

CELEBRATING

Advent

THE ARRIVAL OF OUR KING



2017 FAMILY DEVOTIONAL
CHURCH OF THE PALMS



The **MUSIC** of
CHRISTMAS

Wednesdays (11.29 - 12.20)

6:30 - 7:30 pm Chapel

11.29

THE CAROLS OF SWEDEN

Jonathan Spivey, feat. Trine Bolling (soprano)

12.6

THE HANDBELL CHOIR

Beth Ellis, Katy Ellis, Linda Prowten, Barbara Shontz & Linda Spoolstra

12.13

THE CHORAL MUSIC OF DAN FORREST

Jonathan Spivey

12.20

CAROL SINGING



Every once in a while I like a good mystery. A good page-turner. It's fun to read a story where you don't quite know where the plot line is going. It keeps you on your toes and your head in the book. Who dunnit? Why did they do it? How did they do it? We'll know, hopefully, in the end.

To some degree what you have in your hands is a good mystery. The Advent story, frankly, is a good mystery. We get to return every year to this miraculous and mysterious story of a captured world being saved by a gracious hero. The characters in the story (Mary, Joseph, shepherds, wise men) are sometimes oblivious to what is happening in the moment. Strange things are happening but they don't know who dunnit, why it's happening or how it will all come about. We've read the book before and know the ending – but that doesn't take away from it continually being a great story.

And the truth is it really hasn't ended. There's more to come. The mystery and miracle are at play in your life and mine. God is still working God's purposes out. So much is happening right now to which we may be oblivious. The days of our lives are still filled with expectation as to what might happen next that will allow us to see God's hand at work in us and around us.

I hope you will take the time to keep your head in this book. Each day will be an unexpected thought or meditation that you've never encountered before. Each page will be a new chance for God to speak something surprising to you. Lord knows what new plot twists are ahead for you and me. We know they'll be good, because we know the author. He's never given us a bad ending.

A blessed Advent to you all,



December 3

Mark 13:24-37

by Carolyn Wilson

BEING READY FOR JESUS

During Advent and the Christmas season we focus on the birth of baby Jesus, the incarnation of the Living God in a human body and his entrance into history in time and space. In this passage in Mark, Jesus reminds us that he will come again and since no one knows the day or the hour, we should be ready at all times.

In his first advent, Jesus came into the world quietly and with little fanfare other than the angels' announcement to the shepherds. But when he comes again he will come as King and Lord and all the world will see and know. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10-11).

We can be ready by trusting Jesus and by loving God with all our beings and by loving our neighbor as ourselves.





December 4

Psalm 79

by Donald Stewart

A PLEA



Drawing by Tallulah Bonifield

In this plea for redemption and forgiveness, the Psalmist laments the heathens' destruction of God's temple and the city of Jerusalem to heaps of rubble. The Psalmist also laments the mass slaughter of its inhabitants who are left to rot in the elements.

The plea relates that the survivors have become objects of scorn and have been demeaned and trivialized by heathens who regarded the God of Jacob and his people as false.

A prayer is made to God for forgiveness from prior sins and for the redemption and re-legitimization of his people who will venerate him for their salvation. It is also asked that God exact revenge against those who have taken the blood of his people.



December 5

Micah 4:6-13

by Frances Patterson

A PROMISE

Micah offers us a promise of restoration for God's people. First Micah shows us that God will gather all, even the disadvantaged and weak to make them into His nation.

Secondly God's plan includes a birth that comes with pain. As we celebrate the birth of Christ, the greatest gift of all, we must not forget that pain was endured by Jesus for our sakes.

Finally Micah speaks of a restored nation, strengthened to bring the godless back to God. This Christmas why not offer the greatest gift of all through love.



Drawing by Sydney Soboleski



December 6

Luke 21:34-38

by Bill Mallett

PREPARING OUR HEARTS

We are in the season of Advent, that time when we are maybe beginning to think about the birth of our Savior. The scripture today is pointing out that we should be preparing our hearts for his return. It cautions us not to get caught up in the cares of this life, the things that take our eyes off of Jesus and how he expects us to live out our lives. Jesus wants us to prepare our hearts so that we are always ready to receive him. We can begin this by constantly praying for wisdom and strength to avoid life's distractions and guidance to see the true path, because we may see what is easier to follow and and be surprised when it is the wrong path.

God often surprises us in wonderful ways too! When Jesus was born, no one expected the Messiah to come as a baby. But in the coming days, as you begin to get ready for Christmas, be open to God's surprises in your life and prepare your heart so that you will be ready to welcome the Savior.



Drawing by Sydney Soboleski



December 7

Hosea 6:1-6

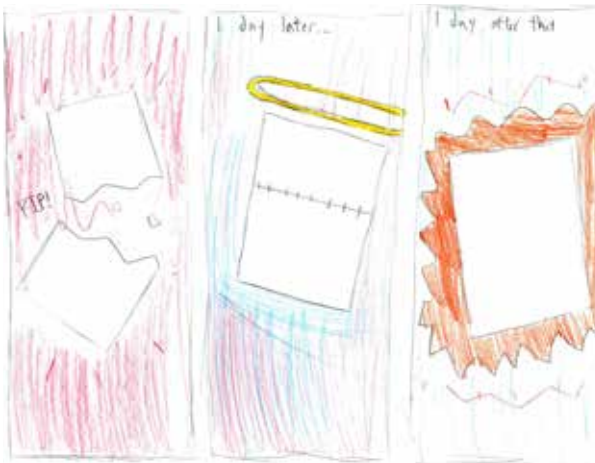
by John Kennedy

PEOPLES INSINCERE REPENTANCE

In Hosea 6, it appears the people are feeling that God tests them by hurting them. They apparently feel everything should be great all the time and that nothing bad should happen to them. They do have faith that God will make things good again, but it seems like they merely expect it rather than do the right things to deserve it.

The Lord asks “ what am I going to do with these people.” Their love of God comes and goes. They are not listening to his message from the prophets, and they are not honoring God the way they need to.

What this passage means to me is that we need to keep God in our lives and our thoughts always, not just when things do not go well for us. Also, we need to have clear communication with God, giving thanks when good things happen as well as praying for help when things are not so good. To really know and honor God is to talk with him many times a day, thanking him for small things as they happen. Don't take anything for granted, good things come from God, not because we think we deserve them, but because God loves us.



Drawing by Charles Moser



December 8

Jeremiah 1:4–10

by Katherine Andersen

THE CALL OF JEREMIAH

I believe the good news of Christ Jesus. Before Jesus died, he commissioned his followers to spread the good news to all the nations. Jesus said that God would be sending the Holy Spirit to help us with this task. Even though I have the Holy Spirit at my disposal, I can identify with the prophet Jeremiah. Even though I live in a time where I can easily reach people across the globe via the internet, I still feel inadequate. I need constant reminders that I am not doing this mission on my own. God said to Jeremiah, “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you.” God will rescue me. God wants me to put Him to the test when I am doubting His promises.

Our nation is comprised of people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Some know Jesus and some do not. Jesus made it clear that He came to save everybody. No one deserves Jesus more so than the next person. Jesus loves each and every individual. He wants me to transcend tradition and share His love. No need to fear. God will rescue me!



Drawing by Libby Moser



December 9

Mark 11:27-33

by Sarah Soboleski

CELEBRATE WITHOUT FEAR

When Jesus is asked for his credentials by the elders in the temple I wonder if he wants only to know that the rabbis will acknowledge John's life and death in a meaningful way. I wonder if, as he watched them huddled in the corner, whispering, not brave enough to speak the truth because it would cost them something, he felt a deep sadness? Perhaps even anger? It's their coward-ness, their timidity and their valuing self-protection over the truth that leads Him to decide they are not worth His time. I wonder how this might inform how I celebrate the Advent season. To celebrate the coming of the Christ child without fear or self-interest. Without weighing how my belief will play on Facebook, or how my decorations and holiday festivities might "come off" to the neighbors. If I might instead pour myself into what I believe without concern for anything other than the truth...the Christ child is coming.





December 10

Isaiah 40:1-11

by Dr. Alan Rodda

GOD'S VERBAL HUG

This is a passage for those whose circumstances in life lead them to long for hope and comfort. The Judeans were forced into exile in Babylon, and enslaved for 70 years. In their plight, the prophet Isaiah uttered a poetic message of comfort and hope for a new exodus – a return to their home in Jerusalem. “The glory of the Lord will be revealed and all mankind will see it”.

We now see these words as a message that God was working behind the scenes, through history, to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, setting the earthly stage for the entry of His only begotten Son. Isaiah’s words are what one writer calls “God’s verbal hug”.

When we are down, captured by our circumstance, God delights in touching us with “verbal hugs” - assurances of his care and presence through life’s ups and downs. We too welcome this fulfilled promise of a Messiah for our comfort and encouragement; “For the mouth of the Lord has spoken it”.



Drawing by Adair Purner



December 11

Psalm 27

by James Saltsman

GOD'S LOVE

In Psalm 27 King David tells how his faith in God provides the joy of his salvation, and the strength to overcome all fears. All things will pass except God. God is sufficient to overcome all of life's obstacles.

King David's scripture is as true today as it was 3000 years ago. And we have God's Son, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for

our sin and salvation, to understand how much God truly loves us.

As you go about your daily life, do not underestimate God's love for you. There is no greater love. God waits for you and will always be there for you. You can do all things through God who strengthens you when you place yourself in His hands.



Drawing by Kimmy Proffit



December 12

Acts 11:1-18

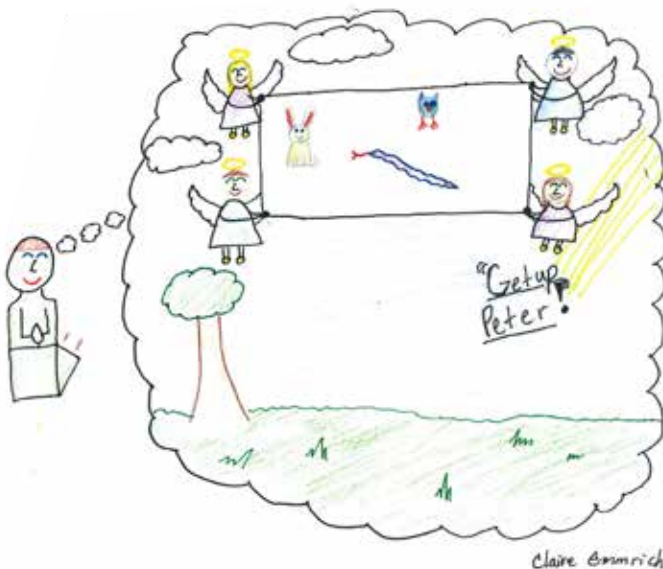
by Eric Jason

PETER'S REPORT TO THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM

These verses speak to me of the universality of the Church, God's love and the Holy Spirit

The vision of the sheet with all sorts of clean and unclean animals, birds and fishes is very clear when one is familiar with Hebrew dietary laws which were very strict and really were matters of health in the ancient times. Even food from the sea would be clean and unclean depending on bottom feeding and or scales or lack thereof.

We are struck that our God and Holy Spirit is saying go outside the community of Hebrews and that all can be baptized by the Holy Spirit and receive God's grace. Then there shall be no more difference between clean and unclean or circumcised and uncircumcised, Jew or Gentile.





December 13

Luke 1:5-17

by Linelle Dickinson

WAIT, HOPE, ANTICIPATION

At an advanced age, Zacharias and Elizabeth were told the new that they would have a child, a gift from God. They hoped and waited in anticipation. Like Advent, the good news that there is hope regardless of your situation reminds me of my grandfather whose faith helped him to wait for people to embrace God.

My maternal grandparents were missionaries in China in the 1920's and 30's. Grandfather didn't have a car, but he had a bicycle so he could ride to villages and rural areas preaching the gospel to the people. This was a dangerous time to be living in China let alone the overwhelming obstacles to teach and preach the word of God. After almost two decades, and riding his bicycle over 25,000 miles, my grandfather baptized many Chinese and helped them start a self-sustaining Christian Church.



Drawing by Justine-Marie Hearon



December 14

Psalm 126

by Jordan Goodwin

GOD'S RESTORATION



Drawing by Teddy Moser

Psalm 126 reminds us that joy and sorrow are intimately connected. Even after God pours out mercies, we must continue to pray to God for restoration and healing. As long as we are in this world, we will experience suffering. Yet, when we remember the past, we are assured of God's promise of peace and redemption. Let us wait patiently but let us act amidst the waiting.

Jesus Christ invites us into the mission of restoring the world. We are encouraged to sow seeds despite our burdens. As sowers, we become the tangible expression of God's restoration as we wait for the coming of God's glory. Therefore, let us continue to sow, remembering the sprinkles of joy amidst the pain. Let us continue to go out, whether in sorrow or in joy. For we know that God will use whatever we have to bring blessings and joy. Regardless of our circumstance, let call upon God in expectation of the fullness of life, the blessing of peace, and the joy of abundance.



December 15

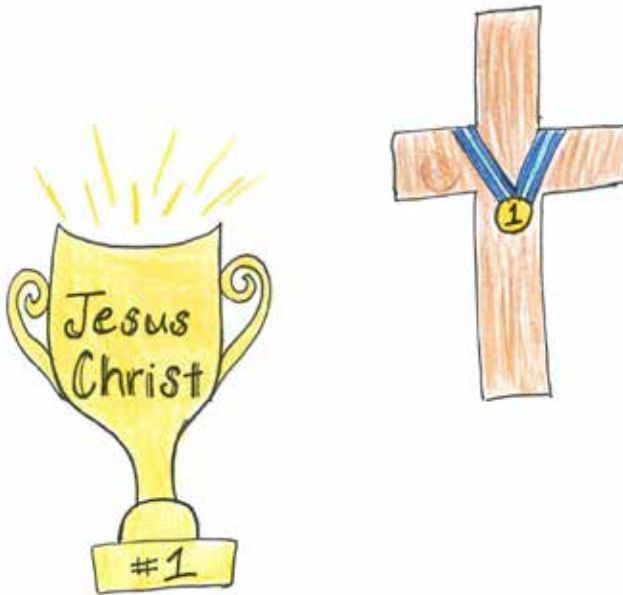
Philippians 3:12-16

by Johnathan Spivey

MAKING IT MY OWN

Growing up in the Christian faith, it is easy to just go along with family and friends – especially at Christmas time – experiencing faith in a superficial way. Paul encourages me to “make it my own,” even comparing it to the way Jesus “has made me his own.” How strong is that?

As we wonder at the deep, unconditional love that Jesus has for each of us in our brokenness and lostness, we can get a glimpse of how passionately we might grasp our faith. Mary looked at the baby boy “with blinding joy,” and may this happen to me too, as I make Christmas “my own.”



Drawing by Amy Dunn



December 16

Habakkuk 3: 13-19

by Phillip Ellis

OVERCOMING FEAR THROUGH FAITH



Drawing by Reese Nippert

Witnessing the power of the Lord and overcoming fear through faith is what these verses are about. Faced with an enemy that appeared to be an overwhelming force, Habakkuk shook with fear.

Yet, the Lord crushed the enemy and his people were delivered. Having seen the awesome power that the Lord can bring to any situation, we are reminded that even when things look bleak, famine is in full swing, and we wonder where

our next meal is coming from, the Lord will provide. In the end, our faith gives us strength and helps us find our way through challenges and to new victories.



December 17

Luke 1:46b-55

by Dr. Hmingi Browne

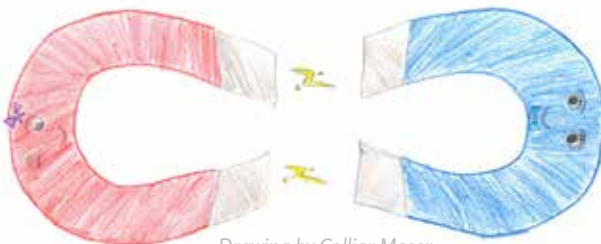
MARY'S SONG

This passage is also commonly known as the “Magnificat or Mary’s Song.” I love Mary’s opening words which honor God, “My soul magnifies the Lord...” This is an amazing and beautiful poetic declaration by Mary, a young woman of deep faith. In saying these words, Mary expresses a theology of gratitude and hope deeply rooted in her Jewish tradition.

That tradition calls her to remember what God has done in the past and, strangely, ‘what God has done in the future.’ The people of God are to give thanks for God’s help in the past and they are to thank God for future help even before God has time to give that help. The future is to be seen as a history of what God has yet to do, but surely, will do!

As we hear Mary’s words, we join her in celebrating both the past and the future. Who Mary is, is the product of what God has done in the past. The child she bears is the gift of God’s future. She, pregnant with the child, stands in a joyful, thankful, anticipatory moment. I invite us on this third Sunday of Advent to light the pink or Mary’s candle and to wait joyfully for the birth of Jesus to arrive. We too could join Mary and sing, “My soul magnifies the Lord.” Thanks be to God!

And Mary said, My Soul dose
Magnify the Lord



Drawing by Colliar Moser



December 18

Psalm 125

by Marsha Quattlebaum

THE LORD SURROUNDS HIS PEOPLE

“As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and forever.” These words bring comfort and hope. One week from today we will be celebrating Christmas.

Every December my mind returns to 1994 when our son Jon died in a hiking accident two weeks before Christmas. My husband, daughter and I knew the best we could do was to just observe or plod through the holiday. We flew to the mountains of Lake Placid, NY to do something we'd never done...ski. Our escape worked so well that we have become once a year skiers. The pain of those days has been replaced by warm memories and deep gratitude for faith, family and friends. They certainly “surrounded” us.



Drawing by C. Homeister



December 19

Acts 3:17-4:4

by Greg Knudsen

A CURE FOR THE SOUL

The book of Acts chronicles the history of the church immediately after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. This was a time of uncertainty for many, though there were those who would speak about the selfless acts of Jesus to anyone who would listen. In this account from Acts, Peter was among those who would speak of Jesus and how the prophets, Samuel and Moses, told of the coming of Jesus and how believing in him would be the only way to

save one's soul. Peter, speaking openly about this, attracted the attention of the local temple leadership who were angered by his stories of Jesus and the resurrection. He was arrested and put in jail overnight in the hopes to prevent the word from spreading. Their plan failed, as word of Jesus' resurrection spread and increased the number of believers from three to five thousand.

It is during times of fear and uncertainty that one's belief in Jesus can be most fragile. Instead of using Jesus' sacrifice as an example to adhere to, it can often be used as an excuse to provide selfish comfort for themselves. It is during times like these that believing in Jesus and following his actions are most important - knowing that doing so will cure the soul as only He can.



Drawing by Nathanael Hearon



December 20

Malachi 3:16-4:6

by June Wilson

GOD'S SALVATION



Drawing by Ava Llewellyn

Long before Christ's birth, many people were neither honoring God, nor doing his will. Others talked to each other and to God. He heard them, and before him a book of remembrance was written, naming those who feared and meditated on the Lord. God said, "They shall be mine. I will spare them as a man spares his own son that serves him."

God warned that a day would come when those who served God, and those who did not, would

be divided. He would spare his own, and dreadful consequences would be wrought on the the wicked.

The Lord declared the son of righteousness will arise with healing in his wings for those who follow God. He reminded all to remember and follow the laws of Moses. He further stated that he would send the prophet Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers and sons to each other.

In these ways he offers all who do not know, honor, and serve him an opportunity to do so and to be saved by God and be his forever.

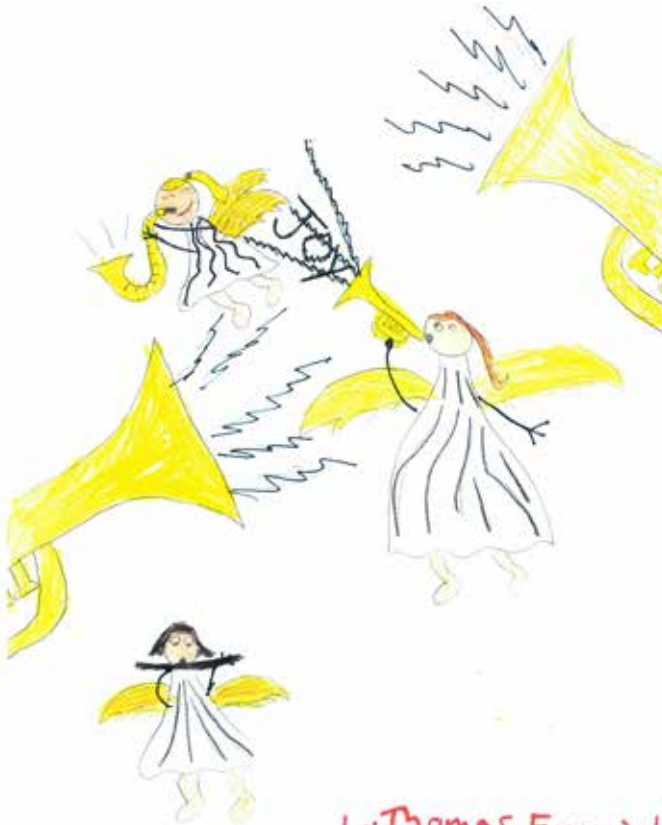


December 21

Psalm 89:1-4

BASKING IN JOY

Dear God, teach us to be happy like the Psalmist who wrote this Psalm a long time ago. Help us to get ready for the birth of Jesus singing from the best part of our hearts with great joy and happiness. Jesus is almost here. Fill us with your love and grace so that we may be able to celebrate Him on Christmas day and every day of our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.



by: Thomas Emrich



December 22

Hebrews 1:1-4

by Robert Ruse

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST

With only three days remaining until Christmas, many are caught up in traditional activities of the season. There are concerns about last minute gifts to purchase, preparing for the arrival of family and friends, along with other things unique to each of us. As Christians, however, we should, at the very least, hear something and give some thought about an inn with no vacancy, a divine pregnancy, a baby in a manger, shepherds, wise men, etc. That's why our lesson from Hebrews seems somewhat strange. However, our scripture sums up the essence of the Christmas event. Jesus is superior to the many ways God revealed his love through Moses, the prophets, and even the angels! Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the ultimate radiance of God's love and glory! May God bless each of us with this faith as we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior.



Drawing by Isabella Sanguinetti



December 23

John 7:40-52

by Julie Boeger

HOW TO KEEP AND SHARE

In John 7:40-52 Jesus has shown his healing and supernatural powers for good and shown nothing but love. He wants to help the others see the love of his Father who sent him to return them to the eternal life of love with God. Instead, he is misunderstood, judged by the powers that be and the people that he has come to save. He has believers, but they are powerless or afraid to help him and the result is the tragedy of his death on the cross.



It reminds me of the 1999 movie, *The Green Mile*. Main character,

John Coffey, a massively built black man had been convicted of the brutal murders of two young sisters. His jailer, noting his naive loving character, afraid of the dark, questions if he is truly guilty.

Although easily strong enough to kill, and blessed with supernatural powers, he has not one ounce of evil in his heart. His true demeanor is one of love and caring. By the end of the movie he comes to meet the same fate as Jesus, misunderstood, judged and put to death. His jailer and those who knew the truth, loved and believed in him, but could not save him. They wept for him because they knew he was a good man and all he had was love in his heart for others.

It's up to us to keep Jesus' love in our hearts, sharing it always and thanking him for his sacrifice.



December 24

Psalm 139

by Dr. Stephen D. McConnell

GOD SHOWS UP ANYWHERE



Drawing by Sophie Buchmeier

It was the manger part that got them, I suppose. As if it weren't enough for those poor shepherds to have an angel appear to them in the fields and the glory of the Lord shining around them and the heavenly host praising God – they had to swallow the fact that Savior of the world was somewhere lying in a manger. Let's be clear – a manger isn't what we want to make it out to be in our Christmas pageants. Oh yes, we go as far as putting together a nice little

wood Ikea like structure and fill it with fresh straw – but that's a far cry from what Mary had to lay her firstborn in. Picture the smell of cattle, nearly eaten straw, germ covered splintered wood, sheep remnants ... you get the picture. And somehow the shepherds are supposed to look for this? What parent in their right mind would lay their baby in a manger? None – except the parents of a Messiah who has come to show how far down God will go to show his love for his people. If God can show up in a manger God can show up anywhere.

I guess that includes the lowest point in our lives. The psalmist says that even if I make my bed in hell God is there. Well, that happens to all of us at one time or another. And tonight is the night that reminds us that God is already there helping us to find a way upward and onward. Thanks be to God.



December 25

Luke 2:1-20

by Laurie Haas

UNEXPECTED PLANS

I don't know about you, but I like a plan...and then I like everyone to abide by the plan! My frustration and unhappiness seems to grow in the gap between my "plan" or expectation and reality. God seems to enjoy turning the little plans we make upside down, but rather than pain or disappointment, we experience an unexpected joy! Mary did not plan to get pregnant with the Son of God, nor to birth him in a stable with stinking animals all around. Yet God blessed her in unimaginable

ways. Or how about those shepherds, who were minding their own business in the fields with their sheep? They did not plan to be the first recipients of the Good News that our Savior was born. They sprinted to the stable and were filled with such joy that they couldn't stop "glorifying and praising God for all they heard and seen." The next time our plans are turned upside down, perhaps we can pause to listen and look for the presence of God in our midst. God continues to surprise and delight us by showing up in the most unexpected places. Oh to have eyes to see and ears to hear, so that we might also glorify and praise God in the ordinary interruptions.



Drawing by Anna Buchmeier

This Little Light of Mine

Shine your Advent light over the days of December

1. Bring new article of clothing to a clothes closet.
2. Attend the Christmas Pageant
3. Place a candle in your home and light it every day and say, "Jesus said, You are the light of the world."
4. Write a Thank you note to someone.
5. Ring the bell for the Salvation Army or find a basket to donate.
6. Attend the "Music of Christmas" tonight.
7. Bring a bag of groceries to the food pantry.
8. Compliment someone.
9. Attend the *Messiah* concert.
10. Sit quietly for a half an hour.
11. Start making a list of all the things for which you are grateful.
12. Buy a cup of coffee for a stranger.
13. Keep the TV off the entire day.
14. Write a mission statement for yourself.
15. Visit someone in a nursing home.
16. Donate to a new organization.
17. Pray for world peace.
18. Reach out to someone who is grieving.
19. Read a book to a child.
20. Do someone else's chore.
21. Attend the Longest Night service.
22. Forgive someone.
23. Worship with us at Siesta Beach.
24. Worship the New Born Savior.
25. Eat, Drink and Be Merry!

Celebrate with us CHRISTMAS



Siesta Key Beach Service

12/23 @ 5 pm

Join us at 5 pm on Siesta Key beach for a casual and contemporary Christmas Eve service. Sing your favorite Christmas carols, hear scripture lessons and worship with us as the sun goes down over the water.

Family & Traditional Services

12/24 @ 5, 7, 9 & 11 pm in the Sanctuary

Our 5 pm Family service, will feature Christmas through drama, joy-filled music & candle light.

Our 7 & 9 pm traditional Christmas Eve services will include scripture readings, Christmas carols, phenomenal music, candle lighting and an inspiring message

Our 11 pm service is a time of intimate reflection as we worship together to bring in Christmas day. This service will feature carols, special music and an inspiring message.



Join us on Sunday morning: 9 & 11 am (Traditional) and 10 am (Contemporary).

Church of the Palms 3224 bee ridge road sarasota fl 34239