



ST. JOHN'S
United Methodist Church

Glorifying God. Feeding People. Making Disciples.

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SCENES OF THE SEASON



ST. JOHN'S
United Methodist Church

2022 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT

Scene: Luke 2:1-20

Biblical Character: Jesus

Christmas Movie: *The Charlie Brown Christmas Special*

I love listening to Christmas music - both gospel and secular. One of my favorite songs is Stevie Wonder's "That's What Christmas Means to Me." It's a great song, but I must admit, Stevie forgot something - better yet - SOMEONE. Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. *That's* what Christmas is all about!

In the movie, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Peppermint Patty wanted to put on the best Christmas pageant. She entrusted Charlie Brown with the Christmas tree. Well, we all know about that little tree! Ole "Blockhead" messed up again, and out of frustration, he yelled the words, "Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?" That's when Linus tells about the birth of Jesus. That's what Christmas is all about: Jesus, the savior of the world.

By Darlene Dickson



**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24 and/or
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25**

Today we light the candles of Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace,
as we focus on THE story of the season.

(Light four candles)

Sometimes in the hustle and bustle of the season,
we lose sight of what Christmas is all about.

Yet through the ages,

the Good News of great joy remains,

the story of the Christ-child's birth is ours.

Today we set the scene for Christ, for unto us a child is born! Unto us a son is given!

(Light the Christ Candle)

God has brought light into every darkness. The promises of God are fulfilled!

Christ Child,

We join the angels, shepherds, and holy family

in welcoming you into the world this day.

May we continue to embody the gifts of Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace

throughout our lives,

as we share you, the Living Christ, with others.

Amen.



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INTRODUCING OUR THEME

The Advent season is upon us, a time when we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ child at Christmas. This special season is full of familiar stories - from the family anecdotes that get told over and over again, to the holiday movie classics we watch year after year, to the well-known stories of scripture repeated each Advent. The four main characters in the Advent story, Mary, Joseph, Zechariah and Elizabeth, each had their own unique way of preparing for the first Christmas. This Advent, we will focus on the scenes in scripture that tell their story, revealing to us how we, too, are invited into the narrative and become a part of the Christmas scene. Invite a friend to join us for worship as we experience the joy and excitement that Christ brings to us through the Scenes of the Season.

To accompany our Advent journey, we have created a daily calendar, with simple reflections and activities as well as this weekly devotional booklet. Each week includes Advent Wreath Candlelightings, as well as devotions written by St. John's member, Darlene Dickson, which connect our scenes from scripture with scenes from some of the Christmas movies we all love to watch this time of year. You may enjoy rewatching them in light of her reflections.

ELF NIGHT

On **Friday, December 2**, from 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. our United Women in Faith will be hosting Elf Night. On this night the children (ages 2 years through 5th grade) of St. John's families can be dropped off in the FLC, at no charge, in order to provide parents with a night out to shop for Christmas! Please sign up on Sunday in the FLC during coffee time or contact Sherri Artecona (iama225secfan@yahoo.com or 985-320-3018).



BE NOT AFRAID

Scene: Luke 2:8-10

Biblical Character: The Shepherds

Christmas Movie: *Home Alone*

"Ok Kevin we've passed the Halloween decorations. You don't have to be afraid because mommy won't let anything bad happen to you." One fall when he was little, I said these words to my son Kevin as I pushed my shopping cart as fast as I could go. Fast forward about ten years and I have Devin in the shopping cart and we come upon the Halloween decorations.

"Ok Devin, don't be afraid," I said.

"No faid! Punny punny!" Devin replied

"You're right about that! There's no need to be afraid!" I smile.

I wish I could say that about everything. We all have fear of some sort. This holiday season, let's remember that we don't have to be afraid because God has everything in control. We must put our faith and trust in him.

In the movie, *Home Alone*, eight-year-old Kevin McCallister didn't let the criminal duo called the Wet Bandits frighten him when he was left home alone by accident during Christmas. This crafty kid outsmarted two adult men and defended his home. Meanwhile, his mother raced across the continent to get back home to him. This kid had every right to be afraid but he overcame his fear.

On that first Christmas shepherds were watching over their flock when an angel appeared and they were afraid. Unlike Kevin they had no reason to be afraid because God was sending them a message of good news. Jesus Christ was born! Be not afraid, my friends, for Christ our savior is coming.

Emmanuel - God is with us.

By Darlene Dickson



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18

As we focus on the meaning and scenes of the Advent season,
today we light the Candle of Peace.

(Light four candles)

There is much turmoil in our times, so much unrest knocks at our door.

But our God brings order out of chaos,

restoration out of destruction,

and renewal out of our regret.

This season we set the scene for Christ's Peace

that it might make a home in our hearts.

Lord God,

We look to you to bring us true peace

in a world where peace seems far away.

We hear your call to us to be peacemakers within ourselves

and in the world around us,

but we know we cannot find peace apart from you.

Grant us your peace in our hearts and lives.

Amen.



JOY FEST

Save the date of Sunday, **December 11** for our Advent celebration this year. We will gather for festive fellowship from 5 - 7 p.m. in the Family Life Center. We will have fun for all ages with a potluck dinner, word games, Name that Tune, crafts for the kids, and caroling.

And don't forget! Expected attire for the upcoming Joy Fest will be, of course, Ugly Christmas Sweaters! Get yours aired out and ready to go!

A couple of special activities will test your Christmas carol knowledge, but don't worry - we won't test your singing (even though we're going to do plenty of it!)

There might even be an unexpected visit from a surprise guest ...



HELP MAKE A CHILD'S CHRISTMAS BRIGHTER

Opening Doors is offering us a chance to help brighten Christmas for children from two of our neighborhood schools, Wildwood Elementary School and Gardere Community Christian School, through a new mission: Neighborhood Friends. Choose a child's name from our Christmas tree the next time you are at the church.

You are being asked to purchase two gifts for each student you choose: an item of clothing and a fun item (toy). Each gift should cost between \$20 and \$30. Wrap each gift separately following the directions on the instruction sheet you receive. Gifts are due back by Sunday, December 4.

For more information, please contact Buffie Grayson or Beth Forester.

GREAT TURKEY GIVEAWAY

The twelfth annual Great Turkey Giveaway will be held on Saturday, December 17. We anticipate giving away over 500 turkeys and complete holiday meals to our neighbors.

Volunteers of all ages and abilities are needed. Plan to arrive by 7:30 a.m. For more information, contact our Director, Theresa Sandifer (225-337-1306 or tsandifer0829@gmail.com).



If you prefer to make a monetary donation, \$20 will provide a turkey and everything for a Christmas dinner.

A BLESSED & WONDERFUL LIFE

Scene: Luke 1:39-55

Biblical Character: Mary

Christmas Movie: *It's a Wonderful Life*

Holidays can be hard for a lot of people and for so many different reasons. My stepdaughter Rachel has been through a lot in her life. She wasn't supposed to live long after she was born. She has a shunt in her head. She had juvenile diabetes that caused liver damage as well as loss of vision. Yet with all those challenges she's still smiling. She received a liver and kidney transplant about a year ago. She still has had recent challenges with her shunt malfunctioning as well as a tumor on her ovaries. Rachel is a miracle baby and she has a blessed life. It is indeed a wonderful life.

In the Christmas classic, *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey thought everyone would be better off if he had not been born. God sent him a wingless angel Clarence to show him how his life touched so many other people's lives. In the end, George Bailey discovered he had a blessed life. A wonderful life!

Mary, the mother of our Lord and savior Jesus, came to the realization that she was the most blessed woman on earth when she visited Elizabeth. What an honor it was to be chosen by our Father in heaven to birth the savior of the world, Jesus Christ. Oh Mary, because of your obedience, we all have a blessed life. It's a *wonderful* life!

By Darlene Dickson



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11

As we focus on the meaning and scenes of the Advent season, today we light the Candle of Joy.

(Light three candles)

Like Mary our souls magnify the Lord and our spirits rejoice
for the Lord has heard our cries and draws near.

God's mercy flows in wave after wave.

Today, we receive with joy God's liberating message.

This season we set the scene for joy, confident that with Christ,
ours can be a wonderful life.

Heavenly Savior,

In your coming,

you lead our lives out of languish and into laughter.

You turn our sorrow into joy.

As a covenant people,

we seek to live into the joy of Christ's birth.

Give us hearts and minds ready to celebrate your arrival.

Amen.



SOUNDS OF THE SEASON

Join us on **December 18** for Sounds of the Season, a celebratory service filled with seasonal music and original writings from congregants.

These identical services will feature the Praise Team, Chancel Choir, handbells and chimes!



LONGEST NIGHT WORSHIP

For those who have experienced loss, the holidays can be a particularly painful time, stirring up grief in acute ways. We know that many approach this season with mixed emotions. If this resonates with you, we invite you to give yourself the gift of attending our Longest Night worship service on Wednesday, **December 21** at 6 p.m., which is designed to provide space for prayer, reflection, and remembrance amidst the holiday hustle and bustle.

CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP

December 24 | 5 p.m.

We hope you will join us for a beautiful service on Christmas Eve at 5:00 p.m. as we celebrate the birth of the Christ child. Our service will include singing of Christmas carols, reading the Christmas story from the Gospel, an inspiring message, a special time for children, and Holy Communion. Our service will conclude by candlelight. Children, guests, family and friends are all invited!

CAROLS, COMMUNION, AND COOKIES

December 25 | 10 a.m.

We invite you to come comfortable on Christmas morning at 10 a.m. for Carols, Communion, and Cookies. We will sing tons of Christmas carols, share in Holy Communion, and enjoy loads of cookies following the service – plus coffee and hot cocoa, too. Children are invited to bring one toy they received for Christmas for a Blessing of the Toys during worship – in person and virtually.

You won't want to miss this uplifting morning of worship and fellowship!

Feel free to bring some cookies to share.

A HEART THAT GROWS THREE SIZES

Scene: Luke 1:8-20, 57-64

Biblical Character: Zechariah

Christmas Movie: *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*

“Have you ever loved somebody...the way that Jesus loves you?”¹ As I listened to the words to this song, I reminisced about the first time I held my son Kevin. I never planned on having children; it just wasn't in my plans. Throughout my pregnancy I asked God, “How on earth did You choose me to be somebody's mother?” I'm selfish! Yes, I love kids, and what I love most about kids is the fact that I can give them back to their parents. Then it happened. The nurse placed that tiny little being in my arms, and I felt my heart grow. It grew so big that I thought it would pop out my chest. I looked at my sweet baby boy and said, “I love you so much it hurts.” God knew what I didn't know: that I could love unselfishly.

In *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, the Grinch thought he could stop Christmas from coming if he stole all the material things associated with the holiday. Yet, what he didn't realize was that the Whos didn't need any of those things to celebrate Christmas because Christmas was in their hearts. When he finally realized that Christmas is so much more than things, his tiny heart grew three sizes bigger that day.

Zechariah didn't believe the angel Gabriel when he told him that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a son in their old age. He was unable to speak until the child was born. I could only imagine how Zechariah's heart grew when baby John was born. During this Christmas season, let's allow God's love to fill our hearts to maximum capacity.

By Darlene Dickson

¹ *Real Love* by Kirk Franklin, from Kirk Franklin and the Family album



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4

As we focus on the meaning and scenes of the Advent season, today we light the Candle of Love.

(Light two candles)

God's love has the power to transform us.

We look for God's love, and we seek to live it out

in our hearts and in our homes,

in our church and in our neighborhood,

in times of certainty and in times of doubt.

This season we set the scene for Love, expecting our hearts to grow three sizes.

Holy One,

We stand in awe of your overwhelming love.

At times it leaves us speechless.

By your grace, drive out the fear and darkness in our hearts,

and inspire us to share your love with others.

Amen.

TWELVE DAY OF CHRISTMAS SERVICE

Sunday, January 1 | 10 a.m.

Many of us know the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas," but did you know that each verse refers to a different teaching of church doctrine? The "Partridge" refers to Jesus Christ, who died on a tree, and the "True Love" is God, our Creator, the giver of life and every good gift. The twelve days of Christmas are the twelve days between Christmas Day, December 25th, the birth of Jesus, and the Epiphany, January 6th, the day Christians celebrate the arrival of the Magi (Wise Men) and the revelation of Christ as the light of the world. Join us for a single service at **10:00 a.m. on January 1** for a lively service of Lessons and Carols for the Twelve Days of Christmas. Don't worry, we'll only sing the song once, but once you've heard the meaning behind this familiar carol, it will bring a whole new appreciation to the song.

EPIPHANY SUNDAY

Sunday, January 8 | 8:30 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.

We will celebrate Epiphany on **Sunday, January 8**, and each person will be offered a special word for the year printed on a star. These words are a symbol of the star the magi followed on their way to baby Jesus.

A Star Word is a word or intention for you to focus on in the year ahead. Following in the footsteps of the magi, we are invited to follow our individual star and open our hearts and minds to see where it takes us in 2023.

Just as the Christmas star once shined for all people to see, the light of Christ still shines for all people. Join us for worship on Epiphany Sunday as we embark on this New Year together, guided by the light of Christ - our Christmas star.



SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27

As we focus on the meaning and scenes of the Advent season,
today we light the Candle of Hope.

(Light one candle)

We place our hope in God. We place our lives in God's care:

both in times of thanksgiving

and in times of challenge,

when everything is just as it should be,

as well as when it feels like the bottom is falling out.

This season we set the scene for Hope, trusting that once again, God will draw near.

Gracious God,

You are the source of our hope and the One for whom we long.

May the hope we find in the stories of this season

surround us and lift us,

and may this lively hope

lead us into new birth through Jesus Christ.

Amen.

HOPE WHEN THE BOTTOM FALLS OUT

Scene: Mathew 1:18-25

Biblical Character: Joseph

Christmas Movie: *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*

I love Christmas!!! It's my favorite holiday. I begin watching Christmas movies in October because I want my Christmas season to last longer. Although, I must admit that I've had some difficult Christmases. One in particular was the first Christmas without my grandmother. She is the person that instilled in me the joy of Christmas. I remember saying to God, "Lord, how can I celebrate Christmas without the only other person in my life who loves Christmas just as much as I do?"

Oh, but God with his love and mercy restored my hope and joy by giving me the words "It's still a merry Christmas." I wrote a song with that title and the chorus says this: "It's still a merry Christmas because Jesus came to save us." Those words alone gave me the right reason to celebrate Christmas.

In the movie, *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, Clark Griswold thought he was going to get a big bonus from his boss so they could pay for a swimming pool as well as have a big family Christmas, instead, he received "Jelly of the Month Club membership." Even after all the mishaps and disasters he and his family faced, Clark Griswold found a reason and the ability to still celebrate Christmas.

Although very different from mine and the Griswold clan, Joseph had plans that first Christmas. He planned to put Mary away quietly and go on about his business. However, we all know how that story goes - God intervened, and the rest is history! This holiday season, don't forget Jesus because he is truly the reason for the season.

By Darlene Dickson