BEAUTIFUL SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH

2026 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Peace

FOR REAL LIFE



A collection of scripture and reflections on Peace for the Advent Season.

PEACE FOR REAL LIFE

About our Theme

At the end of the year that has been filled with broadcasts of worry, distrust and fearful messages, let us turn toward our God who says, “Do not be afraid,” and “Peace be with you.” Listen to the voices of John the Baptist, Mary, the angels, and more as they help us learn to trust God’s love and call. Listen to the voice of Jesus himself as he reminds us again that he has come to be with us forever. Peace for real life is found In Him.

About the authors

Contributors to this project are members and friends of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church. A wide range of experiences and voices are represented. Each author, upon reading the scripture of the day, has shared their thoughts based on their own life experiences and their faith journies.

How to use this resource

Take a few moments to slowly read the scripture passage. In prayerful thought, ask God what the words might mean for you. Then read the devotion written by the day’s author. Their words are personal to them but what do they say to you?

- How does this devotion connect with your own life?
- What is God saying to you through the words of the author?
- How might these words guide you in your own preparations for the coming of Christ?

Finally, spend time in prayer. Begin with the sentences provided. As you wish, you may spend time in personal prayer or journaling to complete your devotion time.

THE SEASON OF ADVENT 2026

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December 15	Luke 1:46-49	Hannah Briggs
December 16	Luke 1:50-52	Lennie Wilson
December 17	Luke 1:53-55	Louise Green
December 18	Luke 1:67-75	Becky Henry
December 19	Luke 1:76-80	Jim Kershner

PEACE MAKES ROOM FOR LOVE—WEEK 4

December 20	Matthew 1:18-23	Marilyn Lochner
December 21	Luke 2:1-5	Rick DeVore
December 22	Luke 2:6-7	Michelle Luck
December 23	Luke 2:8-12	Chaplain Ken Fouty
December 24	Luke 2:13-14	Bryant Wade
December 25	Luke 2:12-20	Pr. Niklaus Schillack

Peace Has Come

Arranged by Mary McDonald

He came to bring us peace.
He came to give us hope.
He came to bring us joy and love
through Jesus, God's Son!

He came to bring us light.
He came to set us free.
He is the Way, the Truth, the Life;
through Jesus, God's Son.

Peace has come to the world through a Savior;
born a Baby, born a King!
Peace has come, a Light in the darkness.
Peace has come to the world.

Peace For the Sake of Peace

01 November 29

Pastor Diane Greble

Isaiah 64:1-9 (NRSVUE)
O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down; the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name or attempts to take hold of you, for you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

Key Verse 4: From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him.

Blessed first day of Advent! We come to this season looking for God to break in on the world. We come to this day seeking one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit: Peace. In Hebrew the word is *shalom*; in Greek the word is *eirene*. In both languages it means completeness, wholeness and a state where nothing is missing or broken. It seems that to find this peace, we need God to pour it out and intervene. The prophet Isaiah shared the messages of God to a people who were living in broken, incomplete times: under threat of invasion and in the face of being exiled out of their homeland.

Isaiah reminded the chosen people that they were people of God. He pleaded with them to return to the Lord their God. And being truly human, people returned but then drifted again. Powerful empires rose and fell. In the seven to eight hundred years between Isaiah and Jesus's birth, invasions, exiles, hard times and better times came and went.

But God did not change or drift. God did not become “exceedingly angry” and did not “remember iniquity forever” (v. 9). God remained faithful to the world he loved. And some continued to worship and honor God along the way, putting their trust in him, even in the long waiting for the Messiah.

We give thanks for those faithful ones: for Zechariah, Elizabeth, John the Baptist, Joseph and Mary and their forebears, who kept faith in God alive from generation to generation before the birth of Christ. Jesus was born to reveal to us the merciful love of God and to bring us into the light of everlasting life. From where you are on this day, find peace in the truth that “from ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God [besides our God], who works for those who wait for him” (v. 4). Even though things seem broken and incomplete, there is perfect peace today because Jesus lives. Trust that God is pouring out and intervening even now.

We praise you, mighty God, for staying with us from age to age. We praise you, Jesus Christ, for the blessed honor of calling you Savior. We praise you, Holy Spirit, for pouring out peace and keeping us centered in all truth. We wait for your next move. Amen.

Peace For the Sake of Peace

02 November 30

Pastor Ken Greble

Micah 4:1-4 (NRSVUE)
In days to come the mountain of the Lord's temple shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

Key Verse 3: "He will judge between many people and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore."

This passage offers a hopeful picture of a world shaped by God's justice, wisdom, and peace. In today's culture—often marked by division, fear, violence, and constant competition—the image of swords becoming plowshares is especially powerful in the light of current events. It asks us to imagine using our energy and resources not to defeat others, but to build, heal, and provide.

The prophet Micah still speaks to us today and connects peace with learning: people first seek God's ways, then change how they live. The challenge to us is practical. Are we contributing to fear and conflict, or helping create communities where people can live securely, listen to one another, and flourish together through our shared vision?

Here's a purposeful takeaway: choose one conflict today—at home, online, or in your community—and take a small step toward peace. Listen before reacting, speak with respect, and use your influence to build understanding rather than deepen division.

Holy God, we pray for peace to come to earth. We pray for nations to find the courage to bring an end to war and for the leaders of the world to be transformed by your will to heal, to protect their people, nurture life and to be at peace. In Jesus's name. Amen.

Peace For the Sake of Peace

03 DECEMBER 1

Pastor Jan Marvar

Psalm 78:1-7 (NRSVUE)
Listen, dear friends, to God's truth, bend your ears to what I tell you. I'm chewing on the morsel of a proverb; I'll let you in on the sweet old truths, Stories we heard from our fathers, counsel we learned at our mother's knee. We're not keeping this to ourselves, we're passing it along to the next generation—God's fame and fortune, the marvelous things he has done. He planted a witness in Jacob, set his Word firmly in Israel, then commanded our parents to teach it to their children so the next generation would know, and all the generations to come—know the truth and tell the stories so their children can trust in God, never forget the works of God but keep his commands to the letter. Heaven forbid they should be like their parents, bullheaded and bad, afickle and faithless bunch who never stayed true to God.

Key Verses 5-7a (The Message): Listen, dear friends… God planted a witness in Jacob, set his Word firmly in Israel, then commanded our parents to teach it to their children so the next generation would know, and all the generations to come —know the truth and tell the stories so their children can trust in God, never forget the works of God but keep his commands to the letter.

How have you learned Scripture during your lifetime? Whether you are three or ninety-three, you were not born with Bible texts already in your brain, so you had to have learned them somehow through your childhood and your adulthood. Interesting to me is that the psalmist, who lived in a male-dominated society, gives credit to mothers for teaching children the words of God from, as we might say, "knee-high up." I hope you see this as encouragement to you to learn scriptures throughout life and to pass them on to both children and adult friends.

Advent is a wonderful season to introduce yourself to a new habit. Yes, I know…it is also one of the busiest seasons of the entire year! There is time, my mother taught me; always there is time to do what you want to do. She was right, of course, and she lived it out. Advent is a time not only to anticipate Christmas, but to prepare my heart and the hearts of others to look forward to that celebration with actions of love for others, not just for my own family members. It is a time to renew or begin my own prayer life,

my regular scripture reading and a regular gift of time, money, or energy to a charitable effort. It is, for me, also a time to express appreciation to God for the peace Jesus gave to us and for others' gifts of time and efforts in his name.

No matter how much I have tried, I rarely get the Ten Commandments spoken in order, but I do remember what they are after over seven decades of learning them. What I also remember is their importance in keeping me on the right path: *Loving God and loving neighbor.* Not a bad practice for living in anticipation of celebrating the birthday of Christ Jesus!

Lord, I thank you for the story of how you have loved and led your people, the ways you have disciplined and delivered, the ways you have rescued and reconciled. Give me a desire to pass on the story, sharing its truths in word and action with friends and family. Amen.

Peace For the Sake of Peace

04 DECEMBER 2

Kathy Hutson

Luke 21: 34-38 (NRSVUE)
"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the Son of Man."

Every day he was teaching in the temple, and at night he would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives, as it was called. And all the people would get up early in the morning to listen to him in the temple.

Key Verse 36: [Jesus said], "Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the Son of Man."

My father-in-law is the only one I've ever known who started reading every book by reading the ending. Well, when I was given Luke 21 verses 34-38 to write about, I thought of my father-in-law and decided that since these were the last verses of the chapter, I should read the first verses. And what did I find? Two thousand years ago, and it was like watching every night's news. There were references to wars, fights, and threats of destroying the world as we know it. And my last verses talked about not being anxious and being prepared for the things that would take place.

The BSLC Advent "Powers-That-Be" assigned me verses on the anxieties of life and patience! Me, the queen of Xanax and "getting it done now" was admonished to pray for peace and patience. Those verses made me think of my mother who had a note on the refrigerator door that said "Worry is not an act of faith." And after I broke my leg and hip in July, my surgeon told me to be patient with the healing process because it was going to take longer than the hip replacement I'd had in April because the first one hadn't included broken bones.

Think good old Saint Luke was talking to me personally? Have a little faith, Lady, in spite of all the things that are happening around the world and to you personally, take it to the Lord in prayer because one day you are going to be standing before the Son of Man. Yep, like the old hymn "Take it to the Lord in prayer."

And that's what I've been doing. Despite two hip surgeries, a couple of heart stents, and illnesses and deaths of many friends and family members, I'm fine. I'm calm and peaceful. And my prayer has been: "Lord, if this is the worst I have to face, 'Thank you for all your blessings, for good medical care, and for the prayers, notes, blanket, and food from the members of BSLC who are doing the Lord's work. And thank you for the Son of Man whose birth we remember and prepare for in this Advent season. '"

Lord thank you for my many blessings and help me remember the blessing we all receive after communion: "Peace be with you." Peace be with all of us. Amen.

Peace For the Sake of Peace

05 December 3

Tom Ingram

Psalm 85:8-9 (NRSVUE)
Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

Key Verse 8: Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.

Is “Peace for the sake of peace,” still peace? I guess you’d have to say yes. The end of war is peace, the end of an argument can be peace, the ceasing of any kind of hostilities or turmoil could be called peace, and we should be grateful for all those. However, I believe, the peace promised by God the Lord in Psalm 85 goes much, much deeper than any physical manifestation. The alpha and omega of peace was given to us through our savior, God’s Son Jesus Christ! In John 14:27 Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

Jesus gives us peace that is out of this world, the most powerful eternal peace. His peace goes beyond war, arguments, turmoil, beyond health problems, failed relationships, unfulfilled aspirations and even beyond death. I don’t mean to jump right to the end like that, but it’s true! If there’s any reason to turn away from folly and turn to Jesus it’s the promises of God: Love, Grace, Peace and certainly, Eternal Life.

Thank you, Lord for your many blessings, especially the ability to have faith in your Son Jesus Christ. Please make your presence known and be with us always. In Jesus’s name we pray, Amen!

Peace For the Sake of Peace

06 December 4

David Lochner

Luke 1:5-20 (NRSVUE)

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was descended from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years. Once when he was serving as priest before God during his section's turn of duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to offer incense. Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified, and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I know that this will happen? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

Key Verse 18 (NRSV): Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years"?

Sometimes I wonder about the elusive nature of God's peace—especially in these turbulent times. As a believer, I whole-heartedly embrace the concept of His peace, but I don't always experience it. My strong interest in keeping track of what is going on in our world certainly doesn't help! I wonder, where and when I can more consistently find this ultimate form of peace—God's peace within me?

Zechariah questioned the validity of the miraculous message delivered to him by the angel Gabriel in the Temple's Sanctuary of the Lord. Can you even imagine?!! He asked: "How can I be sure this will happen?" What happened next has always puzzled me. In my own personal framing, I assumed that God simply struck him mute as punishment for his lack of faith. But why this kind of punishment?

Maybe God's peace can best be found in the silence. Zechariah lived this silence for nine months or so. And by the end of this quiet period, his soul was on fire. After the baby was born, he silently but strongly confirmed his naming, as God (through Gabriel) commanded, and his speech was immediately restored. What happened next deserves additional attention. Zechariah praised God and immediately proclaimed a prophesy of the coming of our Messiah, and the role that his son John would play to prepare the way for him (Luke 1: 67-80). Maybe Zechariah's season of silence wasn't so much a punishment as it was an opportunity. Much like Mary's reaction to Gabriel's message to her in her beautiful Magnificat, Zechariah's heart was on fire, and he proclaimed God's word in a perfect and obedient burst of renewed faith.

All this, after a long period of silence. A worthwhile and fruitful silence. A silence in which he could truly hear what God was asking him to do.

Those who know me know that I can sometimes be, shall I say, prone to a certain lack of economy with words (witness the length of this devotion!). Upon reflection, I have realized that my own sense of peace isn't often experienced while I am talking or thinking about talking. It most often happens in my silence.

This is never more true for me than in the season of Advent. With Advent's wonderful distractions and heightened activity, it is that much harder to achieve. When I do find or create those moments of silence, I am bathed in joyous and profoundly hopeful Christmas peace. In the silence.

Heavenly Father, help us to actively listen for and experience your peace this Advent season, through the power of your spirit. Amen!

Peace For the Sake of Peace

07 December 5 Pastor Gordon Peterson

Luke 1:21-25 (NRSVUE)
Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. When his time of service was ended, he returned to his home. After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, "This is what the Lord has done for me in this time, when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."

Key Verses 21-22 (NRSV): "Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak."

So the theme of this devotion is all about peace. Peace today is in really short supply as we all know from the headlines. Yet, Advent is a great time to hear about peace. Advent is a time to wait as we look for God who comes to be with us. There is no greater source of peace than this event in our world.

The key verse tells us that the crowd was concerned Zechariah was taking too long to fulfill his priestly duty. When Zechariah finished his duty, he was unable to speak. The crowd thought he had seen a vision as the cause of his condition. Again, the theme is peace. The idea of a member of the clergy being of few words might bring a sense of peace. Perhaps, Elizabeth (Zechariah's wife) was enjoying a time of peace and quiet at home. Yet, the true source of peace came from the working of God in the background.

Zechariah did see a vision. The angel Gabriel appeared and announced that Zechariah and Elizabeth were going to have a child. Zechariah was struck silent for his refusal to believe. Elizabeth rejoiced that she was no longer childless (a source of public disrespect in those days). The couple prayed for many years into their old age but peace didn't come with the pregnancy alone. This child would grow up to become John

the Baptist. He would prepare the way for the coming of God to be with us in Jesus. Peace comes in the working of God to bring salvation to this sorry world.

We say in the Lord's Prayer, "…thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven…" The prayer is not trying to force God to submit to our aspirations. The prayer is to welcome God's will to be done among us and this world. Yes, Zechariah and Elizabeth received the goal of their prayers but they also gained so much more, the will of God born to them and us. John the Baptist prepared the way for the coming of the Prince of Peace.

The season of Advent allows us to wait and watch for the will of God to be born to us, Jesus Christ who is the bearer of salvation and peace for us and all of creation.

Lord, peace that is long and complete is so badly needed. Help us to seek (…thy will be done…) as we prepare for your birth among us. Bring us your peace. Amen.

PEACE THAT OPENS THE DOOR TO HOPE

Sing Alleluia! Christ Will Come

Arranged by Mary McDonald

O come, Thou long-expected Jesus;
born to set us free.
From fears and sins release us.
Let us find our rest in Thee.

Thou, Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of earth Thou art;
desire of ev'ry nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,
born a Child, 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!

Sing alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, Christ will come!
Alleluia, sing alleluia, alleluia. Christ will come!

Peace that opens the door to hope

08 December 6 Ted George

Isaiah 40:1-5 (NRSVUE)
Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Key Verses 4-5: "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Isaiah 40 begins *"Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid…"*

Surely these words are meant to bring peace to God's people, and they remind us that our penalty has been paid, not by us but by Jesus Christ our savior, if we only turn to him with faith and repentance. In today's tumultuous and troubled world, we all surely want to be comforted and reminded that we are God's people and He will care for us.

Then in verses 3-5 come the well-known words:

3 A voice cries out:
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
4 Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

5 *Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,*
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

These familiar words call to mind Jesus’s procession into Jerusalem cheered by the crowd, but also that the glory of the Lord was not truly revealed until the third day after His death on the cross, when He rose from the dead. We recall that He has been with his people, tending his sheep, through times of great joy and times of great sorrow, from then until now. As we prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus into the world, we are filled with hope for the future, praying.

Come to us Lord Jesus, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace! Amen.

Peace that opens the door to hope

09 December 7

Joan Hemke

Isaiah 40:10-11 (NRSVUE)
See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom and gently lead the mother sheep.

Key Verse 11: "He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom and gently lead the mother sheep."

When you read this Isaiah passage, ponder these action words: FEED, GATHER, CARRY, LEAD. These are simple words, but also very dynamic concepts when we consider our spiritual life and journey.

- The Lord has FED us physically during our lives, but especially in a dynamic way through his Word and the Lord's Supper.
- Throughout life he has GATHERED us in his arms to give the support of his presence and counsel.
- The Lord has CARRIED us in his bosom when he has bestowed on us his comfort and encouragement, and protection.
- Whereas, he has gently LED, especially the mother sheep, which encompasses all nurturing people, so they can be nurturers.

The verse specifically speaks about three separate groups: the FLOCK, the LAMBS, and then the MOTHER SHEEP.

I envision the flock to stand for the entire congregation, which the Lord said he will feed. It also references the lambs, which I see as the young ones, whom he will gather in his arms and carry in his bosom. In the end, it especially mentions the mother sheep, whom he will lead; how comforting and encouraging for all followers of the Savior.

All the images in Isaiah 40:11are heartwarming, supportive, and reassuring. The Lord is present in our lives in every way and at every moment. The Good Shepherd will watch over, guide, direct, support, and nurture his entire flock from birth through old age. From every up and every down moment in our lives, the shepherd is our guide and stay. His rod and his staff comforts and leads us from birth to life eternal.

Lord, thank you for being our Good Shepherd, who feeds, gathers, carries, and leads us every day of our lives. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Peace that opens the door to hope

10 December 8 Paul Coughenour

2 Peter 3:8-9 (NRSVUE)
But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.

Key Verse 8: "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day."

This reading must have been assigned to me on purpose. By someone who knows me well. I am impatient by nature. With long lines. Actually, with any lines. With traffic jams. With anything that slows down what I am trying to accomplish. And yes, at times, I am impatient with God. I have even asked in our bible study why, with so many people in such great need in the world, Jesus has not yet returned to clean things up? We clearly need him, yet he waits.

These verses in 2 Peter speak to this issue. They tell us that God does not operate within time as we understand it. God exists outside of time. Time is not linear for God as it is for us humans. If a thousand years may be like a single day to God, as explained in 2 Peter 3:8, then a year of God's time equals 365,000 years for mere mortals! In turn, three years of God's time translates to one million years in human time, known as a mega-annum in geology. Put into this perspective, we can begin to understand that God may be moving at a vastly different pace than we might expect or prefer.

So yes, let us be more patient. Let us view the delays and drawbacks of our daily lives not by our own self-centered timetables, but with hearts filled with patience, remembering that God is patient with us. He awaits our repentance with his arms open wide to welcome us into his loving embrace. God's love never wavers or fades; it is always there when we are ready. If a beloved grandparent's hug can envelop a child with warmth, love, and peace, imagine how much greater an embrace by the Father Almighty will be. I can't wait! That sounds impatient, I admit, but I write those words

with a smile and the knowledge that God awaits us with his promise of salvation. That knowledge allows a sense of peace and patience to wash over my soul. I pray that it be so for you, too.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for being our Good Shepherd, who feeds, gathers, carries, and leads us every day of our lives. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Peace that opens the door to hope

11 December 9

Jan Haefner

2 Peter 3:14-15a (NRSVUE)
Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him.

Key Verses 14-15a (NIV): "So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation…."

As I sit here at my computer, the strains of amplified music are coming up from the basement below me as my husband and his guitar playing comrade are enjoying a rock-and-roll jam session. Not exactly a peaceful setting for writing a devotion about peace, is it? But maybe that's fitting because usually the times we most need peace are when we're bombarded by the noise, chaos, and busyness of life.

The word peace appears around 400 times in the Bible. It's a familiar concept and promise. We're familiar with many of them. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God," "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you," "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your minds in Christ Jesus." We offer the sign of the peace to each other every Sunday. We send Christmas cards which say, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will to men."

Peace. What is it? How do we acquire it? Is it even attainable? The world would probably say no. Yet, it is a fruit of God's Spirit. How do we find peace in our day to day lives? I wish I could say that I always experience the peace of God, but I don't. There have been many times when I've faced difficult circumstances and felt anything but peaceful. Yet, God is always there. I can find peace in the knowledge and assurance that God is in control. I may not know when, where, why, or how he will act, but I know He will. More than 20 years ago, when my late husband was hospitalized in the last stages of cancer, it was a tumultuous time. One day, his oncologist met me in the hallway outside his room and, almost in tears herself, asked, "How are you able to remain calm and at peace when your husband is so ill?" I hesitated for a moment, then

answered her, saying “It’s only by the grace of God.” He is the peace-giver. Psalm 29:11 says, “May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!” Praise to you, Lord God!

Prince of Peace, I am often troubled with burdens in my own life, as well as with those around me. Help me to know that your peace is with me, more than I can ever ask for or understand. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

Peace that opens the door to hope

12 December 10

Annette George

Mark 1:1-4 (NRSVUE)
The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight,' " so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Key Verses 2-3 (NIV): "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way, a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

Isn't it wonderful to read that in the beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ is the announcement that God has done the preparation for the arrival of the Savior? Not only that, but God had already chosen a time and a person for more than 400 years before John the Baptist appeared in the desert preaching God's message. Indeed, Orthodox Christians call John the Forerunner—he who proceeds Christ to prepare the way for Christ's public ministry.

We can acquire peace through God's assurance that he has already done the work to bring us back to an intimate relationship with him. God is always the one who reaches out first. John the Baptist's message is a simple. Baptizing people in the Jordan River was an outward sign of the inward purification that had already taken place when they confessed their sins. We too should look at our lives and ask the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that we can figure out as best we can where we have hurt God, others, and yes, even ourselves, and repent. Repentance is not merely feeling sorry for our sins, but a sincere (if imperfect) attempt to reorder our lives so that they replace God's love in all of our thoughts and actions. Repentance and the prayerful reflection that goes along with it are how we can make a straight path through the chaos, confusion, and moral ambiguities of our lives directly to the manger where Christ awaits us.

Dear Lord, may this Advent be a time in which we find trust in your promises and hope through the birth of your Son, our Savior Jesus. Amen.

Peace that opens the door to hope

13 December 11

Gail Bufalini

Luke 1:26-33 (NRSVUE)
In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Key Verses 28-30: "And [the angel Gabriel] came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' But [Mary] was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

"Greetings favored one. The Lord is with you." Luke 1:26

Mary was interrupted by an angel! Our lives are interrupted often.

- A stranger approaches you at the supermarket—"Hello there. You have just been selected for. . ."
- Robo call on your cell: "You have been randomly selected to receive a free . . ."
- Doorbell rings. You open the door and say you are not interested. OR You open the door and listen to what the kind stranger has to say . . .

"**But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be." Luke1:29**

Mary experienced major emotions! What do we do with our feelings when interrupted?

- Did the stranger in the supermarket work there? Was this some kind of joke? Who else heard this man? What kind of approach was this?

- Did the caller really want to talk to her? How did he get her number? What has this got to do with her?
- The man approached the front door, he could see she was there. Hesitantly and with much trepidation, she stepped onto the porch.

"The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.'" Luke 1:29

What did that mean? She had never seen an angel before. Is this real? How do I know this is really an angel? Why me? Why do I find favor with God?

Mary must have made a quick evaluation of the situation. The light surrounded the angel. The kindness in the voice, brightness and demeanor of the angel. The angel could see Mary's fear and Mary realized the angel was real. She could not ignore the angel and the message brought to her. Although Mary was excited, she was also calm and peaceful. She was given the grace to accept the situation and do what God was asking of her. Those few moments would be life changing for Mary and the world.

Who are the angels in our lives? Is it the kind man who helps you reach the tallest shelf in the supermarket to get what is out of your reach? Is it the thoughtful neighbor who brings your trashcans to your garage when you come home late from visiting your spouse in the hospital? Is it the friendly person at the coffee counter who remembers how you like your coffee. Is it the person who intuitively recognizes someone in need?

Like Mary we have angels in our lives and we can be angels to others, too. ("The better angels of our nature," as said by Abraham Lincoln in his first inaugural address.) We can show kindness to that stranger who is having a bad day. We can say "hello" to the person walking towards us on the street. Being an angel can be life-changing for you, too, a gift to both the giver and the receiver. The angel received the honor of sharing God's message for Mary. And her life was forever changed by the privilege of being the mother of God!

King of Peace, we humbly ask that you give each of us your peace today. We deeply long for your peace that surpasses our understanding. Amen.

Peace that opens the door to hope

14

December 12

Karen Ingram

Luke 1:34-38 (NRSVUE)

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Key Verse 34: "Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'"

Shock, amazement, panic…I know that all of us have had moments in our lives when we were given an assignment, a verdict, or perhaps just an announcement that completely rocked our world. Although it may not have been delivered by an angel, the results were probably very much the same…"Why Me?"

Mary is described as a faithful woman of God who was "chosen" to do the impossible—to conceive a child even though she was a virgin, and to raise that child knowing that His actions and purpose would be different from those of other children.

What an amazing example Mary gave us when she accepted her calling to be the Mother of the "Son of the Most High." Mary was given the assurance that "no word from God will ever fail" which must have given her peace in an otherwise overwhelming situation. As baffling as this encounter must have been, she responded with faith—"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."

Just like Mary, we are freely given the peace that comes from God's strength and guidance as we face the challenges of this world. If we are truly His servants, we should tackle every seemingly impossible situation knowing that God is in control—and He is a God who loves us and is there in every idea, every step, and every decision we make in our lives.

The peace that comes from our Heavenly Father when the challenges are overwhelming should not cause shock or panic, it should result in comfort and hope. We can do all things with God. All we have to do is love Him, trust Him, and do His work, just like Mary did.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the guidance that provides peace when I am faced with challenges that are not expected. Continue to direct me when I am lost, encourage me when I feel alone in my life, and help me to be your servant in the care of others. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

O Little Bethlehem-town

O little town of Betha-le-hem,
how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep,
the silent stars go by.
Yet in the dark streets shineth
the everlasting Light.
The hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary,
and gathered all above;
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars together,
proclaim the holy birth;
and praises sing to God the King,
and peace to all on earth!

O holy Child of Betha-le-hem,
descend to us, we pray.
Cast out our sin, and enter in.
Be born in us today!
We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell.
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord, Immanuel!

O little Bethlehemtown
with angels singing "Alleluia!" all around.
A shining star from heaven shown down
on the Baby born in Bethlehemtown.

Peace leads the way to joy

15 December 13

Lori Calbeck

Luke 1:39-45 (NRSVUE)
In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Key Verses 41-42 (NIV): "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!'"

These verses bring back happy memories of carrying my own children and all the women I cared for as a midwife. There are definitely feelings of joy and wonder that God has given us the gift of a child.

Mary and Elizabeth must have been experiencing these feelings and sharing them with each other. Elizabeth had waited a long time to have a child and must have been in awe of the gift God had given her. Mary was very young and chosen to be the mother of our Savior. Just as women do today, they shared and supported each other in their unique circumstances, trusting God. They were both blessed by God with very special children: Jesus and John.

The last verse reminds me we are to trust God with his plan for our lives. Sometimes these plans can be revealed in a timely way and other times we need to patiently wait for plans to come to be. The Israelites waited a very long time for the Messiah, just as Elizabeth waited. Each time I see God's work around me, I too am filled with joy.

Dear God, be with us during this Advent season as we look to see how you touch our lives and use us according to your plans. May we be filled with joy and peace to contemplate your many blessings. Amen.

Peace leads the way to joy

16 December 14

Katie Wiese

Luke 1:43-45 (NRSVUE)
And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Key Verses 44-45 (NIV): "As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her."

We live in a culture that worships control. From a young age, we are taught a simple equation: do the right thing, work hard, and good outcomes will follow. But life often shatters that illusion, leaving us stranded in situations where we have no control at all.

Many women know the pure joy of feeling a baby flutter and kick inside them. Others know the silent heartbreak of infertility or pregnancy loss—and many have carried the weight of both.

After two smooth, uneventful pregnancies, I suffered an ectopic pregnancy followed by repeated miscarriages. Medical tests and theories yielded no answers. Though my husband and I were deeply grateful for our two healthy daughters, our desire to grow our family remained strong. Yet with every positive test, hope was immediately eclipsed by fear: *How will this time be any different?*

When my doctor proposed a new path forward, we decided to try again, though I was too terrified to hope. On Easter Sunday, I knelt at the altar rail and surrendered my fear, praying simply for a healthy pregnancy. In that moment, a quiet peace washed over me, and right then, I felt the first faint flutter of life. Months later, we welcomed a healthy baby boy, followed later by another daughter.

In Scripture, Elizabeth saw her long-awaited dream fulfilled through quiet trust. Mary received a daunting, overwhelming calling and found peace through her faith. Giving up control runs counter to human nature, but true peace comes when we release our grip and trust in a promise far bigger than our own ability to fix things.

Dear Lord, help me walk in the footsteps of Elizabeth and Mary. Teach me to place my full trust in You so that I may discover true peace in my heart. Amen.

Peace leads the way to joy

17

December 15

Hannah Briggs

Luke 1:46-49 (NRSVUE)
And Mary said,"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name;

Key Verses 46-48 (NIV): "And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.'"

As I sit and reflect on this scripture and compare it to today's world, I am reminded that the Lord our Savior has been with us all, whether in the quiet or in the midst of it all, his name will be glorified, joyous and proclaimed. God's voice is not just heard, but shown by sending his only son. In every generation that is now and will be to come, his name is spoken and leads us onto joyous paths. We can glorify him in various ways: scripture reading, praying, serving, listening and following him. Mary states, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Our praises serve our three-in-one; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In life, there are so many moments where we get so caught up in what we are expected to do and every standard we are expected to follow in order to get through every day. We are reminded by the deep joy in Mary's heart, that we can serve and glorify God in all ways, knowing it will be passed down to generations to come. We are but humble servants of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and we are the generation that is now. In this truth there is peace that is promised to us. Continue to serve and praise him now and forever.

Heavenly Father, I come before you today and ask you to remind us of your generational promises and help us to continuously praise you in the joy that you provide through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. No matter where we are in life or in the years to come, may we praise you and serve you. In Jesus's name we pray, Amen.

Peace leads the way to joy

18

December 16

Lennie Wilson

Luke 1:50-52 (NRSVUE)
Indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly;

Key Verses 50-52 (NIV): [Mary said,] "[God's] mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered the proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble."

O Lord Almighty, your mercy surrounds us. In our reverence, please help us to be humble. Enrich those thirsting for your mercy through their searching, meditating and praying.

By sitting with our Lord, being quiet, and listening to him, may he enhance our wisdom in understanding his mercy. May we better internalize the peace, joy and contentment there is in just being with our Lord. There is peace in knowing that God's mercy is always with us, in us, and surrounding us.

O merciful God, please help us take time to rest in your presence and receive your mercy, realizing our blessings in your world. Humbly respecting your might and accepting your mercy. Amen.

Peace leads the way to joy

19 December 17

Louise Green

Luke 1:53-55 (NRSVUE)
"He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Key Verses 53-55 (NIV): [Mary said,] "God has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."

It sounds kind of counter-intuitive to think of hungry people as filled, and rich people as empty. But I believe God, through Mary and Luke, was speaking of spiritual filling. I have known people with every material advantage—a good home, perhaps a second home, nice cars, all the adult toys, financial security. And yet they are haunted by the feeling that it is never enough. They never seem fulfilled or at peace. This is because they are relying on the fleeting security that their own successes and accomplishments provide. They don't recognize their need for a relationship with God, which is the only thing that each of us truly needs.

And I have met people who were rather destitute, but in their need they turned to God, and developed a rich faith life. They were given the peace of knowing God is always on their side, that He will provide, and that He will fulfill His promises. It has been inspiring to me to watch how the importance of a life grounded in God can change a person's perspective and consequently the peace and joy they experience.

Lord God, I pray that each person who enters or engages with Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church will develop a life-long faith and trust in you, the habits of prayer and Bible study that allow us to know you, and the will to be obedient to you, thereby entering into your peace. Amen.

Peace leads the way to joy

20 December 18

Becky Henry

Luke 1:67-75 (NRSVUE)
Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:
"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his child David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness in his presence all our days.

Key Verses 68-70 (NIV): [Zechariah prophesied,] "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago)…."

There are times we pray for something, wait for it, and eventually wonder if the answer is ever going to come. Zechariah was well beyond the age when he thought a prayer could possibly be fulfilled, yet God answered it.

When I look at my life, I can see that God is writing a much longer story than I could have ever imagined. There were times when faith was in the back of my mind—knowing its importance but not making it a focus. Yet God never stopped working. Zechariah's song reminds me that sometimes we understand God's faithfulness best when we look back. Often, we may only see the waiting, the unanswered prayers, the disappointment, or the years that don't look anything like we expected. But God sees the entire story.

Zechariah couldn't see how his family's story fit into God's much bigger plan. There are things in my own life that I may not understand yet. Why did my dad die with so many years left to share his love? Why did my 47-year-old husband have a life-altering heart attack? Am I being the best mother for my girls? There are prayers I am still waiting to

see answered. Will he heal completely? How will our daily lives continue changing? What is next for all four of us? There are circumstances that don't make sense from where I am standing.

After all those years of waiting, Zechariah was able to praise God for what He had done and for what He was still doing.

I don't want to only recognize God when I can see the answer. I want to recognize Him while we are waiting, during ordinary days, through unexpected turns, and in the parts of my story that don't make sense yet. When I look back at where my husband, my family, and I have been and where God has brought us, I can see things I couldn't see at the time. God was there. And He is still writing a story much bigger than I know. I am so thankful I still have my husband, that my girls still have their father, and that we can continue to live, love, and grow through many more chapters of God's story together.

God, thank You for being faithful even when I don't understand what You are doing. Help me remember the ways You have worked in my life, especially during times when I couldn't see the bigger picture. Thank You for the people You have placed in my life. Give me the faith to praise You not only when I see the answer, but while I am still waiting for it. Amen.

Peace leads the way to joy

21 December 19

Jim Kershner

Luke 1:76-80 (NRSVUE)
"*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. Because of the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.*

Key Verse 76-78a (NIV): [Zechariah proclaimed to his son, John,] "And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God…."

When I was informed that this year's Devotionals will reflect readings having the theme of "Peace," I was immediately reminded of the devotional that I composed for last year's edition, which reflected a section of Micah ending in the passage "And he will be our peace." I suggested then that that promise about Jesus should be our armor against the prevailing internal divisions, external threats and accelerating social and technological changes.

Not much has changed in our world in the past year, and we must still hold tight to that promise in Micah—but is "holding tight" really all we need to give us, as individuals, peace? After reading the passage from Luke above, I'm not so sure: waiting on the fulfillment of promises might not be enough. Rather, for me at least, peace requires immersion in Christ's peace through active participation in it, just as it was with John: "you will go before the Lord"; "you will prepare the way"; "you will give his people the knowledge of salvation"—calls to action not just for John, but also, I think, for us.

God of all time, we await you and need you. Give us patience and help us to trust in your timing and continue to do your work on earth as we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus." Amen.

PEACE MAKES ROOM FOR LOVE

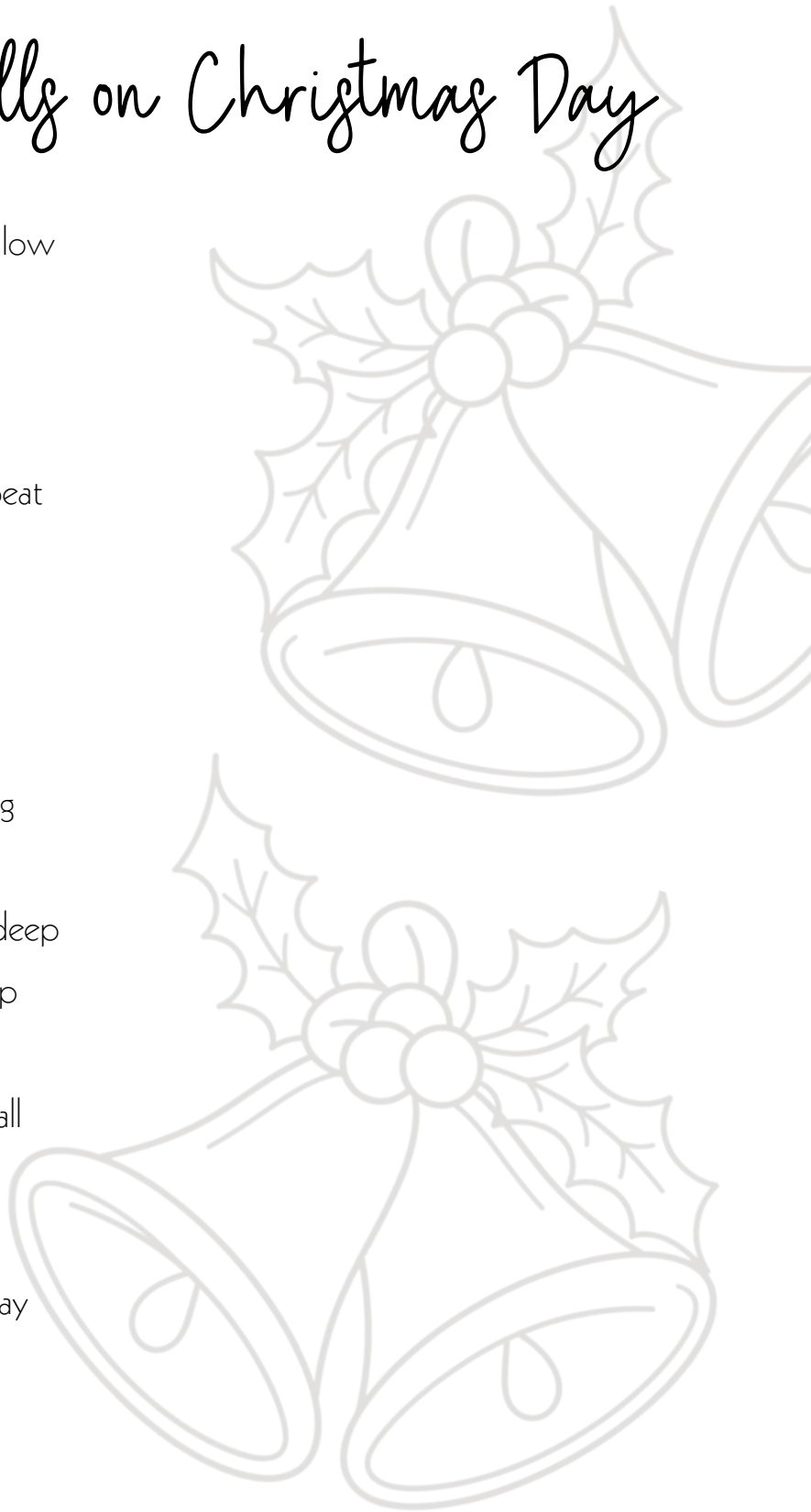
I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

lyrics by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play
And mild and sweet their songs repeat
Of peace on Earth, good will to all

And in despair I bowed my head
"There is no peace on Earth, " I said
For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on Earth, good will to all
Then rang the bells more loud and deep
God is not dead, nor does He sleep
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on Earth, good will to all

Then ringing, singing on its way
The world revolved from night to day
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime
Of peace on Earth, good will to all



Peace makes room for love

22 December 20

Marilyn Lochner

Matthew 1:18-23 (NRSVUE)
Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

Key Verses 20-21 (NIV): "But after [Joseph] had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'"

All I have to say is "Are you kidding me?" Can any of us imagine this happening to us? Could we be as courageous as Joseph, as faith-filled, as trusting?

In Joseph's time the Holy Spirit was understood not as a distinct third "person" in a Trinity, but as **God's dynamic, active presence and creative power in the world**. So it is a little bit easier to understand that He might speak through dreams and visions.

Once Joseph let go of his doubt and believed this message was truly from God, he was obedient. When I think of this situation and how difficult it would be as a man to embrace this message and obey God, I also think about the peace he would have felt once he did. God is giving Joseph a clear direction. How I wish sometimes the angel of the Lord would come to me in the middle of the night with clear directions!

What do I hear God saying in this scripture? Open your heart, dare to trust me, I know you, you are my child and I love you! I truly believe the only way we can have peace in

this lifetime is to trust and obey God.

I have recently completed a Bible study based mostly on Isaiah. It covers five benefits God intends for every one of His children to enjoy:

1. to know God and believe Him
2. to glorify God
3. to find satisfaction in God
4. to experience God's peace
5. to enjoy God's presence

Ultimately, Joseph's quiet obedience proves that when we choose to believe and honor God in the dark, we awaken to the fullness of His presence and the depth of His peace.

Loving God, help us find our way. Help us to understand how much you love us and help us to trust you in everything we do. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Peace makes room for love

23 December 21

Linda Miller

Luke 2:1-5 (NRSVUE)
In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

Key Verses 1-3 (NIV): "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register."

How exciting to once again visit this passage of scripture where God's plan of salvation for all begins to unfold more fully. Yes, the Savior of the world is to be delivered for all who want to take up His cross and follow him. Joseph and Mary obediently and courageously left their home in Galilee to travel about 90 miles. Can you imagine how difficult this must have been with Mary so far along in her pregnancy? Their destination was the small town of Bethlehem, as foretold in Micah 5:2.

As Jesus once said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." And so, the betrothed couple began their journey to register for the census. God's plan for salvation was in motion, leading up to the miraculous birth of His Son, Jesus, name above all names! The One who promises believers an everlasting home with Him.

So we too can travel our often difficult journey through life with the security and protection of dual citizenship. We are citizens of this earth, with responsibilities and obligations just as Joseph and Mary had. But through our faith in Jesus, we are also citizens of heaven, with the promise of everlasting life.

I have so often heard Pastor Hemke share that we live with one foot on earth and one

foot in heaven. What a wonderful way to think about our dual citizenship.

Yes, we work hard in this life to know **who** we are to ourselves and to others. That can be exhausting. There are so many things that define us: our family, ancestry, personal traits and gifts, our occupations, etc. But our dual citizenship makes us realize we can relax and concentrate more on **whose** we are. We are children of the Most High God.

This Jesus who was born so humbly on a starry night in a small town is ours to follow boldly on this earth and into our next forever home. We have truly felt the precious blessing of His love for us, a love that is today and forever.

So, citizens of the earth, hold on to this Jesus with one hand and use the other to give Him away to another. May we treasure our faith and strive for a purposeful life now until we reach our final eternal home in heaven.

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for all your blessings that you have so freely given to me and all of us on our earthly journey. Continue to give each of us the strength that we need to share your plan of salvation with others. Help us to be grateful people who enjoy our home here on earth. Let us also rejoice in the knowledge that a future home has already been beautifully prepared for us. And so we say, "Amen."

Peace makes room for love

24 December 22

Michelle Luck

Luke 2:6-7 (NRSVUE)
While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

Key Verses 6-7 (NIV): "While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 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."

For years I haven't liked Christmas. My life is normally pretty busy. I work, raise kids, attend church, volunteer, love my crafting hobbies and occasionally perform housework. I'm busy because I feel all of these activities are part of the Lord's path for me.

But then November hits. Suddenly the preparation for Christmas begins and my normally busy life starts to feel downright chaotic. There are decorations that need to come out, cookies to bake, Santa to see, gifts for different exchanges, greeting cards, concerts and so much shopping. I feel overwhelmed and crabby. And then I feel guilty because I am the person complaining about a time when most people are so joyous. It is time to celebrate the birth of Jesus and I am short with my family while they decide which gift exchange game we should play.

As soon as I am sure I am an awful person, typically on Christmas night, a calm comes over me. The time for preparation is done, tasks either happened or they didn't, presents are being unwrapped or unbagged and it's just those I love around me. I have come to look forward to this peace and the love that now can truly fill me. All of the other busy-ness has been moved aside for Christmas preparations and now that they are complete, I have room to cherish those I love. At that time, it is easy to see that this is the next step in the Lord's path for me.

In Luke 2:6-7, I imagine Mary in the same frame of mind. She was traveling, heavily

pregnant with the Son of God growing inside her and she had no idea where they would stay. I can imagine when she finally found herself in a stable, surrounded by animals, she felt safe. She could simply concentrate on loving baby Jesus. The peace after so much chaos gives way to love.

Dear Lord, Help me to stay calm through the Christmas preparations, knowing that truly the most important part of the season is love. Amen.

Peace makes room for love

25 December 23

Chaplain Ken Fouty

Luke 2:8-12 (NRSVUE)
Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

Key Verses 8-10 (NIV): "And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.'"

The shepherds were standing watch.

That part of the Christmas story means something different to me now. As a Navy chaplain, I live and serve among people who understand watches: long hours, dark spaces, quiet vigilance, and the responsibility of guarding something entrusted to you. The shepherds knew that world. They were ordinary people doing necessary work while most others slept.

Then God interrupted their watch.

The first words from heaven were not "Try harder," "Be stronger," or "Get yourself together." They were, "Do not be afraid." God knew their fear before they spoke it and met them in the middle of it.

That is where I increasingly find God's peace: not in the absence of uncertainty, but in the presence of Christ within it. Some days I feel like the faithful disciple I aspire to be. Other days, if I am honest, I am more of a wanderer: tired, uncertain, and trying to find my footing while caring for people who are carrying burdens of their own. Yet the good

news of Christmas is that Christ does not wait for us to become steady before coming near.

The shepherds were sent to find a Savior, but the sign was not a throne, a sword, or a display of earthly power. It was a vulnerable child lying in a manger. God's strength appeared as love willing to draw near.

That kind of peace changes how we stand watch over one another. It invites us to notice the lonely person, listen without rushing to repair, forgive before resentment takes command, and remain present when someone's darkness cannot be quickly explained away. Peace makes room for love because peace frees us from having to protect ourselves from one another.

Whether we stand watch in a field, aboard a ship, beside a hospital bed, or within a restless home, the message remains, do not be afraid. God has entered the night. Love is here.

God of every watch, meet us in the darkness and steady us when we wander. Fill us with the peace of Christ and teach us to make room for your love by faithfully watching over one another. Amen.

Peace makes room for love

26 December 24

Bryant Wade

Luke 2:13-14 (NRSVUE)
And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

Key Verses 13-14 (NIV): "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.'"

It's hard for me to imagine a boisterous army of angels embodying peace. I would have been terrified at the sight. But, perhaps like the shepherds, I would have quickly felt the reassurance of God's love through His incredible gift of Jesus. A gift not given to just a few, but given to all of those who believe. A gift of peace.

Peace reminds me of a quiet calmness. But peaceful feelings can be fleeting. What seems sure is not always so sure. What seems stable is not always so stable. And what seems predictable is not always so predictable. But conflicted experiences are one of the greatest blessings of faith. With the challenge, we can feel and appreciate God's guidance. With the setbacks, we can feel and cherish God's perseverance.

Life's challenges allow us to truly feel God's presence. When the unpredictable occurs, faith enables us to question human perspectives and fully trust God. When we let go, we can fully feel God's peace.

Dear Lord, thank you for always being with me in my times of need. Thank you for granting me peace so that I may appreciate the blessings of life. Please continue to guide me on this journey and help me be the person you intended. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Peace makes room for love

27 December 25 The Rev. Dr. Niklaus Schillack

Luke 2:12-20 (NRSVUE)
This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

Key Verse 20: The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

"The Return" In our nativity scenes, the shepherds stay beside the manger. We arrange them around Jesus, and there they remain throughout the whole season of Christmas. Yet Luke's recounting of the first Christmas continued beyond the manger. After the shepherds saw Jesus and shared what they had heard from the angels, they returned.

I find myself wondering about that return. They returned to the fields, the flocks, and the familiar responsibilities. They carried the good news into places they already knew, glorifying and praising God along the way. Perhaps that is where this Advent journey leads us as well.

Throughout this booklet, people connected with Beautiful Savior have shared reflections on God's peace. We have received their words, considered their experiences, and explored God's gift of peace for our daily lives. And so today, we celebrate the birth of Jesus and the peace God has brought among us.

Then we return to our familiar places. For some of us, that means returning to work after Christmas break and resuming a familiar commute along Woodward or Telegraph or I-75. For others, it means returning to the kitchen table, a caregiving responsibility, or a conversation we've been avoiding. Some routines resume next week. Others continue even today.

How will we return? The shepherds returned praising God for all they had heard and seen. We, too, return carrying this good news: in Jesus, God has come near with love and peace for us and for the people we encounter. We return ready to share what we have received.

As we return, a place that is familiar to us may become the place where someone else experiences Jesus's peace for the first time. The peace that is familiar to us may be unfamiliar to them until we share it. Through our patient listening, our generous welcome, and our willingness to speak about Jesus, someone may begin to experience God's peace and recognize that God's love includes them as well. That is the power of our return. God can work through our presence in a familiar place to begin something new in another person's life.

Before closing this booklet, let each of us do the following:

- Name one place to which we will return.
- Picture one person there who needs the peace Jesus offers.
- Choose one action that will share God's peace and make room for love when we return.

The shepherds returned carrying good news. Let us return to our routines ready to help people discover how God's peace is for them as well.

Jesus, as we return to familiar places, let your peace make room for love in us and through us. Help someone discover your peace through the love we offer and the good news we share. We ask this in your name. Amen.



Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS
FELLOWSHIP & WORSHIP

ADVENT BY CANDLELIGHT
Wednesday, December 2 @ 7:00 p.m.
bslcmi.org/post/advent2026

CHRISTMAS GIFT MAKING WORKSHOP
Friday, December 4 @ 5 p.m.
bslcmi.org/post/2026-2027calendar

YOUTH-LED WORSHIP SERVICE
Sunday, December 13 @ 9:00 a.m.
Contemporary Worship @ 11:15 a.m.

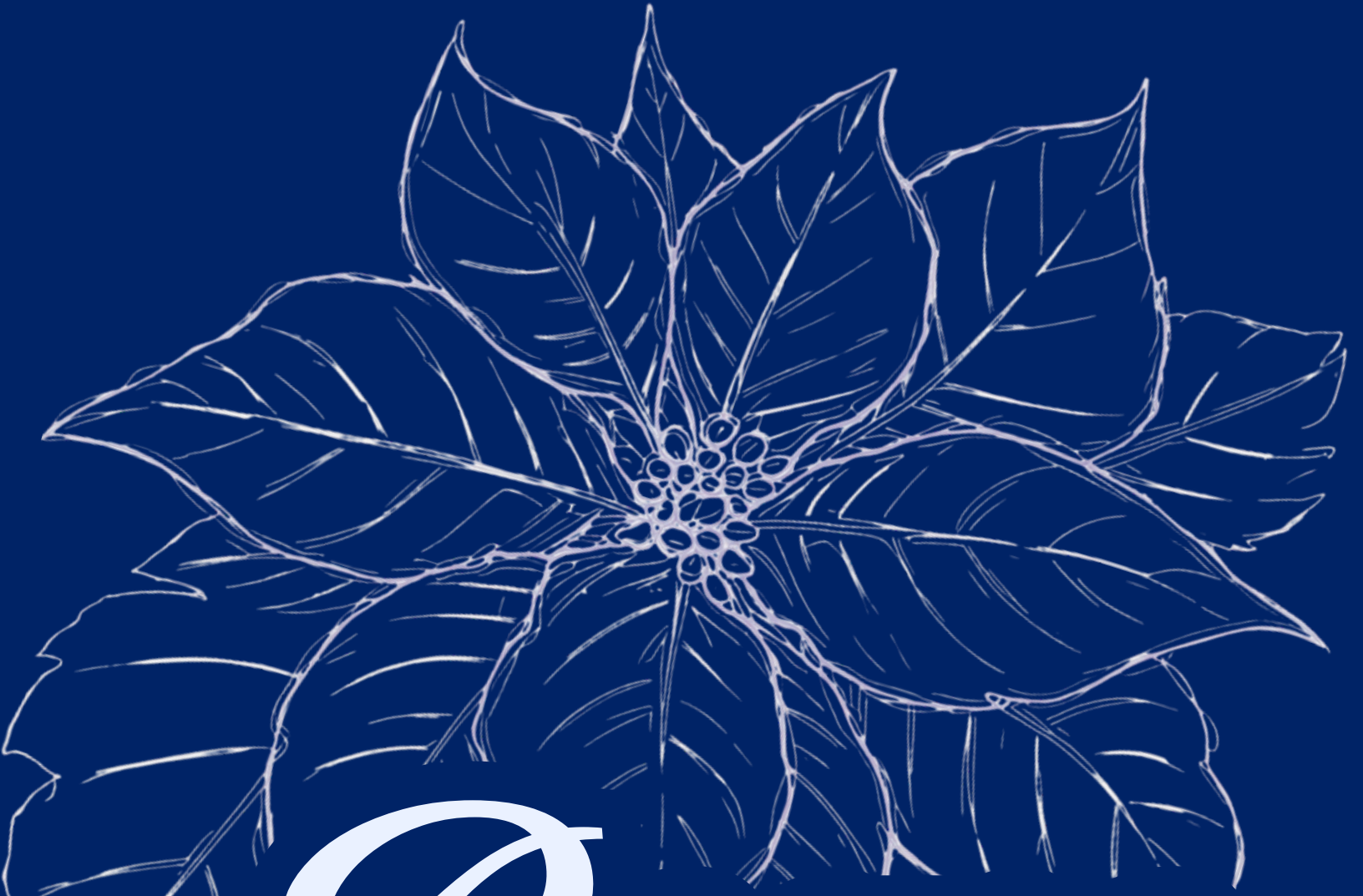
FIVE LAKES SILVER BRASS BAND
Satursday, December 19 @ 7:00 p.m.
No ticket necessary—free will offering
bslcmi.org/concerts

CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP
Thursday, December 24
4:00 p.m. | 7:00 p.m. | 10:00 p.m.
** 4 P.M. CELTIC CHRISTMAS EVE FEATURING GUEST MUSICIANS FINVARRA'S WREN **

CHRISTMAS DAY WORSHIP
Friday, December 25 @ 10:00 a.m.

SPECIAL SUNDAY WORSHIP
Sunday, December 27 @ 10:00 a.m.
** SPECIAL TIME, ONE WORSHIP SERVICE ONLY **

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Peace

FOR REAL LIFE

ADVENT DOES NOT OFFER SENTIMENTAL PEACE OR EASY ESCAPE FROM THE WORLD AS IT IS. ADVENT PEACE COMES TO REAL LIFE: TO UNCERTAIN DAYS, WILDERNESS SEASONS, WOUNDED HEARTS, WAITING HEARTS, AND THE ROAD STILL AHEAD. AS WE PREPARE TO CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF JESUS, WE HEAR AGAIN THAT GOD'S PEACE IS NOT FRAGILE OR SHALLOW. IS IT SPOKEN IN THE WILDERNESS, GIVEN TO THE BROKENHEARTED, CARRIED BY THOSE WHO WAIT, AND MADE FLESH IN JESUS.

BEAUTIFUL SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH

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