lesson learned that semester.

Psalm 71:5-6 (NIV)

*For you have been my hope,
Sovereign Lord, my confidence
since my youth. From birth I
have relied on you; you brought me
forth from my mother's
womb. I will ever praise you.*

-John Powell

John and Rita are new to our community and church but already so involved. John retired from Texas State University. The Powells radiate especially bright when their daughter and grandkids from Woodville join them in worship.

Hebrews 11:1 (NASB)

*Now faith is the certainty
of things hoped for,
a proof of things not seen.*

Hope

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7

At Advent, the hope of the coming of Jesus is celebrated with the knowledge that a child will be born to suffer the sins of the world. For many, the birth of Jesus was just another baby being born in the town of Bethlehem. But to some believers and

the learned few, it was a promise, a forecast from the Old Testament prophets, of a prophecy being fulfilled. It was the hope of Jesus Christ. Isaiah 7:14 says, "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel." The fulfillment of the scripture was revealed in Luke 1:35 when the angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

For thousands of years, people waited, anticipated, and even longed for the promise of God to be fulfilled – the very definition of hope. Why? Because they believed. Jesus fulfilled the promise that a descendant of David would reign on David's throne forever. His time on earth established a way out of sin and death through eternal life in Christ. Old Testament prophecies about Jesus are essential for Christians because they give us hope and show how the promises of God are fulfilled. Prophecies reveal that Jesus' glory was anticipated long before He actually came to earth.

Hope is not wishing that something will happen like receiving that special Christmas present under the tree. Nor is hope the thought process of just willing something to happen such as "I hope that ..." Hope at Christmas time is the anticipation of more to come and the embodiment of eternal life in heaven by believing in Him.

Paul tells the Romans in 15:13 saying, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in Hope." It is through Jesus that we have the hope of eternal life, the assurance that no matter what we go through in this life, there is something greater and more beautiful waiting for us in heaven.

It is my hope this Christmas that your belief in Jesus is renewed, strengthened, and brings you lasting peace.

-Sawyer Brightwell

Sawyer is in 8th grade at Lufkin Middle School. Sawyer is a great leader in our youth group and loves to sing. Sawyer is Savannah's little brother and keeps parents, Sam and Rebecca, always on their toes!

Hope

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8

When we Hope, we anticipate something good that is coming. We feel excited as we look forward to good things happening to us or around us. But a hope that depends on circumstances is unstable and hard to maintain. What if it doesn't get better? You may not see that situation ever resolve. Things don't always work out the way that you want. You can't fix everything. Just like chasing joy or peace or love that is based only on our circumstances, this approach leaves us with a lot of uncertainty.

The hope that resides in you is based on God's unchanging love. You are cared for and belong to the King of the Universe, who is limitless & in control of all. Your salvation is secure because of the Messiah, who is faithful to God's plans & makes a way for you to restore fellowship with your Creator. You are gifted the Holy Spirit, who is a guide, a strength, and a comfort.

Let us remember and be bolstered by these truths. He is great and will do great things! God is referenced as the source of hope throughout the Bible, and we can also look forward to His plans with excitement whether we get to see it or not, or even if our personal agenda isn't included or we should suffer along the way. Like its source, this hope is stable and unfailing.

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

-Brittany D. McCall

Brittany is wife to Kris, mom to Cora, Blair, and Maggie, and friend to all. Brittany is active in our children's ministry and women's ministry as well. Look for Brittany in the choir!

Hebrews 10:22-23 (NIV)

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Hope

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9

There are many moments in my life that have made me pause and realize, this is God. One of these moments was when I was emailed the Bible verse I was to reflect on. Hebrews 10:23 states, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering (for he is faithful that promised)." How fitting that someone, who had recently taken a break from church, was assigned this verse.

A little over a year ago we found out one of our daughters had heart issues. After the shock wore off, an anger set in that I was not ready for. How could God let this happen to our child. It made me question my faith, and I pulled away from the church. I paused and thought, this is God. His gentle reminder that He is here. The author of this verse is encouraging the Hebrews. In the last verse, he encouraged them to draw near to God. Now he encourages them to cling to the confession of our hope. To hold fast means we cling to it. We never let it go. Regardless of our circumstances, and what we think we see or experience, we hang on.

We're called to hold fast without wavering. It means we're immovable. Unbendable. The idea is that we don't compromise, we don't surrender, and we don't move. Hold fast without moving. Today, let's remind ourselves something about the faithfulness of God. What has he done in your past that encourages you to keep going without bending?

-Lyndy Vines

Lyndy thrives on being busy! Dr. Lyndy is a chiropractor and a professional photographer as well. Lyndy and Davy have two precious girls, Nealee and Victoria.

Peace

WEEK 2



Lachlan Campbell, 6 years old

John 14:27 (NLT)

"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."

Peace

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10

On Sunday mornings I love to look at the stained glass in front of the baptism in our sanctuary. It is a scene of the dove descending from heaven to anoint Christ with the Holy Spirit when he was baptized in the water. The white dove serves as a messenger from God. What a gift!

God also uses the dove as a way to show his lasting peace. His peace is a permanent gift. It is eternal peace. It is an inner peace that comes from trusting Him. This permanent gift surpasses all human understanding. Jesus knew we would all live in a troubled world, so he left us with the promise in John 14:27. He encourages us not to be troubled or afraid no matter what we are facing.

In our lives today, the dove has come to represent glad tidings, forgiveness, renewal, and love, among other things. It has become synonymous with the Christmas season. As we go through the December days, some become busy and hectic. In fact, some days are like a roller coaster ride and we buzz around town. Slow down; take a deep breath. Draw near to Him. "Let go and Let God." I urge you to think of your favorite spots where you have often found peace from those kinds of days! Go there if you can! Think about the promise of peace in John 14:27! Look at the white dove on Sunday mornings in the stained glass. You will feel His presence!

What a gift!

-Sheila Wood

Sheila and Bubba are long time FBC members. For many years, Sheila was devoted to the children's ministry, serving so faithfully to children's Sunday School. Sheila finally gets to join her friends in the Geneva Class on Sunday mornings.

Peace

MONDAY, DECEMBER 11

We tend to confuse words like peace, happiness and joy. We tend to want everything to be all about us "feeling good." Many times, when we don't "feel good," we look to things or people to help fill these voids. We also will "work at" achieving peace, happiness and joy.

Today we are going to talk about peace. So, what does peace mean anyway? Peace – freedom from disturbance; tranquility.

What is it that causes us to not have peace in our life? We can find examples with almost every interaction we have. We might not like it that someone accidentally ran a grocery cart into our car or the way we were treated at the store. These are simple examples. But, for us to have "peace," does this mean we are to "keep the peace" at all costs allowing everyone to do what they think is the best? If we are to maintain peace, we should just let all these things go. Right? I think we know the answer to that. This is why war seems to be a constant in our world.

Let us now talk about a different kind of peace. Peace from within comes from knowing who we are and what we have done or not done. We tend to either focus on what happened in the past or what could happen in the future, rather than living in the present. We want to turn to people, stuff and sometimes medication to find the balance.

Regardless, peace in this world can be illusive. We make this hard because we trust in stuff and people that just let us down. Friends will turn their back on us. Family will talk about you behind your back. Everyone is looking out for themselves. We cannot just rely on others or things to find peace. I call this 'relying on shifting sand.' So where do we find the bedrock?

Christ made this simple for us. Peace is a fruit of the spirit. Therefore, the only way to achieve true peace is to allow Christ to live within you. No matter what the world throws at you, Christ is your constant. Christ has been the same for thousands of years and will continue to be the same. Unlike this world, He does not change! Your search for Peace has ended. Choose Christ. We must admit we are sinners, turn from our sins, walk with Christ confessing He is Lord and that God raised Him from the dead. Let us all focus back on Christ and what he did for this world and let His peace overflow from us! May peace be with you!

-Jeffrey Abeldt

John 16:33 (MSG)

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Jeffrey grew up in Lufkin and FBC and recently brought his wife Kimberly back home! Jeffrey and Kimberly own Abeldts Pharmacy as well as a pharmacy in Tyler. They have two grown sons.

Psalm 29:11 (KJV)

*The Lord will give strength unto
his people; the Lord will bless his
people with peace.*

Peace

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12

Peace... we live in a world that is longing and praying for peace, and yet peace is so hard to find. You turn on the news, or read the newspaper and all you can see, hear, and feel is sadness, anxiety, stress, hurt, and pain. There seems

to be death and destruction everywhere you look, which is the exact opposite of peace, and so we continue to struggle to find peace even as we want it so desperately.

So, the question then arises, how do we find this peace that we hear of, the peace we all so desperately long for not only during this holiday season but every day? True peace will not just magically appear, we will not find it wrapped under our Christmas Trees, or stuffed in our stockings. It won't be on Santa's sleigh or even from the delicious food and sweets we will eat this December. No, the peace that we are looking for, the peace that we must cling to only comes from Christ. It is not a peace that is earned or taken, but rather a peace that is given to us, a peace that is a blessing directly from the Lord. This is a peace that is all consuming and powerful, one that wraps us up and holds us tight. In the highest of highs and lowest of lows, this peace remains the same and gives us strength. Strength to persevere, to press on, to find peace even when the world around us continues to live in chaos. This peace is not of this world, no this peace is from the Lord, as Psalm 29:11 says, "The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace." My prayer for all of us this Christmas season is that we may feel the peace that the Lord has blessed us with. A peace that can conquer all, a peace that has no bounds, the peace of the Lord.

-Truett Newton

Truett is a proud graduate of Baylor as well as Truett Seminary in Waco. Truett and Grace are proud parents of Riley and Rosie (a Brown Lab and a Golden Retriever). Truett was called to serve our church as Student Minister in June of this year.

Peace

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13

During a recent visit to a local grocery store, I noticed several shoppers moving at a faster than normal pace. One shopper even passed me in the aisle going at a slow jog. It dawned on me that it was Friday, a day of the week in which everything moves at a faster pace as we hurry to wrap up a busy week to get on to an even busier schedule of weekend activities.

In *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, John Comer shares a definition of hurry “as a state of frantic effort one falls into in response to inadequacy, fear, and guilt.” Hurry is brought on by the persistent feeling that there is too much to do and not enough time to do it. Comer points out that mental health professionals have classified stress, which hurry induces, as a disease of epidemic proportions.

One of the great stressors of our day, hurry robs us of the inner peace Christ provides freely. Dallas Willard, former teacher, writer, and philosopher at the University of Southern California was asked the question, “What do I have to do to become the me I want to be?” He answered, “You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life. It is the great enemy to spiritual life in our day.”

Comer argues that the solution is not to make more time, which is an impossible goal, but to simplify our lives around things that really matter. Peace is a promise fulfilled in the Advent of Christ, who showed us a way to live in that peace no matter what the circumstances. So, during this Advent season, let’s slow down, take a few deep breaths, and recognize the Peace of Christ.

-Jerry Merriman

Isaiah 9:6-7 (KJV)

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

Jerry is a proud graduate of Lufkin High School. Jerry and Rhonda have three children and love when they can all be home (a son in NYC and son and daughter in California.) Jerry spent his career serving in Baptist Collegiate Student Ministry.

Colossians 3:15 (NLT)

*And let the peace that comes
from Christ rule in your hearts.
For as members of one body
you are called to live in peace.
And always be thankful.*

Peace

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14

Our daughter, Natalie, was born six weeks early. It was hard to have peace about her unexpected arrival. The nursery wasn't even ready!

When the pediatrician came in after checking on Natalie, friends were in our hospital room visiting. The pediatrician told us Natalie's head was pointed but that would correct itself and otherwise, she seemed to be in good health. Our friend heard the doctor say the pointed head would give her character, so she was very concerned for us and wondered how we could be so calm about that. We've had many good laughs about that since. Natalie may have character but not because of a pointed head.

We were probably a little numb to suddenly have our baby here early, but we did have God's peace with us, and we were very thankful she was healthy. We had to leave Natalie at the hospital for nine days after I was dismissed. It was hard to have peace about that. After Natalie was dismissed, we ended up back at the hospital the next day, and Natalie was re-admitted. It was hard to have peace about that, but this time I was able to stay with her.

Back in the hospital, it was discovered Natalie's lungs were not as developed as they had thought, so we stayed in the hospital another five days. It was hard to have peace about that, but we did have God's peace, and we were thankful for the friend who noticed her apnea problem. We were thankful Natalie was finally able to go home with medicine and some monitoring equipment. Now when the monitor alarms would go off in the middle of the night, that would cause some not so peaceful moments, but we still had God's peace with us. We were able to stop using the monitor after six months and the medicine after nine months, and Natalie has grown to be a wonderful young lady.

We all have many situations in our lives filled with turmoil. The world around us is filled with turmoil, BUT because of God's gift of Jesus, even in not so peaceful situations, we are able to have peace in our hearts through it all, and we can all be extremely thankful for that!

-Laurie Hefner

For 25 years Laurie has been the Chief Financial Officer of our church! Laurie grew up at FBC as her dad served the church as Minister of Music for many years. Laurie and Robby serve in many areas in the church but are especially active in music ministry and special friends Sunday School.

Peace

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15

Sometimes, we all feel like no matter what we do, our situation will never get better. We start thinking about all of the bad things that could happen. We think about deadlines for projects, at our jobs, or an essay that's due for school, and it makes us feel overwhelmed and helpless. We need to keep in mind no matter how overwhelmed we feel, we must have hope that God will help us overcome our greatest battles.

Let's talk about what hope is, but not just any hope, let's talk about what hope in God is. Worldly hope is nothing compared to the hope that we have in God. Hope in God, Heavenly hope is us, as faithful Christians, knowing that God is always with us and that He guides us through whatever challenges we may face, big or small. It's us knowing that God has a plan for our lives, so we should never focus on the negative things, instead, we should only focus on the positive ones.

Now that we know what true hope is, let's talk about how we can apply it in our lives. How can we put all of our hope in God and know that He will make things better? Well, the answer is quite simple: we just have to have trust and patience. Even when our circumstances are difficult and we feel like there's no solution, we have to trust God and have patience because eventually God's plan will happen and we will be free of the sticky mess we are in. His plan might not happen instantly or in a way that is obvious for us to see, this is why trust and patience is so important.

Don't ever think God won't get you through the tough times you are enduring, because He will. You just have to have true hope. As long as you remain patient and have trust in God, there is no situation and no bad thing that He will not be able to free you from.

-Tryston McGee

Romans 12:17-18 (NLT)

Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

Tryston is a junior at Hudson High school. He loves to play golf and is very active in our youth group. Tryston is always on the front row in worship which helps parents, Kevin and Sadie, and siblings, Faber and Sophia, keep him in line.

Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Peace

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16

As imperfect humans in an imperfect world, we have a tendency to be anxious. It seems rightly so with all of the conflict and suffering we see in the news right now. If you add our daily worries to that, it's easy to get overwhelmed fast. I know we all stress over things, big and small, especially during the holiday season! It is so easy to get caught up in our own world that we often try to take things into our own hands instead

of taking them to God. Or maybe deep down we are afraid to let God know our requests, lest we seem selfish or ungrateful.

But Philippians 4:6-7 gives us a different way to approach our anxiety. Paul, who wrote this letter, tells us to plead humbly. He urges us to pray with thanksgiving because we serve a wonderful and compassionate God, and to let our requests be made known to Him. God is understanding. He cares about what is on our hearts, about our anxieties and our worries. He will provide peace beyond our understanding. The word Peace in this verse is translated from the Greek word "eirene." Paul's use of this word is different than our usual understanding of peace. Eirene encompasses a total well-being, inner rest, harmony, and a reconciliation with God. This only can be found through having a relationship with Jesus Christ, and prayer is part of that.

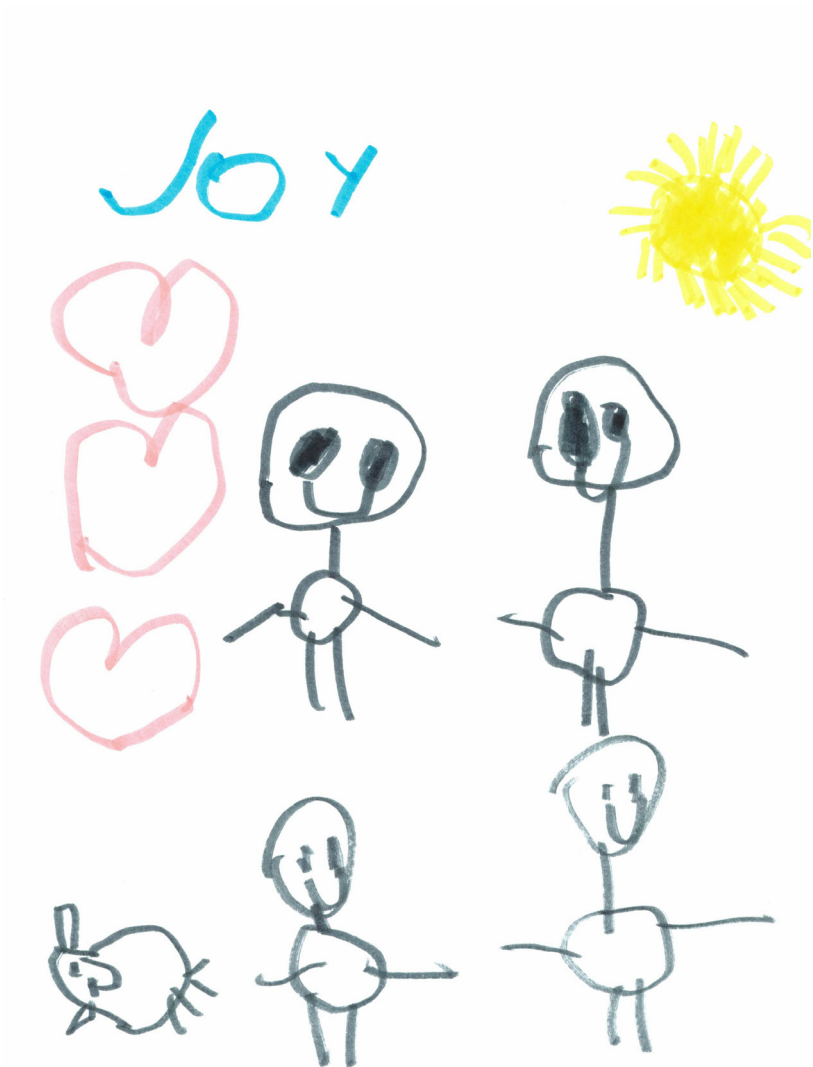
This is a reminder for us all during this busy season to take our requests to God. No matter if they are big or small. It's ok to pray for the everyday things like your holiday to do list, or prepping for final exams! It's also ok to bring to Him requests for big things like the blessing of a child, healing of a loved one, or a help with a strained relationship. Pray, talk to God, plead humbly for what's on your heart, and let the peace that only God can give enter into your life this season.

-Whitney Kent

Whitney and Reid are active in our young adult ministry as well as faithful workers in Wednesday night youth ministry. Whitney has a busy social calendar and is a proud graduate of Texas A&M.

Joy

WEEK 3



Brooks Huggins, 5 years old

James 1:2-4 (NRSV)

My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

Joy

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17

When I think of Joy, I think of all of the holidays. Thanksgiving- the food, the desserts, the kids running around yelling and playing while waiting for the food. Christmas Eve and Christmas. The kids on Christmas Eve talking about what they think Santa is bringing them, making cookies and milk. Christmas morning, kids getting up running to the tree to see what they might have gotten from Santa, opening the presents and seeing the joy that they are showing. That's what

brings joy to me during the Holidays.

JOY: In every journey, in every walk with God, we search for Joy. Joy is what we look for every day we wake up and go to work, play or rest. In our every day of life, Joy might be one of the hardest pleasures to find. Stress from work, home life, marriage, bills and kids. Wake up every day looking for a piece of Joy in everything you do for that day. For the days that Joy cannot be found, you can seek out God and find Joy through him, talk to him, walk with him, and you will find Joy. When you find Joy, show it, share it and spread it to everyone you come in contact with. That person who you encounter might also be looking for some part of Joy that they are missing in their daily walk. Show them that Joy surrounds you and is with you and you are ready to share that Joy.

Prayer: God thank you for being here for me and my family, showing us that in the toughest times Joy can be found. When times are tough, we still can be joyful through you by spreading the word of love and Joy.

In God's name, Amen.

-Scot Hamel

Scot can be found at Lufkin Ford these days as Operations Director. Scot has worked for the City of Lufkin and worn many hats. On Sundays you will find Lynn and Scot in Bible Study and making sure their youngest child Grace is on time to youth!

Joy

MONDAY, DECEMBER 18

In a world filled with cruelty and hatred, natural and manmade disasters, devastating diseases and tragic disappointments, joy can be a hard attribute to master.

The first definition listed in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary says that joy is “the emotion evoked by well-being, success or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires.” As Christians, we know that joy goes well beyond that. It’s finding the strength to push on just one more time. It’s showing up on the darkest days determined to bring light and positivity to those around us. It’s standing up in the midst of the chaos and yelling, “God’s got this!” It’s the comfort we have from being saved by the blood of Christ. Because joy is a gift given by God, we must treasure and protect it.

So, when the whole world seems to be against me, when I’m exhausted and angry, or when I just want to give up, I remember something my mother always says: “No one can steal your joy. Only you can give that away.”

Your joy, which is made complete in Jesus Christ (John 15), belongs to you. No matter the circumstances, or what people may say or do, you can control your joy. You can decide that despite Satan’s best efforts to bring you down, you will remain joyful.

James 1:2 says that we are to consider it “pure joy” when we face trials of many kinds. A friend puts you down behind your back? Don’t let her steal your joy. Your boss fails to see your potential? Don’t let him steal your joy. Your marriage is struggling? Your kids are driving you crazy? Your depression is so deep you can’t see a way out? Don’t let anyone steal your joy.

Protect it. Joy is a God-given right, and no one can steal that from you.

-Melissa Crager

From Lufkin Daily News to CHI to Charm Magazine to her current responsibilities at Brookshire Brothers, Melissa is one busy lady when it comes to Public Relations and Marketing! Melissa and Brian are parents to daughter, Mary, and twins, Emily and Issac, and are active in our young adult bible study class.

Psalms 71:23 (NASB)

*My lips will shout for joy
when I sing praises to You;
And my soul, which You
have redeemed.*

Hebrews 12:1-3 (NLT)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up.

Joy

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19

If joy was something you could buy, how much do you think some people would be willing to pay for it? How much would you be willing to pay for it? But the thing about joy is that it can't be bought for any amount of money. Joy is a "state-of-heart" that comes from our blessings in this life (and the next life) that are purely gifts from God, alone.

Joy, to me, is really a combination of the other three themes of Advent: Love, Hope, and Peace. The love of family and friends, the love of a spouse specifically "hand-picked" for you by God, Himself, and especially the love of God The Father, God The Son, and God The Holy Spirit, who not only created us but

provided a way of eternal salvation for our souls; that's what makes love such a huge part of the joy we are so graciously given.

Hope provides joy in knowing that our eternal future is secure and that we don't have to be "good enough" to earn our way into Heaven. Jesus Christ has already paid the price for us that we could never have paid for ourselves. Our debt has been marked "Paid In Full" and our certainty of that eternal hope brings pure joy to the heart of every believer.

Peace is at the same time an invaluable component of as well as a product of our joy. At a time when our world seems so out-of-control, when conflicts and hatred and differences in values are a constant source of worry and confusion, having the knowledge and bedrock faith that our God is not only in control, but He has already Won The War, brings us great peace no matter what this world (and Satan) throws at us. Our future is secure! That knowledge is what gives us as Christians a peace that the world can't know or understand. And that peace adds to our joy immeasurably.

So "let us run with endurance the race that is set before us," "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." Let us never take for granted that we as Christians are blessed with a Hope, Love, and Peace that gives us Pure Joy that can only be found through a right relationship with the Savior of the World!

-John Ellis

John is one of our Bible Study teachers on Sunday mornings for Adult Bible Study. John has been in medical sales most of his adult life. John and Molly are active throughout the community and would love to tell you about their grandkids.

Joy

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20

When Mark emailed me to write a day in this year's Advent calendar, I responded yes and to give me whichever theme is needed. I received another email a day or two later with a Bible verse and the theme Joy. The next few days I prayed about Joy. I began listening, watching, and observing daily life and how God is Joy!

I start each day drinking coffee. In fact right now I am drinking my coffee out of a "be happy" mug. I like the phrase "be happy". Yet the phrase "choose Joy" resonates God's Holy Spirit to me. Google states this: "Joy is an inner feeling. Happiness is an outward expression. Joy endures hardships and trials and connects meaning and purpose. A person pursues happiness, but chooses Joy. Biblical Joy is choosing to respond to external circumstances with inner contentment and satisfaction, because we know that God will use these experiences to accomplish His work in and through our lives." Choose Joy!

As I was pondering Joy and going about daily activities this past week, I drove through a coffee shop. I noticed a sign on the drive through window. This is what it read: " Welcome. Join us in creating a Joyful and inclusive space where we can uplift one another over coffee. Thank you for being a part of our community. You belong here." I prayed for Jesus to create Joy in me. One of the sayings I would tell my children as they left our house for school was "Shine for Jesus." I pray for Jesus to shine through me and for Jesus to create a Joyful space for others through me.

I was eating dinner with my husband, Jeff, this week. He was wearing a Baylor basketball t-shirt. As I was looking at his shirt and continuing to focus on Joy, I saw the word Joy on his shirt! Coach Scott Drew, the head men's basketball coach of Baylor University, leads his team with faith in God. Baylor University describes the basketball program under Scott Drew as a culture of Joy. Baylor states "Scott Drew's trademark positivity propelled by his deeply rooted faith has built a foundation for success on the court." This is the way the team describes the culture of Joy. Joy is Jesus, Others, and then Yourself.

I believe God is showing me to choose Joy daily. God is Joy! Throughout this advent season, Christmas, and the new year, I pray that daily I put Jesus first, that I look to Him faithfully to show me ways to choose Joy, create a Joyful space, and live in the culture of Joy in Jesus Christ.

-Ginger Bates

Habakkuk 3:17-18 (MSG)

Though the cherry trees don't blossom and the strawberries don't ripen, Though the apples are worm-eaten and the wheat fields stunted, Though the sheep pens are sheepless and the cattle barns empty, I'm singing joyful praise to God. I'm turning cartwheels of joy to my Savior God. Counting on God's Rule to prevail. I take heart and gain strength. I run like a deer. I feel like I'm king of the mountain!

Quiet, calm, and always smiling...at least at church! Ginger and Jeff have two sons and a daughter, one grandson and another grandchild on the way. Ginger has a servant's heart and can be found most Wednesdays filling tea and water glasses in the FLC.

Philippians 4:4-5 (NLT)

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

Joy

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21

When I was little, my mom would play a funny version of I've Got The Joy Joy Joy Joy (Down In My Heart) for my brother and me, and it always made us laugh. As I've gotten older, I think about the words of that song... "Down in my heart. Down in my heart TO STAY," and I'm reminded of the

kind of joy only God can give us. The world defines joy as a feeling of great pleasure and happiness. Most everyone enjoys experiencing joy in life, whether it's making a good grade on a test, getting first place in an event, or all the fun surrounding Christmastime, but these feelings are short-lived. The joy the world gives doesn't stay, but the kind of joy that God provides really is in our hearts TO STAY. Just like the song says. In the Bible, joy is defined as more than just a happy feeling, it's a lasting emotion that comes from the choice to trust that God will fulfill his promises to us. Real joy can only come from God. So we should Rejoice in the Lord always because we have joy from Him that is "Down in our hearts to stay."

-Taylor Day

Taylor is an 8th grader at Lufkin Middle School. Taylor excels in academics but can also swing a golf club with force and accuracy. Taylor and younger brother, Parker, claim their Sunday morning pew weekly in the balcony, next to their parents, Leslie and Patrick.

Joy

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22

The definition of joy is a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.

Christmas is a time of joy for most of us. It is a time when we get together with those we love and celebrate the birth of Jesus. Now, if we are being honest, we spend a lot of time visiting, playing games, eating, and exchanging gifts. For some people, Christmas can be a time of sadness. There may have been a death in the family over the last year, a divorce or break up, or the loss of a job.

Life is a book of many chapters. Some are short, others long. Some are funny, others sad. Some are joyful, others are not. All too often, we allow external circumstances to overshadow our ability to have joy in our lives. We may not feel good about ourselves. We may not feel like we are good spouses, parents, or siblings. This seems to have worsened with social media as there are temptations to compare ourselves with others who proudly claim how great their life is.

Joy is a generous gift from God. It is the realization that He sent his son to be born amongst us, to live and breathe with us, and to die on the cross for us. God sent his son to die for our salvation. We must be mindful to keep our external circumstances from diminishing our joy of knowing God sent his son for us. That is the ultimate act of love and that should bring us great joy regardless of our life's chapter.

I say a simple prayer on the way to work every morning. I ask God to give me an attitude of gratitude and to help me have joy throughout my day. Joy is our witness to share with others and it may be the one thing that stands out to others. As we enter this Christmas season, may the joy we have through our relationship with Jesus Christ be evident to others.

-Troy Coleman

Luke 2:10-11 (KJV)

*And the angel said unto them,
Fear not: for, behold, I bring you
good tidings of great joy,
which shall be to all people.
For unto you is born this day in the
city of David a Saviour, which is
Christ the Lord.*

Dr. Coleman is a radiologist at CHI Memorial. Troy and Lorelle are proud parents of two grown children and all four of them are proud Baylor Bears.

Isaiah 9:2-3 (MSG)

Joy

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23

*The people who walked in
darkness have seen a great light.*

*For those who lived in a land of
deep shadows—light! Sunbursts
of light! You repopulated the
nation, you expanded its joy.*

*Oh, they're so glad in your
presence! Festival joy! The joy of a
great celebration, sharing rich gifts
and warm greetings.*

What does Joy mean to me and how can I find joy in my circumstances? This is a question that I have asked myself, and I'm sure you have as well, many times depending on the stage of life I am in. In this current stage of my life, I work a job in which I get to engage with people who are in some of the worst situations they will ever be in, and yet, they find joy. Given scary, intense, and defeating events, most

of the patients I see, and their families, choose joy over and over again. I have been told by families, caregivers, and patients themselves that despite everything, they choose joy in these circumstances because they know that Jesus is with them every step of the way. It never ceases to amaze me when people find joy in challenging circumstances or troubling times.

This leads me to the answer to my question: true JOY, not just feeling happy that day or that week, is found, not in circumstances or situations, but in Jesus Christ. Isaiah 9:2-3 tells us that when we have true joy and spread our joy to others, we make the earth better. How beautiful is that! Joy from Jesus brings LIGHT to the earth; let's spread that light to all! When we look to Jesus to restore us and fill our "joy cup," we are constantly satisfied and filled with pure, unwavering, true joy. This Christmas and advent season reminds us to focus on the true joy that was given to us with the birth of Jesus Christ. Let's not allow the events of the world to affect the true joy that Jesus pours into us everyday without fail. This advent season, and every season that follows, let us fill our Joy cup by looking to Jesus and seeking his true, fulfilling, unrelenting JOY!

-Grace Newton

Grace is married to Truett and found her way to Lufkin this past July. Grace is a Speech Pathologist at CHI. Grace grew up in San Antonio and met Truett at Baylor. She adores her father-in-law!

Love

WEEK 4



Grace Garris, 5 years old



CAROLS
CANDLES
& COMMUNION

Christmas Eve

12/24
5:30PM

Proverbs 10:12 (NIV)

*Hatred stirs up conflict,
but love covers over
all wrongs.*

Love

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24

What is Love? Love is a gift from God that is meant to be shared with others. Love is not about lust or power; it's about connection, respect, and a deep understanding of one another. It's about seeing each other's hearts and honoring the Lord within each other.

In this scripture, we are told to choose to respond in love, instead of hate, as it is far more powerful. I find myself struggling to choose love over hate all the time. Sometimes it is hard to "do what is right," as choosing a revenge-seeking approach is far easier and brings that immediate satisfaction that I am selfishly seeking. As I have gotten older and become a mom, I have realized that choosing love is the way that I want to live my life, and I encourage others to do the same.

These last few years, the people of our country have been so outspoken about their beliefs and so eager to show hate towards others for those differing beliefs and choices. As Christians, we need to love everyone, even our enemies. Love is the only way to bring the people of our country back together; love will help us find common ground and ways to work and live together.

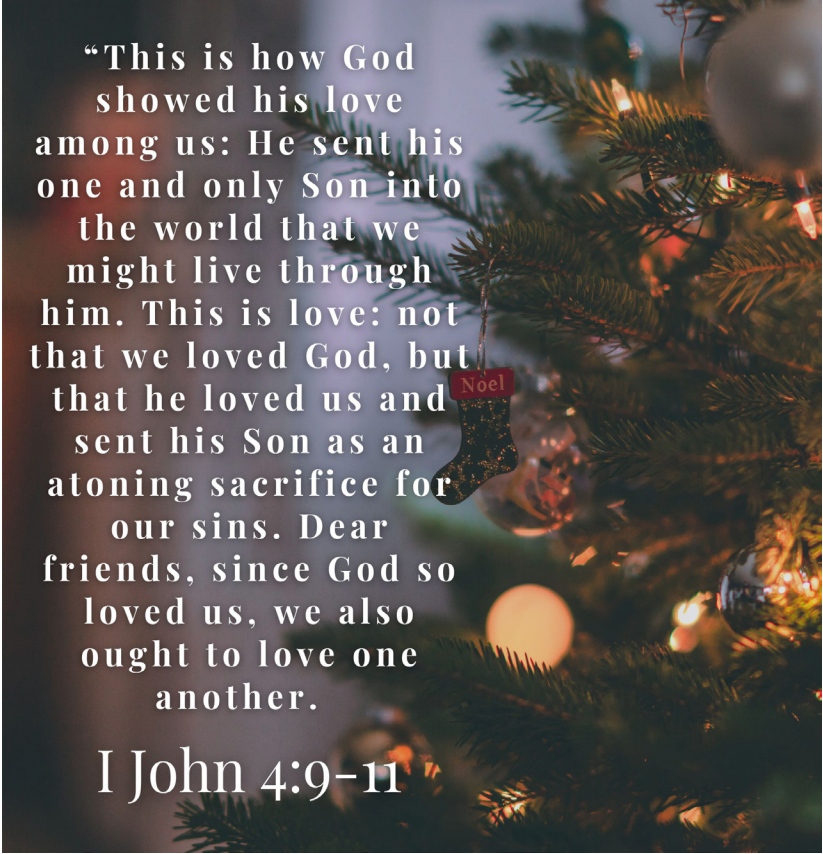
As you continue to celebrate this Christmas season, remember that Love is a gift from God, and his greatest gift of love was Jesus. One way you can share the gift of love is through an act of kindness. Maybe that means taking Christmas cookies to a grumpy neighbor who's hard to love.

-Sarah Hood

Sarah and Chase are proud parents to Harrison. Sarah is a CPA who works from home for her Houston firm. The Hoods love their Aggies!

Love

MONDAY, DECEMBER 25



“This is how God
showed his love
among us: He sent his
one and only Son into
the world that we
might live through
him. This is love: not
that we loved God, but
that he loved us and
sent his Son as an
atoning sacrifice for
our sins. Dear
friends, since God so
loved us, we also
ought to love one
another.

I John 4:9-11

May the love of God surround you and yours on this most glorious day of love. Today is all about love. God loved. God so loved. Thanks be to God for his gift of love, Jesus, whom we celebrate today. You are loved dear church family! Let's share that love with others today and in the days ahead.

-Pastor Mark

Pastor Mark will begin his eighth year as pastor at FBC next month. He and Aurelia love Jesus, love Lufkin, and love Baylor.... maybe in that order.

Notes:

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Notes:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.



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