

Blessed Trinity Lutheran Church at Rosemont

MEDITATIONS --- DECEMBER, 2025

December 1, 2025

Every good gift, every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights... James 1:17

Advent and December are times when gifts are frequently on our minds. On a spiritual level, we prepare for the gift of the birth of Jesus, a gift which seems new every year. On an everyday level, we're often preoccupied with holiday gift-giving— finding the right gifts, wrapping them, making sure we didn't forget a cousin or a neighbor or the person who cuts our hair. But it isn't often that we take a wider and deeper view of gifts; not often that we think of the gifts of body, mind, heart, and soul. The gifts of family, friendship, forgiveness, and the future. The gifts of beauty in nature and bounty at the kitchen table. The gifts of music, art, education, science, medicine, technology, and so much else that we take for granted. If we tried, even for a day, to be aware of, and to note, everything that we call a gift, everything for which we are grateful, we'd be writing all day and running out of paper by suppertime. Gifts are a good focus for us in any season, but we'll pay special attention to them this month, in several of December's Meditations. Awareness of our many gifts – from God, from others, from a beneficent universe – may be the best preparation for receiving the gift of the birth of Jesus.

December 2, 2025

I will pray with the spirit but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing praise with the spirit but I will sing praise with the mind also.

1 Corinthians 14:15

At recess one day in grade school, I sat with my classmate Sharon. I said that we'd had a wonderful class in Sunday School the day before. Our class talked about interesting issues, and our teacher led us through a discussion about how events in the Bible, and Jesus's teachings, could apply to those issues. I told Sharon how much I enjoyed that class. Then I asked, "Do you have nifty classes like that in Sunday School?" "We don't have Sunday School," Sharon whispered, as if the subject was taboo. Sharon belonged to a different denomination, and she explained, "We must do what (the pastor) tells us to do and believe what he tells us to believe." She continued: "We must never ask any questions. What (the pastor) says is the only truth and we don't need to know anything else. We recite the words we're taught and pray the prayers we're taught. We must never ask any questions." Then the bell rang and recess was over. My mind was spinning with confusion. I grew up in a home where education – learning – was revered almost as much as Jesus was. Asking questions was expected. It was as natural as breathing. I have remembered that incident from a long-ago recess because what Sharon said that day stunned me ... then and now. Even in childhood it seemed clear to me that being able to think, to figure things out – to imagine, create, invent, design, discover, understand – is one of the best gifts God gives to human beings. As a grade-schooler, I would not have known today's verse from Corinthians, but I knew, even then, intuitively, that being able to think, to use our minds, is part of how God made us, how God designed our development as human beings. Thinking isn't only necessary, it's wonderful— a joy and a challenge. It is a holy gift. Perhaps that's why so many people recoil and become angry when books are banned, when questions are prohibited, when history is erased or re-written, when there are attempts to limit or control our thinking, to limit the minds God gave us. *"Thank you, Creator God, for the great gift of the mind. Thank you for minds that create art, architecture, symphonies, books, and ballets; that discover wonders in science: looking into molecules and into the expanses of the universe; minds that explore theology, philosophy, psychology; minds that design things from machinery to tools to technology; that give us medicines, prosthetic devices, and life-saving surgeries. Protect and defend us from those who would limit, control, or destroy the work of the mind."*

December 3, .2025

**We wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior,
Jesus Christ.**

Titus 2:13

What a perfect verse to begin the month in which we celebrate the birth of Jesus. It's easy to wait for Christmas because we know it's coming. We know that the day on which we commemorate Jesus's birth will arrive, and we will celebrate with worship, lighting candles, singing carols, gathering with families, and observing that day in ways that have meaning for us. Waiting is easy when we're waiting for something joyful ... something we know is coming. It isn't so easy to wait when we can't see into the future, when we don't know what is coming; when we don't know if a specific situation will bring joy or sorrow. *"Today, Lord, we give you our moments of waiting. We give you the tomorrows we can't see as clearly as we can see December 25th on the calendar. Be with us in our waiting, and help us know that, because you are in all our days and all our tomorrows, joy will come ... in some way, at some time ... joy will come."*

December 4, 2025

Jesus Christ gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous of good deeds.

Titus 2:14

It's a fanciful thought, but we might wonder for a moment what God was thinking when the birth of Jesus was contemplated in those realms where creation occurs, where love is endless and life is timeless. Surely, it was neither an accident nor a casual choice to have a human baby be born to a poor man and a young woman, in a remote, rough part of the world; a baby who, from his birth, had a touch of the divine that had never before been seen. Whether we believe in the ancient interpretation of Christ's coming, or we believe that this is a remarkable man who found his own way into a sacrificial and purely loving Messiahship, one thing is clear— Jesus came to us for a reason. That reason is centered in his love and sacrifice for us. He is, indeed, love incarnate.

December 5, 2025

...His grace, by which he made us accepted in the Beloved.

Ephesians 1:6

In many letters sent to advice columnists, people seek advice about thorny family issues. One columnist wrote that December is a high-stress month, not only because of holiday preparations and expenses, but because people in families – many with grudges and grievances, anger and animosities – will be seeing each other over the holidays, and the potential for conflict and confrontation is high. I don't have an immediate family – parents, siblings, spouse, children – so my rule for being part of my cousin-family is simple: love everyone and keep my mouth shut. That approach is easy for me. I really do love my cousins, and, because I don't want anyone telling me how to live, I'm not inclined to tell others how to live. I realize this rule might not work for close family members, and yet... sometimes, simple acceptance is best, especially in a month when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, who accepts all of us, just as we are. Rather than worry about whether Aunt Agnes will be nasty (again) to Aunt Betty, whether Uncle Ed will get tipsy, and whether we'll have to speak to that person we don't like, perhaps we should just let the cards fall where they may. In letting go of people-related stress ... letting go of our need to judge or control others ... we give a double gift. We free ourselves of the need to 'do' something about others, and we give them the gift of accepting them just as they are— flawed and imperfect, as flawed and imperfect as we are. If we keep our focus on the star, the manger, and the baby Jesus, we'll be better able to deal with those who might not yet have seen his light, found his peace, or felt his love.

December 6, 2025

Paul wrote: I am confident about all of you, that my joy would be the joy of all of you. 2 Corinthians 2:3

'Joy' is a key word in this season. So many hymns that we sing use the word joy. Greeting cards often have Joy! written on them. If life is on an upswing for us, it may be easy to feel joyful. If we're struggling somehow, it may be hard to feel joy. And if we're just chugging along, trying to keep up with work, school, family, and holiday preparations, we may think we don't have time for joy. But joy isn't optional in our lives; it is required. It is required because the human heart needs joy – and hope and love – in the same way the human body needs food, air, and water. Psychologists tell us that the capacity to be happy ... joyful ... is largely in our hands. It is a matter of choice and focus. Abraham Lincoln said that 'most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.' Joy, in this or any season, isn't a gift that is dropped on some doorsteps and not on others. It is our gift and blessing if we will simply allow ourselves to receive it and feel it. Joy to the world! Joy to *you*!

December 7, 2025

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have entertained angels unaware. Hebrews 13:2

It was just a casual comment, made by a church member as we sat in a large room, working on service projects after worship. The woman said that she was going to take some food to a parishioner whose husband died earlier in the year. A man at the table said, "How nice of you. I'm taking her to the doctor later this week." A third person said, "We really should call _____. She doesn't drive and she might need groceries." Angels aren't always in the sky, hovering above us on gossamer wings. Sometimes, they're right here—among us, sitting next to us, delivering food, providing transportation, and doing countless kindnesses. *"Thank you, Creator God, for angels ... the ones who have wings and the ones who don't."*

December 8, 2025

Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. Hebrews 4:14

What an appropriate verse for Advent! Sometimes, we might wish that we had been with the shepherds on that miraculous night when Jesus was born— been there to see the skies light up with heaven's own radiance, there to hear the angels singing "Glory to God!" Perhaps we wish we could have traveled with the wise men, followed that oh-so-bright star in the sky, and then actually been in the stable in Bethlehem, with the scent of hay filling the air, the soft murmurs of the animals, and the bewildered but elated faces of the new parents gazing at the tiny baby in Mary's arms. Yes, to be there on that night of nights must have been glorious. But in some ways, our perspective is even better. We know what happened on that night of miracles. The wise men, the shepherds, and the little family had a sense of the miraculous. But they could not know, as we do, the full majesty of the life that had just been born in the stable. We know. And because we know, we can confess, now and every day, that Jesus is Lord— our Lord, our Savior, our hope, for this and every season.

December 9, 2025

I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord. Jeremiah 24:7

Does the meaning of Christmas seem far away right now? Perhaps, once again, the busyness of the season – plus work, plus family life – has overwhelmed us. The real meaning of the season might seem as far away as the steamy days of summer. Don't worry. God can find us wherever we are, even if we're working late, running around the mall, complaining about having too many things to do and too many people about whom to worry. God can even find us in the middle of our fears and worries, even when we're in no mood for carols or silver bells or Christmas itself. That's one of the miracles of Christmas: it happens for us and in us, even when we are not prepared, and not able to do anything to make it real. The gift of Christmas belongs to God entirely; we have no role or responsibility except to be open, to receive, and to recognize that the miracle is real. *"Thank you, Lord. Thank you for loving me when I can't even love myself or you or anyone else. Thank you for placing Christmas in my life when I have done nothing to welcome it or have even tried to shut it out. Thank you for the persistence of hope and the miracle of love. Thank you."*

December 10, 2025

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 1 John 4:11

In a long-ago conversation with my friend Roger, a wonderful psychologist, he said something I never forgot. We had been talking about the wide diversity of needs, problems, fears, and worries that his patients had brought to him over the years. He said that, often, not only did patients go astray in trying to find answers to their troubles, but those trying to help them – with good intentions – often made the problems worse. "Human beings can only be loved into wholeness," Roger said, "into being all that they can be, being healthy in body, mind, and soul. They can't be badgered into wholeness, threatened into it, or shamed into it. Each of us can only be loved into wholeness." There is so much wisdom in those words, such connection to Jesus's own teachings. A few months ago, I wrote a Meditation about my joy in the success of the charitable foundation for

which I worked. After I'd been at the Foundation for a decade or so, when it was clear that we were growing and thriving, someone asked me how this turn-around happened. The person knew that when I arrived at the Foundation, everything was on shaky ground, including the board's commitment to keep the organization going. I remembered those days all too well, and, from somewhere deep within, I answered "We loved the Foundation into wholeness." I knew it was true. What Roger said about individuals – "human beings can only be loved into wholeness" – seemed to me to be true for organizations and groups comprised of human beings. Families can only be loved into wholeness, churches and congregations can only be loved into wholeness, organizations can only be loved into wholeness, even businesses can only be loved into wholeness, into being all that they can be. It may be stretching Roger's words a bit, but I believe it's true, and it is a blessing – a gift – to know that love is the key to so much that we hope for and desire for ourselves; so much that we hope for and desire for those we love and for the work and world we value. God is love. God is with us. God's love enables us to love others, and that gift keeps giving, leading people and groups to whole-ness, to being all they can be. Love is a gift that keeps giving, changing lives ... changing life ... in ways that we alone never could.

December 11, 2025

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

Isaiah 40:1

People have always needed comfort. Human beings have always had terrors, troubles, and sorrows. But the 20th and 21st centuries seem to be in a contest to see how much misery can be piled up; how much unbearable agony can be heaped on people. World War I was the war that was going to end all wars ... until World War II came along, with the horrors of the Holocaust, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki. Then the Korean War, the wars in Viet Nam, Grenada, Desert Storm, Iraq, Afghanistan. Other wars, involving other nations, go on endlessly. As we peacefully trim our trees and wrap our presents, other families and children fling themselves on fences at borders and refugee camps, hoping to escape slaughter and madness raging through their homelands. In many countries, there is no corner left in which to hide, and bombs have even been aimed at hospitals and at places sheltering children. In some conflict-torn nations, rape and decapitation are as common as sunrise and sunset. Yes, "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God." Let us not celebrate in our comfort this season without praying for and helping ... however we can ... those whose screams of fear and cries of pain can be heard above the sounds of 'Noel' and 'Rejoice'. "Comfort, O comfort my people." They are not only God's people, they are our people, our brothers and sisters in humanity. God is speaking: "Comfort, O comfort my people."

December 12, 2025

O Lord our God – we set our hope on you.

Jeremiah 14:22

We place hope in so many things. Little children hope that Santa will bring them the toys that they want. Adults hope their teams make the playoffs. Beyond these casual hopes, we have serious desires. We hope for health and relief from illness. We hope for raises and for some financial security. We hope for understanding and forgiveness. We hope for second chances, the chance to do things right. Ultimately, all of our hopes rest in God. When earthly desires fail us and our hopes are not fulfilled, we can still hope in God; hope that God will bring good out of what we see as troubles. And in God, our hope can never be disappointed.

December 13, 2025

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord...

Psalms 19:14

Today marks a milestone for the Daily Meditations. It is the 4,000th Meditation presented since January 1, 2015. That seems unbelievable. Warm thanks to the many people who have shared their faith-based stories. Their life experiences are the heartbeat in the written words. Thanks, too, to the church staff and volunteers – at St. John's Windish Lutheran Church, Blessed Trinity Church, and now Blessed Trinity at Rosemont – who have emailed, mailed, printed, and posted Meditations to share them widely: Kathy, Pastor Suzanne, Jodi, Pastor Mike, Deb, Pastor Tom, Sandy, Leigh, Debbie, Pastor Jack, and undoubtedly others. In the world beyond my laptop and our church, countless unnamed and unknown people share the Meditations with friends and family near and far.

That's how the Meditations make their way to New England, Florida, California, and other parts of the country. We know they're read in Britain, South Africa, Slovenia, Ukraine, and Russia. Thank you to the churches and church groups that use them, and special thanks to our first church partner, St. John's Lutheran Church in Versailles, PA, in southwestern Pennsylvania, near the borders with Ohio and West Virginia. Sharon, a church member who is also a retired teacher and grammar expert, proofreads the Meditations each month to check my grammar and word usage. I thought that punctuation marks were always placed inside quotation marks. Not so. Sharon has taught me that, often, commas and periods must be placed *outside* quotation marks. Sharon is a grammar specialist, and I focus on effect—to cause readers to think and feel. I don't always obey the rules, so Sharon and I compromise a lot. (Me: "If you let me keep the two incomplete sentences in this month's Meditations, I'll add the commas you told me to put in." Sharon: "Okay, but only *two* incomplete sentences.") People have asked me to repeat certain Meditations, and a few years ago Kathy suggested that I update and rewrite a few past Meditations each month. I love writing Meditations because the ideas usually come from the Source of All Creation. I just take dictation. When people share what the Meditations mean to them, it's easy to see God's hand at work: "I'm homebound, but with the Meditations I can go to church every day, think new thoughts, and travel to places I could never visit." Maybe God always knew there would be 4,000 Meditations ... but didn't want to scare us off. *"Thank you, Creator God, for giving us one of the best ideas – one of the best gifts ever – when you whispered, 'Write some Meditations.'"*

December 14, 2025

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 1 Peter 1:3

In the days and years before Jesus's birth, even in the years in which his life and ministry unfolded, no one could really see the shadow of the cross. Prophets in ancient times predicted rejection for God's chosen one, but they hadn't envisioned Herod or Barabbas or the mob screaming "Crucify him!" As Jesus grew closer to God, he knew that the path toward earthly power and the path toward God's power would diverge, and he would have to walk one path or the other. But even Jesus did not know the day or the hour, or the exact words that would pronounce sentence on him. We know all of this. We not only know the Christmas story, we know the Easter story. We know the whole span of the story. What a remarkable gift! How will we use this incredible knowledge? How will we live differently, knowing that the baby about to be born will live and die ... for us? This miracle of love should change us deeply and profoundly. Has it? Will it? Will we let it? When?

December 15, 2025

See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him.

Isaiah 40:10

In ancient times, people often saw evidence of God's presence and might. The Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) is full of examples of God's visible might and his miracles. Sometimes, that might and power are also shown in simple and subtle ways. Sometimes we see them in healings, in the unexpected reconciliation of family members, in God's sure leading in our lives. It is enough for us to know that God's might is as real as his love, and it is as real today as in the days of Moses and Gideon and David and Isaiah.

December 16, 2025

"I made the earth and created humankind upon it."

Isaiah 45:12

Isaiah is relaying the words of the 'Lord God' in today's verse, part of a long chapter in which God speaks to Isaiah to tell him about his deeds and his power and his love. We might wonder what 'the Lord God' would say to a prophet – or to any of us – today, as God looks upon the earth. Yes, there are millions of acts of kindness and compassion. There have been remarkable achievements in education, science, technology, medicine, and the arts. But in too many places, God must weep at what he sees. Places beset by flooding, fires, and loss of arable land. Places where infants with twig-thin arms and bloated bellies get neither food nor medicine because of warfare or corruption. Places where people are trapped ... with no way out ... in areas being relentlessly bombed. "I created humankind upon it," says the Lord God. Surely, God did not intend this. Not this. *"Forgive us, Lord. Forgive us and show us the way to peace, to sanity, and to enough for all."*

December 17, 2025

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God ... who are called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28

Most of us have asked “why?” about something that happened ... or didn’t happen ... in our lives, something important to us. We don’t always get an answer to “why?”, but when such answers come, they’re usually a gift, a divine gift given to us. This fall, on a day when I was doing errands, for some reason I began to think about the schools I wanted to attend for college and then for graduate study: Stanford University and the London School of Economics. I was accepted at both schools, and I believed that they were God’s plan for me. But it was not to be. I long ago made peace with the fact that family problems required that I stay close to home during those years. God closed the doors to Stanford and LSE, but God brought many blessings from the educational experiences I did have. I thought I had all that personal history figured out and put away ... until that sunny day when I was doing errands. On that day, as if God was handing me a gift from heaven, God gave me an insight I’d never had before, a thought so deep and true that it brought tears to my eyes, and a new peace to my heart. If I had left home at 17, to go to Stanford and then LSE, I’d have been away from home for at least six years. I’d have been in my mid-20s before I came back ... *if* I would have come back. In most lives and families, that time away might not matter. But in our family, life had been marked by turmoil from the time I was six until I was sixteen. It was a painful time. But at the end of that decade, by God’s grace, my parents’ marriage was healed. Other problems, related to my grandmother’s mental and physical troubles, remained. But my parents were once again anchored in the love that had brought them together and kept them together, and I once again had the loving family I knew in my early childhood. The next decades were pure joy ... for me, as well as for my parents. Being with my parents in those years, and sharing life with them, was one of the great blessings of my life. But if I had left home at 17, I never would have seen their healed relationship, I wouldn’t have had the joy of sharing that happiness. Instead, I would have had a decade’s worth of painful memories and accumulated bitterness, anger, and hurt. That new realization ... that gift from God ... was transforming. Now, I am not only at peace with not having gone to the schools I chose, I’m also glad and grateful that those doors closed so that the door to greater happiness could open. I have no idea why God handed me that insight on that sunny day this fall, 60 years after the events transpired. I only know, deeply and profoundly, that God does bring good from all things, and sometimes God shows us ‘how’ and ‘why’ in his own time and way, as a divine gift.

December 18, 2025

Jesus says, “Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.”

John 6:47

This is another verse that seems meant for Advent. Without the power and truth of the resurrection ... the Easter story that awaits us over the horizon of the coming year ... the events of Advent and Christmas become only a charming story about a poor carpenter and a young woman who gives birth in a stable. Even with the extraordinary journey of the wise men, and the appearance of angels in the sky, it is still only a story of remarkable happenings. It is only when Jesus tells us that he is the link between us and the Creator God ... the eternal and unchanging connection between our life and life eternal ... that the miracle of Christmas becomes real. Against the backdrop of the darkness that would otherwise overshadow our lives, the light of Jesus – the everlasting power of his promise – illuminates our lives and our way. *“Thank you, Lord. For this greatest gift— thank you.”*

December 19, 2025

The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble.

Psalms 90:10

Almost everyone comes to the end of the calendar year and wonders what lies ahead. It is a natural, human instinct. Perhaps, the older we are, the more we are inclined to worry about what the future holds: illness or good health, financial security or worries, security for our families or unexpected troubles. In the days of the psalmist, troubles were many, and times of relative peace and prosperity were few. Most lives had more times of difficulty than times of joy or ease. No wonder the psalmist said that a lifespan is “only toil and trouble.” Most of us have lives that are much easier and safer than the lives of our ancestors, but we still know what it is

to worry, to have problems. As the New Year approaches, let us give the coming year ... and every one of its 365 days ... to God. Right now. *“Lord, I place the coming year in your hands. I ask for your blessing on my life, on the lives of those I love, and on the world itself. Be with me in the joys and sorrows that may come. Light the path into the future with your love and wisdom. Be with me in your loving Parent/Creator presence every day, in every way. In your presence I will find my peace ... in your love, my light. Thank you, Lord.”*

December 20, 2025

There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment.

1 Timothy 6:6

Another appropriate verse for Advent— for a season when we often wish we could buy more for others, afford bigger and fancier gifts, perhaps receive the dream gifts we’d like for ourselves, or just be able to afford the extra expenses of the holiday. This verse is a good reminder that contentment is a state of mind that brings peace and joy that few other attitudes can provide. Material goods – even the latest tech toy or fancy car or piece of jewelry – bring only passing pleasure. Then, too often, we feel that familiar emptiness opening up within us; we feel a longing for something we can’t quite name, something that more ‘stuff’ can’t satisfy. Of course, it is right to pray for the blessings of health and love and God’s provision for our needs. God expects us to turn to him for these things. But for everything else, perhaps we should begin with an attitude of contentment, appreciating what we do have, and finding our joys in God’s companionship and in doing God’s will.

December 21, 2025

Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God.

Psalms 84:3

We have, or soon will have, cold air, frozen ground, cutting winds, and darkness; a season very different from the warm, flowery days of spring and summer. Yet even in this season, the birds find their food and shelter, the seeds begin to germinate underground, and life awaits its rebirth. God provides for all of his creatures in all the seasons of creation. God provides for us, even if it is, somehow, cold and dark for us now. *“I trust you, Lord. I trust you in all the days and seasons of my life, but perhaps I trust you most in the winter days of my life.”*

December 22, 2025

The Lord will give strength to his people.

Psalms 29:11

We can’t imagine what it was like for Mary and Joseph to be travelling at night, in the dark, in an unfamiliar land, with so little to sustain them, no shelter assured for them, and knowing that a baby would soon be born. There were no doctors or nurses; no one telling Mary when the baby would be born or what her pains meant. In the darkness, they found refuge; in the stable, they found rest; in their weakness and need, they found God’s provision. The Lord gave strength to Joseph and Mary. He gives strength to his people. He gives strength to us. *“Thank you, Lord. Thank you for giving me strength, even when the night is dark and I am afraid.”*

December 23, 2025

Therefore, comfort each other ... just as you are doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

When my Mother died, 13 years ago, I phoned our dear friends in Maryland, Joan and Bill. “We’ll come up,” Joan said immediately. “I’ll make you a nice pot of tea and we’ll help with anything you need.” Bill is an Englishman, from Yorkshire, and he and Joan had lived in Bermuda for 20 years, so the British necessity of “a nice pot of tea” wasn’t surprising. Neither was their offer of help. They loved Mom, and it was comforting to have them close by. Their presence was a gift, one of many that meant so much at a heart-wrenching time. Often, when illness, heartache, or death strikes, we’re unsure of what to say or do for those who are hurting. But at such times, *we* are the gift we give to others. Calling with condolences, making a casserole, bringing in the mail, doing the dishes, holding someone’s hand ... or making “a nice pot of tea”— all of these convey our love, God’s love. Every gesture of caring is a gift of ourselves. We are giving ourselves to those in need. That reality can help us prepare to receive Jesus— a gift to us, for us, who still gives himself to us.

December 24, 2025 — Christmas Eve

She weeps bitterly in the night. Her tears are on her cheeks ... she has none to comfort her ... (they) have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies. Lamentations 1:2

Death usually prompts sympathies and kindness, but it can also trigger cruelty. Thirteen years ago, Christmas Eve was bittersweet for me. Mom had died nine months earlier, and that Christmas would be my first without her. Anyone who has ever lost a loved one knows how those ‘firsts’ feel. Although I was sad, I was looking forward to our glorious and uplifting Christmas Eve service at church. I needed that service more than ever. I was dressed and ready to leave when the doorbell rang. I opened the front door. A package had been placed on the porch. I picked it up. Its size looked familiar, and on the mailing label, I saw who sent it: a family member – my parents’ godson – for whom I’d purchased a hand-made Santa at a crafts fair. He and his wife collected Santas, and for the past few years Mom and I had given them unique Santas they said they loved. I sat on the porch and opened the package with an uneasy feeling. It was the wrapped gift I had sent to them. The gift was clearly being returned, rejected. A typed letter was taped to my wrapped gift. It was from my parents’ godson. He and his wife lived some distance away, but they had visited Mom twice when she was ill, and they came to her funeral. I appreciated those kindnesses. But as I read the letter, all pleasant, positive thoughts drained out of me. Paraphrased, he wrote: ‘I know you meant well by sending us a Christmas gift, but I must tell you that, at your Mother’s funeral, I heard someone asking you a question, and from what you said I could deduce that you belong to a political party I despise. Though I value family connections, I want nothing to do with someone as vile and despicable as you. The way you think, and the way you vote, make you more dangerous to me than a street thug. At least I could deal with a thug with my gun. I can’t do anything about the harm you do. Don’t ever again contact me or anyone in my family.’ I felt as if I’d been kicked in the stomach. I knew I certainly didn’t want anything more to do with this person, but I still began to cry from sheer shock and pain. I sobbed as hard as I had at Mom’s gravesite. Such cruelty? Such hate? On Christmas Eve? Because of someone’s political registration? Was the whole world going crazy? My tears wouldn’t stop. I was crying – sobbing – for Mom, for myself, for a world gone mad. The last thing I wanted to do was go to church, but I knew it was what I needed to do. Once again, the Holy Night produced its wonders. Somehow, I found peace. Somehow, beyond my hurt and anger, I was able to say, “I forgive you.” In the next days, I could pray, “Lord, touch him with your wisdom and love.” I placed his letter in one of our Bibles, one we seldom used, as my way of giving him to God ... and letting go. Christmas Eve— a night when we can bring pain as well as praise to the stable; a night when we can cry as well as rejoice; a night when love comes, whether we feel it or not; a night when God gives us his greatest gift ... and rejects none of our gifts, rejects none of us. If, on this Christmas Eve, your heart is broken, if life seems to have more pain than promise, if you can’t see any light through your tears, know that God’s Light is here, now, for you. No matter how painful our lives or how troubled our world, Jesus is born— in our world, in us, for us. A Holy Night, indeed. God bless us all.

December 25, 2025 — Christmas

Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning. Psalm 30:5

Surely, Mary cried out on that night. She probably wept, too, in pain or fear, as the new experience of giving birth came upon her. We, too, have wept in the night. Perhaps it is one of the things that all human beings have in common— those nights when the tears come. But we have this in common, too: the mornings that dawn with joy, with healing, with new life and new hope. As morning came for Mary and Joseph, morning can, and will, come for us, whatever our griefs or fears. And because of the holy joys of this morning in particular ... this Christmas morning ... our night terrors and tears will always be overcome by the light of love, the dawn of hope, and the reality of new life. Praise God. Praise God. Praise God!

December 26, 2025

For there is born to you this night, in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11

One night. One birth. One baby. One life. And suddenly, everything is different. Everything is changed. The world is changed. Not only in Bethlehem of Judea, but in Bethlehem of Pennsylvania ... and in all the cities, towns, villages, and communities of the world. Not only in A.D. 1, but in 2025, and in all the years in

between and all the years to come. On that Holy Night, everything changed. The shepherds and wise men couldn't know that. Mary and Joseph couldn't know it, and the tiny, nursing newborn didn't know it. But the angels knew. And God knew. And now we know. Everything changed. On that night, shepherds and wise men came to the baby Jesus. Decades later, sages and sinners, seekers and sick people, the crippled, the curious, and the confused would all come to Jesus, the teacher and healer. At the very end, even the Roman centurion bowed down: 'Surely, this was the son of God!' And after Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, the powers of Satan and the torments of humanity fell before him. He redeemed our weaknesses and maladies – physical, mental, and emotional – as well as our separation from God. He reconciled us to our Creator. Our lostness and loneliness fell before him and his cross. Death and destruction fell. Grief, pain, infirmity, illness, and fear fell down in powerlessness before this all-powerful Redeemer God. Yes, evil and troubles still exist. But they ultimately fall before the reality of a Redeeming God. And it all began on that one night, under that star, in that stable. And now, once again, we know it.

December 27, 2025

Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

Psalm 33:22

Many times in our lives, in times of joy as well as anxiety, we pray to God and affirm our faith, but we still need ... we still ask for ... something to help us make it through the times of waiting and wondering. 'Even a little something,' we say to God, 'please give me even a little sign.' God is merciful and understands. God knows that in every area of our lives – work, church, community affairs, friendships, marriage – it helps us to have a touch of grace while we learn our lessons, while we grow in faith, and while we wait for the future to reveal itself. Imagine how unaware of the future Mary and Joseph were when they cradled their new baby son. The wisdom of this God-gifted child was years away from being revealed, his powers were still hidden, and the shadow of the cross was nowhere in sight. In the visions that God gave to them, to 'depart by another way', God provided Mary and Joseph with more than protection; God provided the assurance of his presence. God gives us that assurance today. Whatever our lives hold at this moment – happiness or sorrow, health or illness, hope or fear – God is with us. God is present in our present. God's steadfast love is enough, as we wait in hope.

December 28, 2025

God did not withhold his own son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?

Romans 8:32

Of all the beings involved in the Nativity story, only God knew the whole story as it would unfold over the next years and decades. God knew, when Jesus was born, that this child had the capacity to understand things that even the wisest people had not comprehended. He knew that Jesus had God's own capacity for love, and the sacrificial strength to offer his life to become the crucial link between God and humanity. But perhaps even God did not know if that strength would hold Jesus or desert him in Gethsemane. Even Jesus had the free will given to all human beings. He was God's son, not his puppet. As the years unfolded, Jesus sought God's guidance and did his will. As the fullness of Jesus's life was revealed, it became clear that in giving us Jesus, God did, indeed, give us "everything else". Jesus's birth was the start of the story, the first of the gifts.

December 29, 2025

You did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

Romans 8:15

The words 'fear not' appear 365 times in the Bible. 365. With all of the versions of the Bible, we might assume that it is by chance that there are as many statements to 'fear not' as there are days of the year. Just coincidence, right? Well, maybe. I am comfortable with mysteries and miracles, and so I choose to think that scriptures have given us a 'fear not' for every day of the year. Few things are as corrosive and destructive as fear; few things prevent our being all that God wants us to be as much as fear does. In the year to come, it might be wise to hear God say to us, every day, "fear not." Maybe we can write those words at the top of each calendar month. Whatever our method, what matters is that we remember, every day, 365 times in the year ahead, to "fear not."

December 30, 2025

But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Hebrews 13:16

At a community event, I met someone who was in my high school class, though we didn't know each other then. His wife graduated from another school, and it was nice to share with them memories of teachers, classes, and school events. In that pleasant familiarity, we talked about the trajectory of our lives and our lives now, in retirement. Our conversation led to talking about costs of living. I said that Social Security is two-thirds of my income, and without it, life would be very difficult. "Social Security is all of our income," my classmate replied, "100% of it. Thank heaven there are two of us, two Social Security checks." He explained that one of their children, a son, had had serious legal problems years ago, while struggling to raise three children as a single parent. In order to assure that the son could continue to be employed and raise his children, substantial money had to be paid, for attorneys and other costs. "My wife and I cashed out our retirement funds and 401(k)s in their entirety", my classmate said. "We never saw that coming, but I'd do it all over again. Since then, all has been well with our son, and he and our now-grown grandchildren are fine. Sometimes, you just do what you have to do." He said that he now works 15 hours a week at a local store, "for pocket money, and to let us come to some events, like this one." I admired his generosity ... and his candor. I'm pretty sure that, if I had been in his and his wife's situation, I'd have done the same thing. We see many news articles and internet offerings on 'How to Maximize Your RMDs' (Required Minimum Distributions), 'How to Create Trusts for Your Grandchildren', and 'Where to Live Comfortably if You Only Have \$2 Million for Retirement'. We seldom hear about folks who are hit with a life-changing financial collapse. Sometimes 'doing what you have to do', whether financially or through giving time, skills, or other resources, is truly sacrificial— rising to the level of a holy gift. "Provider God, bless all those who give, especially those for whom giving is truly a sacrifice."

December 31, 2025 — New Year's Eve

(Jesus said) "... with God, all things are possible."

Matthew 19:26

In August, more than a million Roman Catholic young people, from more than 150 countries, gathered in Rome for a week-long Jubilee of Youth. The gathering focused on unity, affirmation of faith, worship, and witness. Pope Leo XIV presided over a vigil attended by the young people, and he spoke to them and blessed them on the final day of the Jubilee. The Pope acknowledged that many of the young people came from countries and areas deep in turmoil: wars, conflicts, famine, displacement, and chaos. Praising their faith, hope, and perseverance, the Pope encouraged the youths to "spread your enthusiasm and the witness of your faith ... Aspire to great things, to holiness wherever you are. Do not settle for less. You will then see the light of the gospel growing every day, in you and around you." In his final blessing, Pope Leo told those gathered that "... you are the sign that a different world is possible. A world of fraternity and friendship, where conflicts are not resolved with weapons but with dialogue." In that final blessing, the Pope gave those young people ... and he gave us ... a great gift when he said "... a different world is possible." Think of it: "... a different world is possible." Amen. May it be so.

One benefit of not knowing what lies ahead is that we can travel lightly into the New Year. We don't need to pack much to move into the future. Perhaps all we need is the affirmation of our own values – honesty, honor, kindness, peace, love, and compassion – and a solid trust in the fact that the God who created time and space, the universe and all living things, is with us, holding us, guiding us, and loving us as we move into the New Year and into all the days and years to come. It is all we know, and all we need to know.

"God of all creation, take my hand, please. Walk with me into the days, the year, ahead. Give me wisdom in my confusion, peace in my fearfulness, joy in my blessings, comfort in my sorrows, and strength in my weakness. I have no idea what lies ahead, for me or those I love, for my church, my community, my country, or the world. In this expanse of ignorance, there are three things I do know: You are with me, always, and you love me; you are the Creator God of the universe; and you cause all things to work for your loving will and for the good of your creation. It is all I know, and all I need to know. Thank you."