

Advent
Stories,
Reflections
& Activities

by and for our
Church Family



An Introduction to Advent (Pastor Phil Butler)

When you think of Advent, what comes to mind? For some it makes them think of the lighting of the candles on the Advent wreath either at home or at church. For some, they have a vague notion that it is linked to Christmas, like putting up decorations or putting on the Christmas music. Honestly, the season of Advent gets short-changed these days.



Rather than something tacked on to Christmas to remind us to decorate, shop or long for holidays, it was originally its own special season in the life of Christian churches to help them to focus on God's great faithfulness. It was (and is) for the worshipping community of Christians, the real "new year" – a time to think of beginnings, reflecting on God making promises to his people long ages, generations and centuries ago, which were finally fulfilled in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And Advent has more than one layer. It is not just about God's faithfulness in the past, waiting for the birth of Jesus; it is also about God's faithfulness now, as we wait for Jesus Christ to return, bringing history to its final and right conclusion.

What follows are reflections, activities, colouring pages and opportunities to join together in worship and service based on the themes of Advent: **Hope, Love, Joy and Peace**. Some have direct connections to the celebration of Christmas, some do not. But they all speak to God's great faithfulness as we remember those who waited for the birth of Christ in the past and as we wait now for his return. My prayer is that as you read these, your heart will be warmed, steadied and inspired for greater faithfulness because of the One who is faithful to you.

Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. (Psalm 36:5)

At the end of this booklet are blank pages where you can record your own reflections on Advent, plus a Schedule of Activities.

Hope

Sunday November 28

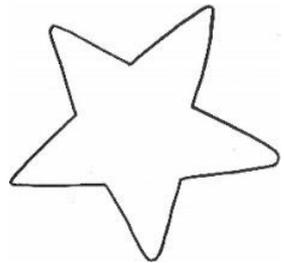
You can Colour a Star (C.E. Committee)

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:5 ESV)

Many people in our churches and communities understand the darkness, especially this year. The darkness has been so heavy that, at times, it has felt suffocating. In the midst of this, everybody is longing for what the Light of Christ brings: hope, love, joy, and peace.

Throughout the weeks of Advent in this booklet, on Sunday - the first day of the week - there will be an opportunity for you, as followers of Jesus, to share the Light of Christ with our neighbours through an activity reflecting the theme of the week like this one:

Our Heavenly Father is the God of Hope who will walk with us as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. You are invited to colour a star, cut it out and bring it to the church so that the stars may be displayed in our windows. *(Pick up a sheet of blank stars at the church or use the link in the November 17 Westview Connect to print your own at home.)*



Monday November 29

Patiently Waiting (Tina Rae)

“You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.” James 5:8

Waiting for Christmas can be difficult. So much waiting. It makes me think of Dr Seuss’s book “Oh, the places You’ll Go”. In his book he talks about a journey and the places we go through in our lives. One of those places, “the waiting place” he calls a useless place.

Waiting is tough and it can seem boring. Dr Seuss also suggests that the waiting place is a place that we want to get away from so we can find something exciting right away. It can be ok if you find ways to keep busy while you are waiting, but if you go looking for something and it means that you never get to the thing that you were waiting for, you could have lost out on something big because some things are worth waiting for.

Things like Christmas day, a visit with friends, or waiting in line for a fun ride. Just imagine if you are at a fair and there are lots of rides and one line is really long and the others are short. The short lines could lead to something that is nice, but it may be worth it to wait in line for that one amazing ride. Amazing things are worth waiting for!

In the Bible we are encouraged to be patient while we are waiting and especially as we wait for Jesus. James 5:8 says, *“You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.”* When the Lord comes it will be an amazing day and it is a day worth being ready for Him.

So be patient and appreciate the value of waiting for something good. Whether it is waiting for Christmas to come, or for the wonderful day when Jesus will come for us. Patience is worth it when we think of the amazing things we can do and the amazing places that we can go.

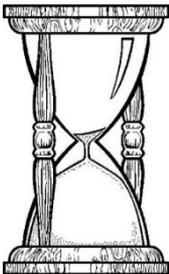
Try This Out – Use your computer to search for *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* by Dr. Seuss Read Aloud. Skip ahead to 2:30 to hear about the waiting place.

Tuesday November 30

The Extra Hour (Phil Butler)

When our son was 14 months old, he had to have open-heart surgery to repair a hole between the ventricles in his heart. Obviously, this was a big deal for me and Anne. But as we approached the date of his surgery in Toronto, there was a growing peace about the whole situation. We were able to go for a long walk around downtown Toronto the day before and we visited with people along the way. Even the day of his surgery, as strange as it was to hand him over to a fully gowned nurse who carried him through the double doors toward the operating room, Anne and I felt the peace that passes understanding.

The staff had prepared us for what to expect: four hours without communication, but with gentle and caring volunteers and staff in the waiting room ready to assist. Anne and I found that the four hours went quickly, and it was encouraging to see medical staff come into the waiting room to inform other parents that their child's surgery was completed. We hadn't reached that point yet, but we believed that God had this...that God had our son. Soon it would be our turn and we would hear the news that the surgery was over, and we could go and see him.



Anne and I also had faith that even if all did not go well that God still had all of us; we didn't need to worry. We held onto hope, believing what we hadn't yet seen or experienced. But then the fourth hour came and went. Medical staff continued to come into the waiting room to tell other parents that they could see their child. No one came for us.

The fifth hour came and went and the hope that had seemed so easy and solid before turned into a fragile thought, more like wishful thinking than hope. Thoughts of what could have gone wrong crept into our minds. At the 6th hour, finally, someone came for us. All was well. The staff had to wait for a particular piece of equipment that was being used in another operating room. This had delayed the finishing touches, but our son was alright. Our faith...our *hope*, had been stretched thin. Which has made me wonder, how much of it was real hope, since it was based on human promises and timelines.

Having our hope in God means believing him even when human promises and timelines have expired. It means being willing to wait the extra hour or hours or years beyond what *we* want. It makes me marvel at the people of faith who continued to believe that God would send a Saviour even though it had been centuries since God had made those promises; even though multiple overlords had swept through and taken over. To believe that God still has “got this” when the evidence all suggests that he has forgotten you...that is real hope. And those who had the faith to see God’s hope fulfilled in the birth of a peasant child...that is a hope worth having.

Isaiah 40:31a ... *but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength....*

Wednesday December 1

Never Lost (Kathy Root Parr)

One of the things Christian Churches do during the season of Advent is to reflect on some of the Old Testament passages that foreshadow the coming of Jesus as the fulfillment of prophesy and the hope we have that God will make things better. One passage that I haven’t heard very often, but I think should be central, is Ezekiel 34:1-24. In it, God criticizes the religious leaders of Israel for their

failure to take care of his people properly and declares that he will do it himself instead. The passage points to Jesus coming and being the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-21). The promises in the Ezekiel passage are beautiful. God says *I myself will search and find my sheep... and I will bring them safely home again.*



When I was 4 years old, I got lost. It was the first day of Kindergarten and it was my brother's job to walk with me to school in the morning and bring me home again at lunch time. He was barely older than me and had his own worries about beginning Grade 1, but I trusted him and paid no attention to where we were going.

The morning was a little traumatic. During rest period, one boy had a tantrum, jumped out the window and ran home only to be dragged back by his mother kicking and screaming to stay until the end. When it was over, I went outside to meet my brother who would take me home to safety but he wasn't there and he didn't come for me. He had gone home without me. So, after a while, I decided to start walking. I hadn't paid attention to how we got to school and nothing looked familiar. I turned the wrong way and pretty soon knew that I was lost. The more I walked, the more lost I got. Finally, in despair, I walked up to the

front porch of a house, sat my sad little self on the steps and began to cry.

A woman came to the door and I blubbered out what had happened. Then her son came to the door and said, "Oh, I know her. She's on my paper route." He put me on his bicycle and rode me home.

Of all the houses I had walked past, isn't it something that I would land on the porch of someone who knew where I lived? I don't know when, exactly, but I came to realize that I am never lost because God always knows where I am and God has a way of bringing me safely home.

Thursday December 2

Trust in God (Carol Simmons)

I was raised in a Christian home and taught at a very young age that we should trust in God. My Father passed away very suddenly at the end of my kindergarten year. Our church and neighbours were wonderful to us, but my mother knew that she would have to find a job.

At that time, it seemed that every kid on our street went home for lunch, because Mom was home. The year of grade one passed, with my Mother deciding to go to Teacher's college in the fall. That made lunches at home a thing of the past on school days. Our lunch period was an hour and a half, leaving a lot of time after eating. Unfortunately, there were only boys my age on my playground. While I wasn't excluded, I longed for a girl who stayed for lunch.

One night, as I lay in bed, I decided to ask God for a girl my age to move to my school. Wow, sometimes God answers prayer quickly. The next day, a new girl came into my class, and she was a bus student, so she had to stay for lunch.

Susan and I became great friends immediately. God granted a seven year old girl a wonderful answer to prayer that came from hope, love, joy and peace.

Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken... Trust in him at all times... pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.
(Psalm 62:5-6,8)



Friday December 3

Renewing Gratitude for our Savior at Christmas

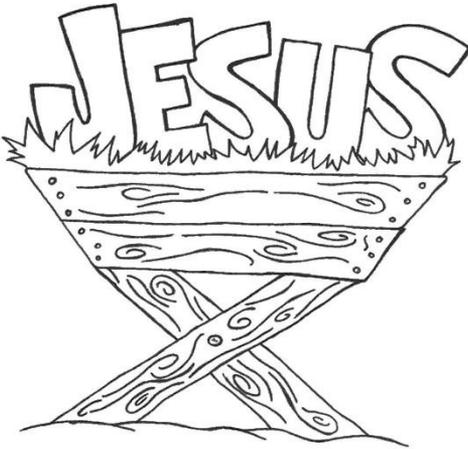
(Tina Rae)

To keep the meaning of Christmas fresh, I am challenged to search for new ways to share Advent each year. Honestly, there are years when I miss the mark, but I strive for that fresh impact every year. One year, I found it. I came across a *YouTube* video posted by *The Skit Guys* where one of the members shared a family tradition that inspired me and I wanted to share it with the church. So I did. That Sunday I shared my idea with everyone to prepare their hearts for Jesus' arrival and to search for Jesus through the advent season.

That Sunday, however, Jesus was literally missing. We saw that the manger scene was set up, but Jesus was not there. The challenge was to find him. I told everyone that I hid him and I proceeded to share a Bible verse clue to where the little baby Jesus was, somewhere in the church. The point was to keep Jesus on our minds, wondering where he was, not only thinking about Jesus at church, but also at home.

The challenge was accepted, not only by the children, but by the adults. The service finished and the search began. There were adults looking in the baptistery, looking under chairs, inside the pulpit, and all over the sanctuary, however, nobody found Jesus.

In the middle of the week, they kept looking but the little baby Jesus still stayed hidden. The next week there was another clue, and still no discovery, but Jesus was on everyone's mind. The next week it was looking as though it might be the same story, but someone had an idea to search a less accessible area a little more and I encouraged a group of children to look their hardest, and their determination paid off.



I was in the sanctuary getting ready for our pageant practice when a group of children came running into the sanctuary with such excitement shouting, "We found Him! We found Jesus!"

That advent we prepared our hearts for Jesus' arrival in a completely new way. I saw the joy of finding Christ through fresh eyes, which brought reminders of the gratitude that we need to have in the gift that Christ gave us. Christ needs to be at the forefront of the season and the forefront of our minds. We cannot forget that or let that fade into the background in the midst of a busy season because Jesus is the reason that we celebrate, and we need to always be grateful for this amazing gift of God's love.

(Excerpt from "Renewing Gratitude for our Savior at Christmas"
By Tina Rae, Nov/Dec 2015 Issue of Live magazine.)

Saturday December 4

Think about **HOPE** as you search for these words.

A	H	O	P	U	L	F	D	W	I	S	H
O	N	P	P	R	C	O	U	R	A	G	E
P	E	T	I	G	O	N	N	N	E	N	G
O	O	I	I	E	N	M	D	G	S	A	T
T	U	M	N	C	F	F	I	A	T	T	M
E	B	I	F	I	I	D	E	S	I	R	E
N	E	S	E	Y	D	P	E	L	E	U	I
T	L	M	E	E	E	Z	A	L	W	S	A
I	I	P	L	A	N	N	A	T	A	T	C
A	E	G	L	R	T	E	F	A	I	T	H
L	F	O	V	N	Z	G	U	S	T	O	E
E	E	X	P	E	C	T	A	T	I	O	N

Words may appear across, up & down, diagonally, or backwards. Some letters are used more than once. Leftover letters (starting at the top left corner and reading left to right, top to bottom) form a sentence on the theme.

- | | | | |
|---------|--------------|--------|-------------|
| Ache | Anticipation | Belief | Confident |
| Courage | Desire | Dream | Expectation |
| Faith | Feel | Fun | Gusto |
| Long | Optimism | Plan | Potential |
| Promise | Trust | Urge | Wait |
| Want | Wish | Yearn | Zeal |
| Zest | | | |

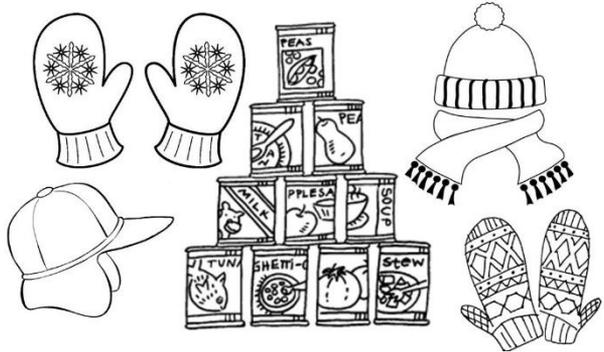
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Love

Sunday December 5

You can Donate to our Food Cupboard (C.E. Committee)

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so must you love one another.”
John 13:34



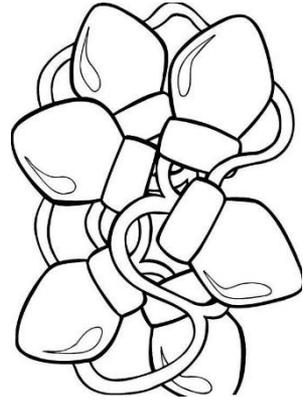
Today, we encourage you to show love for those in need in our community by donating to the Westview Food Cupboard. Bring your donations to the church (non-perishable items within the Best Before date) **this week:** today (Sunday, December 5) 8:30 am-1:30 pm or Tuesday through Thursday 9 am-4 pm. Gently used or new hats and mittens/gloves would be much appreciated as well.

Monday December 6

Christmas Lights (Tina Rae)

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

How many of you have helped put up Christmas lights? It looks great when we see all of those lights bringing some brightness to the dark winter season, but sometimes getting our lights to look so great and amazing can be quite the task.



When decorating with lights, you need to test them to make sure that they work. I remember one year that most of them worked, but there were a few that didn't. Some had burnt bulbs, some were missing bulbs, and some strings of bulbs wouldn't work at all. We even had just finished a tree once when all of the lights decided to quit.

Now what would you do if you had a string of lights that wasn't working? What are our options? Well, we could try to fix them, or honestly, many people would easily just throw them out because it is too difficult, or it takes too much time, or maybe we just don't know how to fix a string of lights.

Sometimes, I think that we are like a set of lights. We can be shining bright, but other times we are like a broken set of lights. We are called to share the light of Christ with others especially during this Christmas season, but sometimes we feel a bit broken, and it is hard to shine bright.

We can feel broken and burnt out, we have sin in our lives which darkens our lives, we are even a little tangled with some of the stresses and worries in our lives, just like our string of lights can be tangled. We aren't perfect, a bit like a broken set of lights.

The good news is that God loves us and cares for us so much that no matter how tattered, tangled, and filled with darkness we are, he will not toss us out. Even though we're

in such a sad condition, God sent Jesus to be born as a little baby and to grow up to pay the price for the sin we have in our lives.

God knew exactly what needed to happen to take us from our tattered condition and he took the time needed to heal us, fix us, and forgive us when He sent Jesus as a baby many years ago.

Now a string of lights is not a person. It is just a thing and it is okay if we do choose to throw it out. It's no big deal. But God never wanted anyone to be tossed out. He cares for each and every one of us no matter what our condition is. If we believe in Jesus, he will forgive our sins and give us a new bright and vibrant life to shine for all to see.

So remember this Christmas when you look at the string of lights, especially any that are not quite working properly, that we too are not perfect and that God can work in our lives and make us new and bright.

Try This Out - Some families in London love decorating for Christmas. Do you want to see some amazing light displays? Go for a drive around the city and check them out!

Tuesday December 7

More than we Ask or Imagine (Anne Butler)

Phil and I chose Ephesians 3:20-21 as the blessing at the end of our wedding in 1994. *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

Our love was young, but it had already been tested.

We met one another very soon after we had individually made a choice to put Christ squarely on the throne of our lives. Jesus had been part of our lives for years, but definitely hadn't been in charge. As part of our dating relationship, we had some confessing to do with each other. The miracle was that God did "immeasurably more than we asked or imagined" in growing us individually and as a couple to bring us to the point where we knew that He wanted us together for life.

Our love has continued to endure testing...and sometimes it hasn't been pretty! But, God has shown Himself faithful in doing more than we could ask or imagine. Our responsibility has been, and continues to be, to put Him first and to humble ourselves before Him and each other. That's when we see His power at work in such a beautiful way!

Wednesday December 8

Reflecting the Creator (Kathy Root Parr)

One of my favourite passages of scripture is Romans 1:20. I especially like the way it is rendered in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible: *Ever since the creation of the world (God's) eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.* So I wasn't surprised when my chiropractor said, "I think the love of a dog is the closest reflection there is of what God's is like." We don't usually talk about God at these appointments but my mother-in-law's dog was coming to the end of his life and so it was relevant.

Dogs love us unconditionally. Occasionally they can become annoyed with us, but their love **never** ceases, and it is really powerful. That is what God is like. No matter how little time we have been away, coming back into the house we are greeted by a dog as if we are their most favourite

person in the world and they are unbelievably glad to see us. That is how God receives us whenever we come into his presence. Even better than that, God comes bounding to greet us. Consider

Deuteronomy 33:26a:
There is no one like the God of Israel. He rides across the heavens to help you...

With a love like that, it is no wonder God was willing to go to such lengths to bring us into his family through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that 'DOG' is 'GOD' spelled backwards... reflecting the Creator?

DOG Depend On God



Courtesy of Golden Opportunity Service Dogs
(Donna Frezell)

Thursday December 9

Drenched (Phil Butler)

I have a vivid and beautiful memory from my childhood of a moment that could have been very dark. Our family had been travelling for our summer vacation and camping each night along the way. It was a hot summer and one evening as my parents set up the camp site my three older siblings and I begged to be allowed into the water with the big inflatable air mattress. Mom and dad agreed and into the water we went.

Most of that I know from the retelling of the story, after all, I was the youngest and only about 5 years old during this

summer of adventure. According to my dad, he remembers us being very noisy in the water and then suddenly we were very quiet – the cue for most parents to think “What’s gone wrong?!” He looked up to see three of his children, the older three, quietly peering over the side of the air mattress looking down into the water....

The part that I vividly remember is looking up from under the water and thinking how beautiful it was: the sun and the colours and the ripples filtered through the water. Oddly, it was a peaceful feeling. Then I remember a white streak of bubbles and a muffled splash. The next memory I have is of my dad draping clothes and dollar bills and non-laminated ID cards over sticks near the campfire to dry.

My Dad had realized that the missing child (me) was under the water and not coming back up. He had dived under the water, clothes on, wallet in his pocket, to pull me up from and out of the water. Even now, that image of him drying off his valuable personal possessions, reminds me that I was worth more than all of that to him.

During Advent, when I think of God’s love, I find it incredible to ponder all that God was willing to sacrifice to rescue me. He dove into our world, aware of the consequences and cost, but willing to lose it all to pull me and you up and out from a grave we were powerless to escape. God loves you so much that he does not tip-toe into the water to save us, he dives in head first!

Isaiah 43:1-4: ... this is what the Lord says— he who created you, ... he who formed you... “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior... you are precious and honored in my sight... I love you...

Friday December 10

Think about **LOVE** as you search for these words.

A	T	T	A	C	H	M	E	N	T	G	S
D	E	V	O	T	I	O	N	B	G	S	G
O	L	I	K	E	O	D	F	E	E	L	O
R	G	L	O	N	G	V	E	N	N	R	O
A	F	O	N	D	O	S	I	E	E	E	D
T	Y	O	D	E	O	L	U	V	R	S	W
I	A	C	N	R	D	N	A	O	O	P	I
O	D	H	D	N	E	E	C	L	S	E	L
N	W	O	E	E	R	E	T	E	I	C	L
E	A	I	V	S	A	D	I	N	T	T	E
R	R	C	Y	S	C	R	O	C	Y	O	N
F	M	E	K	I	N	D	N	E	S	S	E

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Action

Benevolence

Dear

Fond

God

Kindness

Respect

Adoration

Care

Devotion

Friendliness

Good

Like

Tenderness

Attachment

Choice

Feel

Generosity

Goodwill

Need

Warm

Saturday December 11

God is Not Mr. Roadhouse (Kathy Root Parr)

Once upon a time, when I was a student of Chemistry at the University of Guelph, I had a lab instructor whose name was Mr. Roadhouse. He was a white-haired older gentleman in a crisp white lab coat with a no-nonsense attitude.

On the first day of the lab, Mr. Roadhouse assigned each student a section of lab bench with a sink, a Bunsen burner and a locked cabinet under the countertop. We had to pay a \$50 deposit for a set of glassware and other lab equipment required for the term with the understanding that 'if you break it, you bought it' and our deposit would not be returned. He gave us each a key and handed out instructions in writing for 12 different experiments we were required to complete during the remaining 12 sessions of the term. We could not come early or stay late. We were to work in silence.



The results of each experiment were to be handed in at the end of each 3-hour lab session. There was just enough time to complete the task for the day. If you made a mistake there was not enough time to start again, and you would fail that day's assignment. If you completed the task and handed the result into him, you wouldn't

know until the end of the term whether or not it was right.

After he finished that speech, he didn't say another word for the rest of the term. He was always there and he spent the entire three hours each week walking up and down the rows between the lab benches watching what we were doing. Sometimes he would stop for several minutes with his hands behind his back just watching someone work. He never smiled or nodded encouragement.

He also had a little black book that he kept in his pocket and every once in a while he would frown, take it out, write something in it, close it up, put it back in his pocket and walk on. And that's what happened week after week for 12 weeks. What a relief it was for those of us who passed when he posted the marks at the end of the term (I did). How devastating it was for others. We never knew if we were good enough until it was too late to do anything about it.

Some people think God is like Mr. Roadhouse – an intimidating old man who is always looking over our shoulder, occasionally frowning and marking something down in his little black book, and never giving any indication whether or not we are good enough until Judgement Day when it's too late to make a change in how we do things. What a scary way to live!

Fortunately, that's not the picture scripture gives us about what God is like. It very clearly says that God loves us and wants us to know for certain that he has done everything required to bring us into his family. All we have to do is say, "Thank you," and "Yes God, I would like to be part of your family." There is nothing we can do to make ourselves more acceptable. There is nothing we can do to make ourselves less acceptable. It has little to do with us. God decided to make us acceptable to him through the sacrifice of his son – the son he sent to us on that first Christmas – because God loves us.

We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love... And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but

*we can face him with confidence ... Such love has no fear,
because perfect love expels all fear... (I John 4:16-18 NLT)*

Joy

Sunday December 12

You can Come and Sing with Us (C.E. Committee)

The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people”
(Luke 2:10)

We invite you to join us on **Friday, December 17 at 7 pm** under the shelter at the front doors of the church to sing some of our favourite carols celebrating the birth of Jesus. Hot chocolate will be served to warm our insides. Please dress for the weather, and bring a blanket if you wish. Chairs will be available for those who need to sit.



Monday December 13

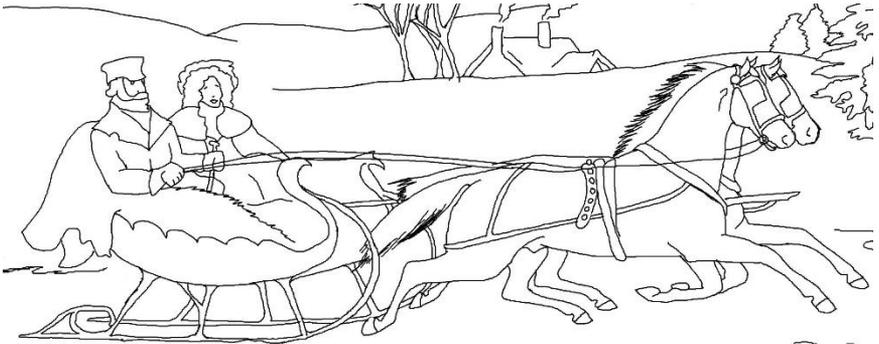
Remembering Christmas (Vi Darling)

My early memories of preparing for Christmas begin with Sunday School preparations. Practicing with our cousins and friends in our classes; acrostics that heralded the birth of Jesus, our Saviour, who was Wonderful Counsellor and Prince of Peace; songs ... Away in a Manger, Silent Night,

We Three Kings; Pageants relating the Manger Scene. The excitement of the program before Christmas with the bag of treats as the finale...a Japanese orange, nuts and candy...yummm.

Then there was the drawing of family names for gift exchange on Christmas Eve when we gathered at Deedik and Babka Bellows for Family Feast with all the uncles and aunts and cousins.

In the days of the late thirties, my outstanding gift was a doll with handmade wardrobe from my Aunt Nettie who had drawn my name. What joy that was. Dad would drive through snow or storm with two horses pulling a wagon box on sleigh which held five excited cherubs with Mom snuggled on hay and covered with warm woollen homemade quilts.



Arriving at Grandparents' home, we unloaded gifts under the decorated tree, inhaled the smells of the busy kitchen with the local aunts and Grandma cooking up a storm and setting tables in dining and living rooms. After a tummy filling meal of turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy, perogies, cabbage roll, jellies, salad, veggies, kootia, and pie for dessert, we sang for Grandpa and Grandma Bellows (Deedik and Babka) our Sunday School Songs, carols along with their favorite Ukrainian Christmas Carol. Each grandchild was given a nickel from Grandpa (about twenty five of us) which could buy an ice cream cone at that time).

Of course there were five sleeping children when we arrived home late that night with visions of sugarplums dancing in our heads.

Reflecting back on these memories, I am grateful for God-fearing grandparents who brought with them the strong faith in a God who loved us so much that he gave his son, Jesus, to come as a human baby so we could learn how to live a life pleasing to him by example. Who, by dying in our place, gave us eternal life freed from our sin if we believe. What joy, peace and hope we have if we trust and obey. May you enjoy these gifts as you look forward to this Christmas!

Tuesday December 14

Singing God's Praises (Tina Rae)

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Have you ever seen a glass sing? This is a really neat experiment that I learned as a child. You can get a glass to sing when you put energy into it by rubbing the top edge of the glass with the wet tip of your finger and forcing it to vibrate.



As a kid, I remember experimenting with all kinds of glasses and being fascinated by singing glass. Of course, the normal glass you find in most homes does not sing very well. You can put all kinds of energy into it and rub it all you want, but it won't work. A normal glass is like someone who does not know Christ. They can be beautiful, have happiness, and a good life, but with all the effort they put into their lives they don't necessarily sing with the Joy that we have as Christians. There is something missing.

You see when we become Christians it says in the Bible in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that we are a new creation in him. So, in this situation, I think more about a fine crystal glass. It is still a glass, but it is different and beautiful and when you put energy and effort into it, this glass can sing.

There are many of us who accept Christ and we become beautiful creations in Christ, but we don't necessarily sing either. When we know God we need to put some effort and energy into our relationship with God, read the Bible, pray, worship God and get to know Jesus. When we put out that effort we can sing.

That's one of the reasons why Christmas is so important. God sent his Son, Jesus, so that we could know him and so that our lives could sing with his joy.

Everyone in our church family is like these crystal glasses. If we have accepted Christ and if we are putting work and energy into our relationship with God, we can sing and when we all sing together it can be a beautiful sound. Are you singing with Joy and are you singing in beautiful harmony?

Try This Out - If you want to see a glass sing, go to Youtube and look for "Street Artist Playing Hallelujah with Crystal Glasses."

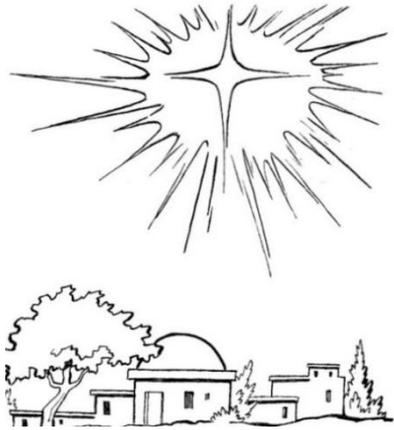
Wednesday December 15

Exceedingly Great Joy! (Kathy Root Parr)

I love the story of the wisemen (Matthew 2:1-12) and how, even though they were from a different culture and practiced a different religion from Mary and Joseph, God wanted them to know about Jesus and sent them a message through the stars. This shouldn't surprise us since *the heavens declare the glory of God...* (Psalm 19:1) so we can expect to learn about God from the stars.

During my undergraduate years at the University of Guelph, I studied a little bit of Astronomy – fascinating! As we approached Christmas, we talked about the star of Bethlehem and what it could have been. The explanation I like best is that it was a conjunction, where three celestial objects lined up behind one another, forming a very short lived but very bright light in the sky. I don't remember exactly which three objects they were but I do remember that, according to Persian astrology, one signified the **birth** of a special someone, one represented the **Jews** and the third proclaimed a **king**.

That is why the wisemen asked in verse 2 *Where is the one who has been **born king of the Jews**? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.* (NLT) Later, in verse 10 it says, *When they saw the star* (which pointed them directly to Jesus and his family), *they were overjoyed.* (NLT) “Overjoyed” doesn't quite capture the meaning of the phrase in the original language which says *they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy* – the biggest pile of joy you can imagine.



That's the kind of joy that can fill us when we meet our Savior for the first time and any time after that. Joy is, after all, one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and is supposed to be ours when we invite Jesus into our heart.

Thursday December 16

Pulling off the Road (Phil Butler)

I love to travel. As a child, it seemed like the ultimate adventure. We would pile into the car with our luggage and

head off down the road, knowing our destination but not knowing what we would see along the way. Of course, back then I had the luxury of sitting in the back seat while my dad did the driving so that I could look out the windows in any direction to see what new sights there might be.

As an adult my experience of travel has changed. I still get excited about it but behind the steering wheel there can be some disadvantages. The main disadvantage is that I am obligated to keep watching in the same direction. There have been many times that Anne or one of our kids has suddenly gasped and exclaimed, pointing out the side window at... (a bear, a moose, a rainbow, a shooting star...) and there is no way I can safely crane my neck around to catch even a fleeting glimpse of it. But what's truly tragic is that too often my adult mind, intent as it is on speed and efficiency, doesn't even entertain the thought of pulling over so that we can all look on in awe for a moment.

When I think of Advent and joy, it's the quiet, full-hearted sense of wonder at what God can and will do and, in fact, what he is doing even now. He promised a Saviour. He reminded his people over and over of his promise and his faithfulness. He painted word pictures of this coming Saviour. But too many of his people were so intent on simply getting further down the road, that they never stopped to joyfully celebrate what God would do. And the greatest tragedy of all, when that Saviour arrived, those busy, driven, focused people missed him, mocked him and murdered him.

Today, stop and consider God's promise of a Saviour and how creatively and faithfully he fulfilled that promise. Let the wonder of God's steadfast love fill your heart with wonder and joy so that you can celebrate, not only what he *has* done, but what he has said he *will* do.

Psalm 16:11 says, *You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

Friday December 17

Good News! (Ruthe Murphy)

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor ... to comfort all who mourn... to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. (Isaiah 61:1-2 NIV)

In Isaiah 61:1-3, Isaiah states that he has been 'anointed' by God to give the people very important information ... that God loves us deeply and unconditionally and wants to be active in our lives every day ... when we are sad, confused, in trouble, cannot remember who we are, feel trapped by circumstances or feel defeated. He promises to meet us, to be present and support us because He loves us. There are no conditions or requirements to receive God's love and acceptance. We are God's children, made in his image and created to be in relationship with Him. This is the source of real joy. Joy is not dependent on circumstances or the opinions of others. It comes from knowing who we are to God. We are his children who are loved beyond measure by our heavenly Father. Nothing can change that.

In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus uses the same words and says he has come to show us the same things. God's love for us is eternal and unchanging. Our response is to accept that love, allow it to transform us and then pass on this truth to those around us. Knowing and accepting that you are loved no matter what will produce joy that is tangible, impactful and observable.



Saturday December 18

Think about **JOY** as you search for these words.

E	S	S	P	I	R	I	T	C	J	W	N
E	C	I	S	S	G	A	U	O	S	O	G
A	I	S	N	I	V	O	P	N	I	N	G
H	M	F	T	G	L	L	D	T	E	D	L
A	P	U	S	A	L	B	C	E	U	E	A
P	E	N	S	I	S	A	M	N	D	R	D
P	E	X	R	E	F	Y	D	T	E	G	E
I	D	H	U	S	M	O	E	M	T	L	L
N	T	G	I	L	O	E	R	E	A	E	I
E	E	T	A	G	T	T	N	N	L	E	G
S	A	J	L	A	U	G	H	T	E	R	H
S	P	L	E	A	S	U	R	E	O	Y	T

Words may appear across, up & down, diagonally, or backwards. Some letters are used more than once. Leftover letters (starting at the top left corner and reading left to right, top to bottom) form a sentence on the theme.

Amusement

Deep

Elated

Glee

Happiness

Rapture

Sing

Wonder

Bliss

Delight

Exult

God

Laughter

Run

Spirit

Contentment

Ecstasy

Glad

Good

Pleasure

Satisfaction

Thrill

Peace

Sunday December 19

You can Come and Listen (C.E. Committee)

“And he will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6)

Please join us any or **every evening this week**, December 19-23, from 7-8 pm for devotional readings and Christmas music. We are hoping to use an FM transmitter so you can come to the church and listen while enjoying the nativity display in the warmth of your car. Stay "tuned" for further details as the date approaches. The prerecorded devotions and music can also be enjoyed through our church phone (519-681-9844 ext. 230) or on our website (www.westviewbaptist.ca).

Let Music Bring You Peace (Martha Reis)

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)



There are so many songs that speak about peace. One such hymn born out of the agony of loss that still resonates with me - “It is well with my Soul”.
(© Public Domain)

*When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,
“It is well, it is well with my soul.”*

Life is full of storms and loss but we can rest assured that we will find peace when we have Jesus at the centre of our lives.

During the pandemic I came across another song that reminded me that “God is still in control”. The verse,

*How can I say it is well,
when my voice can barely speak?
How can I sing you a song
in the midst of suffering?
Jesus will you meet me here?
Let your peace wash over me.
I need you now more than ever.
Teach my soul to sing.*

The chorus,

*My God is still in control
and still he reigns on His throne.
Though mountains may tremble
and sea billows roll,
I'll sing it is well with my soul.
My God is still in control.*

Whatever may be troubling you today I would encourage you to listen to inspirational music and allow it to soothe your soul and bring you peace. (*Still in Control* by Jesse Reeves, Mack Brock, Ran Jackson, Ricky Jackson © 2018 Capitol CMG Paragon CCLI # 363588)

Monday December 20

Light in the Darkness (Tina Rae)

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.” (Isaiah 9:2)

It can be difficult to share some of the dark parts of your personal story. Talking about sadness, death, sin, pain, and the hurt you've walked through isn't easy. We don't like to revisit those memories.

It can be difficult to hear another person's story of darkness, but many times I have resonated with what they shared. At times I've experienced the same hurt and they were able to understand my pain, but the most meaningful part of the experience is the encouragement that comes from knowing that others have worked through the hurt and found peace, so I can too. How unfortunate it would be if we didn't hear these stories. Hiding them could keep others from being encouraged as they work through their own brokenness.

In considering how our difficulties can have value, I'm reminded of a type of artwork that also values brokenness. It's called kintsugi, a form of Japanese art where broken pottery is repaired with gold, which beautifully highlights the imperfections. The gold brings out the history of the object instead of hiding it, because the history, even though it is broken, is valued.*

The history of the Israelites is filled with imperfect people who went through some very difficult times and situations, but these stories aren't hidden from us. They are told to remind us of how God has worked to restore His people to a right relationship with Him.

Isaiah 9:1-7 contains a foreshadowing of a bright future wherein God will send His Son to save the Israelites—and to save us. Isaiah brought the promise of peace with God to the Israelites. In these prophetic words, God promises to bring His people redemption and deliver them out of their darkness and brokenness by sending His Son to conquer death. Through this, all who believe in Him can experience light and life.

Be encouraged that this promise is not only for the Israelites, but also for us. He offers Jesus' salvation in addition to His comfort so that we too can hope for a bright future.

Try This Out Consider something you are struggling through in your own life right now and draw images, symbols, and words that represent that struggle. It can be helpful to explore through artwork a difficult situation you're experiencing. Go back over your drawing with gold or yellow paint, or a gold marker, and contemplate the hope you have and can bring to others through this journey.**

* "Kintsugi," Wikipedia. Date of access: September 9, 2019 (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kintsugi>).

** Devotion used with permission from "Devotions for the Artist at Heart" by Rev. Tina Rae

Tuesday December 21

The Way of Peace (Kathy Root Parr)

Have you ever been in a place where you felt completely at peace in the full sense of the word *shalom*, which includes a sense of well-being in heart, soul, body, mind and community? I felt that a few years ago on Mount McKay, the sacred mountain of the Fort William First Nation in Thunder Bay, Ontario. They call the mountain *Anemki Wajiw* – Thunder Mountain.

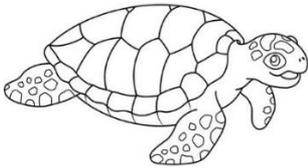
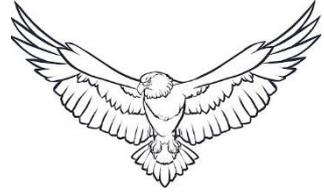
You can only drive part way up. You have to walk if you want to go all the way to the top. But on a plateau, where cars are allowed to park and there is a clear view of the city and the *sleeping giant**, there is a large circle of billboards displaying the seven sacred teachings that form the spiritual foundation of these indigenous people.

Each one-word lesson is represented by an animal and a description of how to live it. I felt completely at peace as I walked under the sunshine in the midst of these beautiful

words and came to know that they are pretty much the same lessons my spiritual community and the scriptures that I love have taught me. This is the way of peace – the way of Jesus.

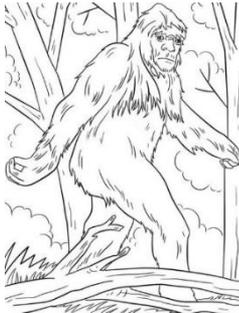
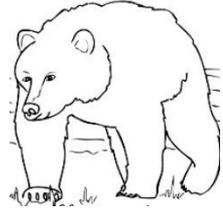
(The words from the signs are in bold and/or italics print. I added the scripture references that reflect the same truth.)

Love (*Eagle*) – Always act in love; love the Creator and Mother Earth. Love yourself, your family, your community and Mother Earth’s creatures. (Luke 10:27; Genesis 1:26 - try reading it in The Message)



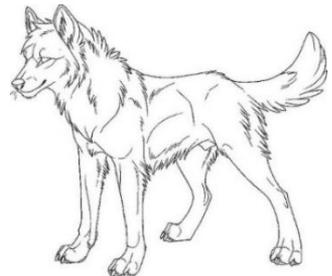
Truth (*Turtle*) – Always pursue truth; living in truth means existing in the Seven Teachings. (Philippians 4:6-9; Psalm 15:1-5; Psalm 25:5)

Courage (*Bear*) – Listen to your heart; it takes courage to do what is correct. (Joshua 1:9; 1 Chronicles 22:11-13; 1 Corinthians 16:13-14)



Honesty (*Sabe/Sasquatch*) – Be honest with yourself and others; speak from your heart. Be true to your word. (Deuteronomy 25:13-16; 1 Samuel 16:7; James 5:12)

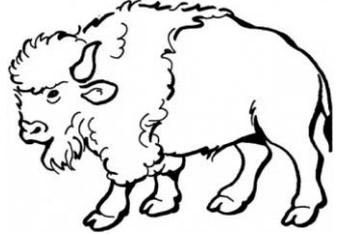
Humility (*Wolf*) – Think of others first, and exhibit humbleness to the Creator by being thankful. (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:27-36; James 4:6-10; 1 Peter 5:5-6; Ephesians 5:15-21)





Wisdom (Beaver) – Everyone has special gifts; embody wisdom by using your gifts for goodness and harmony. (Ephesians 4:4-16, 29; James 3:13-17)

Respect (Buffalo) – Respect life on Mother Earth; honour Children, Youth, Women, Men and Elders of all races through kindness and charity. (Genesis 1:26; Ephesians 6:1-4; Ephesians 4:32; 1 Corinthians 14:4-13)



*You can see pictures and read the “Legend of the Sleeping Giant” at <https://www.northernontario.travel/thunder-bay/legend-of-the-sleeping-giant>.

Wednesday December 22

The Great Paw of Peace (Phil Butler)

I am not one to put a lot of stock in dreams. What I mean is that I don't wake up each morning and record my dreams or try to interpret them. *But* I do believe that from time-to-time God uses dreams to speak to us in ways that we might not otherwise hear (the Bible backs me up here, think of *both* Josephs in the Bible). I have had a small handful of such dreams in my lifetime. One happened while I was in university. It was a simple dream with powerful emotions that I can still feel as I think about it.

In the dream I was asleep (always a confusing way to start a dream). As I woke up, I suddenly realized that I was lying next to a lion, which was also sleeping. Outwardly I said nothing but inwardly I began to panic; *I had to get away from it!* Slowly, very slowly I started pushing myself up to be able to start to crawl away. But just as slowly, and with its eyes still closed, the lion lifted one of its mighty paws and

placed it heavily on my back. I was pushed back to the ground with no way of escape.

At that moment, what had begun as panic turned into chest-pounding freak-out (though, still a silent one): I was certain that I was being saved as a midnight snack. But just as quickly as that thought came on, another thought came to me: there are no claws! I'm sure there *were* claws, but the lion had not put them out and the act of “trapping” me there was an incredibly gentle one. Suddenly a calm descended as I realized that I was not a morsel for later, I was a cub, safe and secure.

The whole dream probably lasted a matter of seconds, but the significance has been with me ever since then: peace is a matter of perspective. Is God a threat and a captor, or our greatest security?



In Revelation 5:5 Jesus is portrayed as the Lion of Judah, God's promised Saviour, both powerful and comforting. Ultimate peace comes from the one with the power to protect and the love to restrain. As we approach Christmas we see that this “lion” came powerless and humble, not threatening and devouring. His simple entrance into the world is our reassurance that he can be trusted, that he does bring peace.

Genesis 49:8-10

Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you. You are a lion's cub, Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.

Thursday December 23

Think about **PEACE** as you search for these words.

K	P	A	C	I	F	Y	N	O	W	H	J
R	C	E	S	O	O	T	H	E	G	A	S
E	U	O	S	A	C	O	N	C	O	R	D
C	W	A	M	I	T	Y	C	D	D	M	A
O	Y	E	X	P	T	S	E	H	L	O	D
N	T	K	L	I	O	L	A	U	L	N	C
C	A	L	M	L	F	S	S	S	I	Y	O
I	E	S	N	F	B	O	E	H	W	S	M
L	R	U	U	O	W	E	F	D	D	T	F
E	T	R	A	N	Q	U	I	L	O	I	O
P	N	E	E	E	A	C	R	N	O	L	R
U	S	I	L	E	N	C	E	E	G	L	T

Words may appear across, up & down, diagonally, or backwards. Some letters are used more than once. Leftover letters (starting at the top left corner and reading left to right, top to bottom) form a sentence on the theme.

Amity
Comfort
Fix
Harmony
Pacify
Silence
Sure
Unruffled

Calm
Composed
God
Hush
Reconcile
Soothe
Tranquil
Wellbeing

Ceasefire
Concord
Goodwill
One
Rest
Still
Treaty

Friday December 24

“It Says So Right Here!” (Phil Butler)

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). (Matthew 1:22-23)

I wasn't quite a Christmas Baby...but close. And shortly after I came home from the hospital (I don't know exactly when) my mom was walking toward the room where I was lying in my crib. As she approached, she overheard a little voice, the voice of my oldest brother who was seven at the time, reading to me from the Bible. I have no memory of this (obviously), but apparently he spoke with deep conviction, stopping every sentence or so to say “See Phil! It says so right here!”



The written word is not always to be trusted – people can write whatever they want. But when words that predicted accurately, when words stand the test of time, when God shows up just as words attributed to him say, should we not stop and take note? Should we not stop and marvel. Shouldn't we turn to someone else and say “Look! It said so right here!!”

As Matthew wrote down the story of Jesus' birth he repeatedly said, “it says so right here!” Well, actually what he said was “...this took place to fulfill...” and then he would quote the words of ancient prophets, kings, and song

writers whom God had used, centuries before to announce and anticipate the coming Of God’s Messiah, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. And Matthew is not alone in this. Other writers of the Bible: Paul, Mark, John, the writer of Hebrews, Stephen the Deacon, and Jesus himself, pointed out the words that had been spoken and written long ago that promised God would send us a Saviour.

Tonight, we will worship the Christ child. Tonight, we can look at the long record of predictions and see God’s faithfulness to fulfill. Tonight, we can declare with the conviction “See?! It says so right here!”

Oh, how good is our God. Praise be to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!



Schedule of Activities

Week of Sunday November 28 . submit Coloured Stars to Pastor Tina	p. 2
Week of Sunday December 5 . Donate to our Food Cupboard	p. 11
Friday December 17 @ 7 pm . Carol Singing outside the Church	p. 20
December 19-23 @ 7-8 pm . FM Music & Devos in the Parking Lot	p. 28
Christmas Eve—December 24 @ 6:30 pm . In-Person Service	

Cover Art by Tina Rae

Puzzles by Kathy Root Parr



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