



2025 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL SERIES

TRANSFORMING APPALACHIA THROUGH GOD'S LOVE



LED BY THE LAITY OF THE
West Virginia Conference
The United Methodist Church

**PASSIONATE SPIRITUAL LEADERS WHO MAKE DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST
FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD**

2025 ADVENT DEVOTIONS - WVUMC

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Transforming Appalachia through God's Love

An Advent Devotional Series

**Presented by the
West Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church**

Lay Ministries Team

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As we enter this season of Advent, we are called once again to prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of Christ. Advent invites us to wait with hope, to watch with faith, and to open ourselves to the transforming power of God's love.

It is a time when we are reminded that God's work of redemption is both personal and communal — renewing hearts and transforming entire communities through grace.

Our theme, *"Transforming Appalachia through God's Love,"* reflects our shared calling as disciples of Jesus Christ within our churches, towns, cities, counties, and connection. Appalachia is a land of deep faith and enduring strength, but also a region longing for renewal and healing.

The words of John the Baptist in Matthew 3:1–12 remind us of that call to transformation: *"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."* His message was both urgent and hopeful — a summons to repentance, renewal, and readiness for the One who would baptize not only with water, but with the Holy Spirit and fire.

That same Spirit moves among us today, empowering us to live as instruments of God's redeeming love throughout Appalachia and beyond.

These devotions, written by laity from across our Conference, bear witness to how God's transforming grace is already at work among us — in acts of service, compassion, and faithful discipleship. Each reflection is a reminder that the love of Christ continues to be born anew wherever God's people choose to love, serve, and hope.

As you journey through this Advent season, I hope that you can find inspiration, comfort, and renewal in these devotions — right here in the hills and valleys of the West Virginia Conference — through the power of God's amazing love.

May all the peace, hope, joy, and love of the Advent season be with you and your families this holiday season.

Jim Minutelli, CLM
Conference Lay Leader
West Virginia Conference
The United Methodist Church

November 30, 2025
First Sunday of Advent

Appalachia and Roots

Psalms 122

¹I rejoiced with those who said to me "Let us go up to the house of the Lord"....⁹For the sake of the house of the Lord our God I will seek your prosperity.

My roots are deep in this area called Appalachia.

My dad was born and raised in Grant County. He left school after the fourth grade to go to work with his grandfather in his lumber business. If the sawmill was slow, he was working with his father on the share crop farm in the community.

Working and helping out was just what you did.

There were not a lot of rules; only two were important: "Church on Sunday" and "Help your neighbor." Dad lived and taught these two rules.

Growing up I lived in a lot of different little towns spread out in southwestern Pennsylvania and northwest West Virginia. My dad had a lot of different jobs including driving a tire truck, gas station mechanic, state road worker, and coal miner. He worked hard regardless of his job.

No matter what else might be going on, Sunday was for church. He made sure every community has a church. Yes, mostly Methodist. Dad loved a good old fashioned hymn sing and was never late for pot luck supper night!

Dad had one of those faces and smiles that he never knew a stranger. He offered help freely.

Dad continued to teach his roots. Dad made sure each of his children completed high school. More importantly, Dad ensured we were grounded in the Word.

I rejoice in my Appalachian roots and the two rules taught by my dad.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for an earthly father who knew the importance of roots. One day I am waiting to hear you say "Come and let us go to the house of the Lord." Amen

Mary C. Bane
Mon Valley District

December 1, 2025

God's Love at Advent

[Psalm 124](#)

⁶Praise be to the Lord, who has not let us be torn by their teeth. ⁷We have escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Advent is the start of the New Year for us as Christians and a time for us to remember where our true hope is.

Psalm 124 is a good Psalm to read and meditate on during Advent. It helps us to deal with the tragedies of life. God never leaves us alone. If we put our Faith in God, the enemy cannot truly harm us. Yes, we will have problems, and bad things will happen, but God is with us through them all.

In October I went through a very hard and unexpected hospital stay. I had a very bad infection, and the antibiotic was a very strong one. The two together messed up my mind and made my legs weak. I had lots of prayers being prayed for me and, in the end, God won. My mind is back to normal, and I have strength back in my legs.

In the end, *we will win*, not because of anything we have done, but because Jesus was born, died, rose, and will come again.

During Lent we look forward to that second coming when everything will be perfect and the enemy cannot harm us.

What greater love could there be than this?

Jesus was born for us and will come back again. So this is how we can "Transform Appalachia Through God's Love." By spreading the word of all that God has done for us, because he loves us.

Let us pray: Dear Lord: During this Advent Season, help us remember to keep our Faith in you and to remember what it is about. Help us to spread the Good News of Advent to all we meet in order to Transform Appalachia through God's Love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Peggy Klages
Wayman's Ridge UMC
Wheeling, WV
Administrative Assistant/Treasurer - Northern District WVUMC
Pastor at Wayman's Ridge UMC

December 2, 2025

Tested and Proven

[Genesis 9:1-17](#)

¹⁵I will remember the covenant between me and you and every living being among all the creatures. Floodwaters will never again destroy all creatures. ¹⁶The bow will be in the clouds, and upon seeing it I will remember the enduring covenant between God and every living being of all the earth's creatures. (CEB)

Perched upon Mt. Ararat waiting for the waters to recede, the eight souls in the ark must have wondered what life would be like after the flood had wiped out their complete way of life and all that was familiar.

Today many of our Appalachian neighbors find themselves in a similar struggle.

I can relate. When my father died unexpectedly at age 43, my childhood family was stripped of the known and familiar: father, husband, wage-earner, house, schools, neighborhood, church, friends, and extended family.

Mom, who had been a mother and homemaker since age 19, moved us out of Appalachia to be closer to her parents who had retired to a small town in central Ohio.

We all had to begin again in an unfamiliar culture without our familiar supports. And yet God was there. My parents passed on their faith to their six children. Mom repeatedly marked Bible verses "T&P" -- tested and proven -- for when she had put God's promise to the test, and it proved true.

She often quoted Paul's words from Acts 14, God "did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good... satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." She would pray and look for the witness of God's provision.

God never disappointed. Though impoverished, we all, including Mom, graduated from college, worked at meaningful jobs, served our faith communities, and reared Christian families.

God has initiated an unconditional covenant of salvation for all people that depends solely on his goodness.

He has hung up his bow as proof. He does not fight against us. He brings us about good -- even in the midst of horrific circumstances. He never forsakes us, never upbraids us for not knowing what to do.

He sends his people into our lives, opens doors, and guides us by the wise counsel of his Holy Spirit.

Our great covenant-keeping God is at work renewing, restoring, and recreating. This Good News of hope in God's love is able to transform the souls of Appalachia; we need only to proclaim it.

Ask me; I know. I've tested and proved that God keeps his covenant.

Prayer: *Loving Father, who keeps his covenant of love to all generations, fill us with your love and inspire us to proclaim the hope we have because of Jesus so that all who live in Appalachia will know him and be transformed to walk in newness of life. In the name of your Son, our mighty Deliverer, Amen.*

Heidi Schmidt, Certified Lay Minister
Mount Olivet UMC, Wheeling, WV
Director of Discipleship Ministries and Prayer Coordinator
Annual Conference Lay Equalization Member
Co-Facilitator of CLM Covenant Group Book Study
Instructor for Northern District Lay Servant Ministries

December 3, 2025

Inseparable: God's Love and His People

[Isaiah 54: 1-10](#)

⁷For a mere moment, I have forsaken you but with great mercies, I will gather you.

⁸With a little wrath, I hid My face from you for a moment: But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you." Says the Lord, your redeemer.

No one gets through this life without some sadness, loss, or feelings of "why me, God." And at such times, it is easy to feel God has abandoned us.

The feeling of being abandoned may come from what we see as unanswered prayer or feelings of disappointment that things didn't work out the way we expected, given that we "did all the right things."

My first encounter with such an experience was a divorce that, at the time, left me feeling like it was the end of my world. I had always been a Christian and a believer and had always been perceived by others as in total control of my life – self-sufficient and able to handle anything that came my way.

But this experience of divorce left me shaken to the core, and for the first time in my life, I was up against something I couldn't fix.

Like many people when confronted with situations like this, I turned in desperation to God and admitted my dependence on Him. I will never forget the peace that came over me and allowed me to sleep for the first time in several days.

I now realize that was my first realization that God is real, has compassion on us, and is our ever-present help in times of trouble.

I realized that I had been missing out on the powerful presence and gift of God in directing my life. I also realized it is never too late to make up for lost time!

In a spiritual study group, my pastor Reverend Joe Hill, told us that when we experience the Holy Spirit in our lives, it leaves us a changed person. That is what happened to me those many years ago when I called on God for help in my desperate time of need.

I am a changed person who realizes the need for God in my life every day, and that I need to accept His love and ask for guidance in my life. What a blessing that has been: to know I can call on Him and have a conversation about anything I am feeling or need. I give thanks to Him for the covenant of peace and love He has made with his people.

Prayer: Father God, I give you thanks for the covenant of everlasting love you have made with me, your faithful servant, through your son, my redeemer. Knowing that nothing can separate me from your love brings me a peace and comfort every day in every situation that nothing else can provide. Help me to live each day as you would have me to live and forgive me my sins as I strive to be a reflection of your Son, our Savior, in this world. Thy will be done.

Carole J. Adams

Christ United Methodist Church, Wheeling, WV
Finance Committee, Bell Choir, Usher & Liturgist

December 4, 2025

A Prayer for Just Leadership

Psalm 72:1–7, 18–19

¹Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the king's son. ²May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.

Living in Appalachia can be both breathtaking and backbreaking.

The rolling mountains, misty valleys, and winding rivers reveal the glory of God's creation — but they also remind us how isolated and forgotten many communities can feel.

The beauty that surrounds us does not erase the deep challenges people face every day. Poverty, lack of access to healthcare, underfunded schools, and limited job opportunities are all too familiar.

Psalm 72 is a prayer for a just and righteous ruler — someone who governs not for personal gain, but for the good of all. This prayer feels especially urgent in our Appalachian context, where justice is not an abstract idea. It is the difference between a family having clean water or not, a child receiving the education they deserve, or an elderly neighbor being able to afford their medicine.

Today's culture often echoes the refrain of "*me, me, me.*" But followers of Christ are called to live differently — to care not only for ourselves but for those whose voices are often ignored.

We are called to pray for our leaders, that they might govern with compassion and fairness. We are called to advocate for our neighbors who struggle — those living in food deserts, families relying on SNAP benefits, children with special needs, and individuals battling addiction and waiting for help from the opioid settlement funds.

True leadership reflects God's heart when it lifts up the broken and provides for the vulnerable.

A just government ensures that healthcare is accessible, that schools are strong, that clean water flows in every home, and that the elderly on fixed incomes can live with dignity.

When justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream, God's glory shines throughout the land — even through our Appalachian hills and hollers.

Prayer:

God of justice and mercy,

Give wisdom to the leaders of our state.

Open their hearts to the cries of the poor and the needs of the forgotten.

Help us, too, to be voices for fairness, compassion, and truth.

*May your righteousness flow through our mountains,
bringing healing, hope, and renewal to every community.*

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Diann Nickerson
Warwood UMC, Certified Lay Minister
Northern District United Women in Faith President
Conference Associate Lay Leader

December 5, 2025

Our Help in Times of Sorrow

[Isaiah 30: 19-26](#)

²⁰ Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them.

When someone asks me how long I've been in church I always like to jokingly reply, "since nine months before I was born," but even being raised in church and making a profession of faith at a young age did not inoculate me against the suffering of this world.

Much like the people of Zion, at different times in my life I've found myself crying out for deliverance, looking for help in places where it seems none is to be found and struggling to understand why I am buffeted about on the waves of sorrow and uncertainty.

In 2016 our house and everything in it was destroyed in the floods that ripped through Appalachia. We left our home in the night with the clothes on our backs and didn't know if we would ever return. When the waters receded, we were left with nothing but devastation.

Hopelessness threatened to sweep away what little of our personal fortitude that remained. We were adrift in our suffering. The isolation and loneliness were, for a moment, all consuming.

But like the people of Zion in this passage, we were not abandoned.

The Lord provided for us in ways we could never have expected. We were forced from our comfort and self-reliance into our faith and God's ample strength. Help came to us over and over again from so many different avenues and so often from God's people.

That would not be our last trial or the end of suffering in our lives. But as I look to this scripture, in this time of waiting and anticipation through Advent, I am reminded of the promises of God in Hebrews 13:5, "...I will never leave you or forsake you."

But even more glorious than that is the promise here in Isaiah to the people of God when, "the Lord binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted." We are not promised lives of ease, but we are promised God's faithful love and restoration.

Dear Father, as we sit in the quiet anticipation of this Advent season, let us cling to your promises and rest in the knowledge that you are steadfast in a world of sorrow, believing fully in your power to restore and provide more than we could ever imagine. Amen.

Autumn D. F. Hopkins
Calvary United Methodist Church, Ripley, WV
Little Kanawha District
Lay Servant, Mission Team Member

December 6, 2025

Am I a Voice for God? Are You?

[John 1:19-28](#)

³John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, Make straight the way for the Lord."

John the Baptist had the special privilege of introducing Jesus to the people of Israel. He was given this privilege by God's direction.

As Christians, we too are to proclaim Jesus to others. These scriptures gave me many questions for myself, and I pray you also.

Do I consider it a privilege to share and serve Jesus?
Do others see Jesus through me?
Do I point others to Jesus through my words and deeds?
Do I introduce Jesus to others?
Do I listen for and heed God's call?
Am I a voice crying out in the wilderness?
Do I recognize Jesus as He passes by?
Am I humble?
Do I keep my focus on Jesus?

As John came to proclaim the way of Jesus, so are we. John willingly surrendered His life for declaring Jesus as Lord to others. As Christians, we are to share the message of the gospel. We are to live our lives for Him.

To tell people about Jesus, His love, His death for us, His resurrection, and how Jesus has changed our lives. Tell them Jesus loves them and will forgive their sins if they confess them and repent.

One day Jesus will return. Are you ready and waiting? Are your friends? Is your family?

What has God called you to do?

Father, I pray that I am proclaiming Jesus to others through my words and deeds. I pray that I always do Thy Will, not mine.

Becky Adkins
Summersville Memorial UMC, Summersville, WV
Member of Greenbrier-Wesleyan District Lead Team
Greenbrier Wesleyan District Conference Secretary
Summersville Memorial Alternate to Annual Conference

December 7, 2025
Second Sunday of Advent

Paths

[Isaiah 11:1-10](#)

¹A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

During the Advent season I purchase an Amaryllis bulb. I plant the bulb and place it in the center of our island. Every day I pass by it and wonder if anything is happening.

Do you ever wonder if God is doing anything in your life? As you go through different stages of your life, do you notice how God's love has transformed you into the person He wants you to be?

There have been times in my life when I wonder. There have been times in my life when I want to go a different direction. God pulled me back and said no; this is the way you need to go.

When our kids were little and starting school, I wanted to send them to the school where I went but God had other plans. I spoke with former teachers, principals, and friends. I made up my mind; this is where they need to go.

But oh no.

God had other plans. Every time I thought I made the right decision, God was there telling me "You need to turn around."

As it turns out, God was right.

If I didn't send them to the school where He wanted them to go, a lot of things would not have happened. My kids would not be the people they are today. My son would not have met his future wife. I would not have the grandchildren that I have today.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for directing our lives and leading us on the paths that you want us to go and grow. Amen

Carolyn Clements
First United Methodist Church, Weirton, WV
Northern District
Lay Leader

December 8, 2025

A Call to Holiness
[1 Thessalonians 4:1-12](#)

¹As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. ²For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. NIV

This section of Thessalonians focuses on three main themes: A Call to Holiness, A Call to Purity, and a Call to Diligence. But what does that mean to me? To us -- here in the WV Annual Conference?

As we respond to the Call for Holiness, we are reminded that in our acceptance of Christ, we are filled with all God's love. We have agreed to live according to the teachings of Christ. We are to increase brotherly love as the apostles did at home and abroad.

We hold the Call to Purity and reject sexual immorality, for this is part of the road to our goal of sanctification.

As we respond to the Call for Diligence, we put into action and show that by using our knowledge of how we are loved we share it with others.

As I have been studying these verses, my husband has had surgery, and I have been distracted. In the anonymous space of hospitals, we tend to be silent and even solitary.

A positive response relieves some of the tension. I have seen examples of the positives in so many ways and places. My spirits were lifted when I held the elevator door open for that person coming – and they responded “thank you.”

When I have faltered, many have offered comfort and prayers. As I have been in crowded spaces, people have been gentle. The simple act of holding an elevator door open is an act of kindness. When I have been able, I have tried to be the example I wanted to see, and others have responded.

It has also been my openness to another's compassion that has lifted me. Asking and accepting help are two sides to this lesson. Receiving that loving help opens a holy space in which we are both loving and being loved.

How can I – how can we -- take this message and grow into it even more? I believe the answer is right here in 1 Thessalonians 4:9, “...*you yourselves are taught by God to love one another...*” NKJV.

We are **Transforming Appalachia Through God's Love** -- one personal encounter at a time.

Prayer: Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on us as we travel the paths of life as your disciples. May we remember that in giving we also receive, and that we may be the smile someone needs today. Amen

Jane A. Ensminger
Crim Memorial UMC
Philippi, WV
Treasurer, Certified Lay Servant

December 9, 2025

Where's Jesus?

Romans 15:14-21

²⁰It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. ²¹Rather, as it is written: "Those who are not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."

Have you ever seen or received a "Little Jesus"? If you have no idea what I'm talking about, let me explain.

There are these tiny thumb-sized figures of Jesus that you can purchase.

He is dressed in his typical uniform of robe and sash. Sometimes his sash has a saying on it like "Jesus Loves You." I was first introduced to "Little Jesus" a few years ago when my Pastor and I hid several dozen of them in our church building.

Some looked out from the top of door frames. Others hid behind the curtains on windowsills with just his face peeking out. I even hid one in the stack of offering plates for the ushers to discover during the worship service.

The goal was for our church family to find "Little Jesus" and relocate him to somewhere in the community for someone else to discover him.

Just in case you're wondering, I left my "Little Jesus" at the bottom of the handrail at our post office. Since then, many folks from my congregation have purchased their own sets of "Little Jesus" to hide or to share with others.

I wonder what Paul would think about this creative yet unconventional way of spreading the love of Jesus to those who may not know him. It is certainly different from his methods, but it is effective all the same.

Sometimes I think about who found the "Little Jesus" that I hid. My hope is that they took him home and placed him somewhere they can be reminded of his love every day. Even better, maybe they relocated him so that someone else could find him and experience his love.

Prayer: Constant Companion, we praise and thank you for the gift of Jesus and how he works in our lives. Guide us in discovering creative ways that we can share his love with others who may not know him. In his name we pray, Amen.

Crystal Welsh
Warwood United Methodist Church, Wheeling, WV
Northern District
Certified Lay Speaker

December 10, 2025

What We Say Is What We Are

[Matthew 12:33-37](#)

³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” Matthew 12:36-37

We hear the words of Jesus as he responds to accusations by the Pharisees that He (Jesus) was casting out demons by the power of Satan (Matthew 12:24). The accusation, according to Jesus, was evil spoken from the Pharisees' own hearts: “From the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34).

A childhood saying comes to mind: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.”

The problem is, according to Jesus, that words which I (we) speak in anger, rage, hate, or other evil may, in fact, hurt me (us).

Although speaking directly to the Pharisees in this passage, Jesus cautions all of us to choose carefully what we say and the words we use.

If we carry God's grace in our hearts, we will speak accordingly. If we carry evil in our hearts, we will speak evil, just as the Pharisees did.

We will be held to account and by our words, we will be declared righteous or declared guilty.

You have heard the saying, “actions speak louder than words.” In that sense, not only *what we say* but also our *actions* “speak” for us.

Do we love others in our hearts as Jesus loved us and as he commanded us to love? Or do we “speak” evil by harming others? Will we be declared righteous or declared guilty? Our speech and our actions are given birth in our thoughts. What do our hearts think?

What are the first thoughts that come to us when we see a child in need? A hungry or homeless person needing some help?

If our first thoughts condemn the child's parent(s) or caregiver(s) or condemn the hungry or homeless, we must seek first the heart of Christ and the love of God that we might speak (by word or action) only fruit from the good tree rather than be declared guilty by our fruit from the bad tree.

Thinking good thoughts first will birth good words.

We are preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus, who commanded us to love others. Let us reclaim the “fruit” of the good tree. This Advent season, and into the coming years, may we speak only the good fruit through our words and our actions.

Prayer: God of love, fill our hearts with love, that we will speak the good fruit from the good tree so that we may be justified rather than condemned. In the name of Jesus, we implore You. Amen.

Bob Moffett
Central United Methodist Church, Fairmont, WV
Lay Leader

December 11, 2025

God's Perfect Timing

[2 Peter 3:1-10](#)

⁸But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹The Lord is not slack concerning his promise...

We read often in the Bible about God's timing. His timing does not always coincide with the timing people expect or prefer.

God promised Abraham a son, making him "a father of many nations." His wife Sarah longed for a child and had given up hope of ever having one when, in her old age, she and Abraham were blessed with a son, Isaac.

The Jews wandered for 40 years in the wilderness on their journey from slavery to freedom. Prophets who predicted the coming of the Messiah did not see His birth in their lifetimes.

But the Bible reminds us that God's timing is perfect. We need to trust in Him and know that He has a plan for us.

On the same day that I first read the scripture I was assigned for a devotional, I received a text from my nephew, Jon. It said, "It's official. We are adopting 11/21."

Jon and his wife Cheryl have been married for 15 years. They have not been able to have children of their own and several years ago became foster parents with the goal of eventually adopting. They hoped to adopt their first foster child and his sister who later came to live with them.

The biological parents were both troubled young people but finally got their lives together sufficiently to have custody of the children returned to them. Although Jon and Cheryl celebrated the rebuilding of their lives, they were devastated by having to say goodbye to their fostered children after several years of parenting them.

Three years ago, a baby named Angelina came to live with them. Angelina has never known any other parents, but it has taken three years for the courts to approve the adoption.

God has fulfilled Jon and Cheryl's dream of being parents, not in their 20s, but in their 40s!

Only He knows why this timing is perfect.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give us the wisdom to trust in Your timing for our lives.

Carol Carroll
Christ United Methodist Church
Wheeling, WV
Lay Leader

December 12, 2025

Loving Grandfamilies

[Ruth 4:13-17](#)

¹⁶Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. ¹⁷The women living there said, “Naomi has a son!” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. —Ruth 4:16-17 NIV

When I was pregnant with my second child, I didn’t want a baby shower. My mother-in-law had other ideas. After all, my second child was her first grandchild. And so, most of the women who attended our event were her friends. They were happy for me, but it was my mother-in-law’s joy they truly celebrated.

I can imagine Naomi’s friends sharing in her joy — showering her with love and suggesting names the way the women of a church family do at a baby shower. (I wonder if someone brought her a casserole!) Naomi had lost her son, but she had bonded with his widow, Ruth, so closely that Ruth had become a daughter. Even though this baby wasn’t biologically Naomi’s grandchild, he was family. To call her a proud grandmother would be an understatement.

Sadly, many grandparents aren’t celebrating the fun part of being grandparents; they are doing the hard work of raising their grandchildren. According to the West Virginia State University Extension Service’s Healthy Grandfamilies Coalition Office, more than 35,000 children in West Virginia are known to live in the primary custody of their grandparents. Most of these children have parents who are incarcerated and/or suffering from addiction.

Their grandparents need more than baby showers and casseroles. They need resources to help them with finances, technology, and all the challenges that come with raising a child.

In my district, Hope in the Mountains uses support from United Methodist churches to help grandfamilies. At Christmas, they provide toys and other gifts for grandparents raising their grandkids. This past summer, the organization’s Pathways program offered career exposure to in-need teenage boys, most of whom were being raised by grandparents.

And — as is the case at Hope in the Mountains and other basic needs closets, like Mercer County’s Mary’s Cradle — it is often grandparents who come seeking items like diapers, baby clothes, and formula. Our connection likely has a similar program near you. Please consider reaching out to see how you can help.

Let us pray: Dear God, as we celebrate Jesus’ birth and remember Naomi’s joy, help us to be mindful of the grandparents whose joy is dampened by the challenges they face raising their grandchildren. Lead us toward ways we can help to heal our communities and continue transforming Appalachia through God’s love.

Audrey Stanton-Smith
United Methodist Temple
Beckley, West Virginia (Southern District)
WVUMC Communications Team Volunteer
Editor of United Women in Faith’s **response** magazine

December 13, 2025

Two Births

I Samuel 2:1-8

²There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you: There is no rock like our God.

Once upon a time a woman named Hannah prayed for a child. She was so desperate for this child that she promised God she would give him back into His service -- if only he would allow her to give birth.

Our God answers prayers, and Samuel was born into the world and at an early age given to God for whatever purpose He may have for Him.

The child Samuel grew in stature and in favor with both God and the people. He became a great Prophet who tried to lead the people of Israel into the right path.

Hannah recognized the Lord as the Holy One, a God of knowledge, the Maker of the world, strong. He feeds the hungry, gives strength to the weak, and gives children to the barren.

Sometimes, He takes from those who have plenty.

Then there was a young girl named Mary *who did not pray for a child*, but God gave her the greatest gift the world has ever known.

A tiny infant named Jesus who would change things for a lifetime of people.

As we celebrate this season of Advent, as we prepare our hearts for this other child -- this gift -- let us learn to serve the world around us.

There is so much that we can do in our world of trouble and needs.

God calls us this Advent season to use the gifts we have been given to make a difference.

Are we ready to answer the call? Are we ready to be like Hannah and Mary and help change our world for the better?

Prayer: Good and Gracious God, Thank you for the gift of Your Son and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Help us to live our lives so that others may see Him in the work that we do. Amen

Judy Raines
John Stewart United Methodist
Bluefield, WV
Certified Lay Minister
Southern District Lay Leader

December 14, 2025
Third Sunday of Advent

Mary's Song

[Luke 1:46b-55](#)

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

Mary's song of praise to God, also known as the Magnificat, is a song of rejoicing.

Recently I heard our Bishop remind us we should sing God's song each day. I read a poem that said, "I have strung and restrung my guitar but never played a song for God."

We all get caught up in the cares of this world, stringing and restringing guitars. We tend to fill our lives with distractions and forget to sing God's song. I know I am guilty.

I believe that we are commissioned by Jesus, as well as our church, to support one another with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and to follow Mary's example of singing a song for God as often as we can.

Mary's song of praise tells of God's mercy, grace, and strength for His people.

I find it easy to sing God's praises as I travel around West Virginia's part of Appalachia. I grew up in flat country and for 15 years I have been praising God for bringing me here to live.

I have been grafted into beautiful West Virginia and accepted here just as God has grafted me into His kingdom. I have so many reasons to sing God's praises!

Prayer: Lord, help me in my ordinary life to sing a daily song for you. I am so thankful for your love and acceptance, Amen

Elizabeth Bailes
Ravenswood First United Methodist Church
Ravenswood, WV
Lay Delegate to Conference

December 15, 2025

Signs and Wonders!

Acts 5:12-16

^{12a}The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. (CEB)

Recently, a friend told me that she thought I had become a Certified Lay Minister and accepted an assigned supply position because I wanted something to do. (I had recently retired).

I have to confess that I was a bit offended by this statement. I explained to her that when I felt the initial call from God, I prayed for discernment, and then that God had provided many signs to me that this is what I was supposed to do. It was a process over several years.

When I think back to how God has gotten me to the point in my life where I currently am, I am full of wonder and thankfulness!!

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ – Emmanuel – was born at the exact time he was because this was God's plan from the beginning. There are so many signs and wonders in the Old Testament pointing to God's plan.

Talk about a process of several years (Thousands? Unquantified?)!

This scripture assigned to me takes place after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. I wondered what this had to do with Advent when I first read it. But the Holy Spirit spoke to me through verse 12.

At the beginning of the church, the apostles prayed and then were ordained by the divine presence of God to heal and make disciples of Jesus Christ, as he had commanded.

Isn't this what we are all called to?

At Annual Conference this year, an amazing thing happened: we collected enough money to provide water for a long time to an area of Appalachia that has no potable water. In this is a sign that we are doing what God wants. I suspect that the people receiving this gift considers this a wonder of God, as well.

Advent is a season of signs.

The stories of Advent and Epiphany in the scriptures are parts of a collective story of wonderment as we celebrate this foretold event that happened through the work of God.

My call to Ruble, the apostles' commission to heal and make disciples, our collective work as the UMC in the world, and especially the birth of Jesus: All show us of the work of God.

Let's celebrate with signs of hope and joy and wonders of love and peace of our own!

PRAYER: Gracious God, in this season of Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace, help us to celebrate the ways you call each of us to lives of service to people in need. We are thankful for the signs and wonders seen through the story of your Son and through the Holy Spirit's work in the lives of those first apostles. Help us to always be in awe of the signs and wonders you complete through each of us. Amen.

(M.J.) Pat Ramsey
Wellsburg United Methodist Church, Wellsburg, WV
Certified Lay Minister
Assigned Supply at Ruble UMC, Wheeling, WV

December 16, 2025

Our Hope Is in God

[Psalm 42](#)

⁵Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? ⁶Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. Psalm 42:5-6

Psalm 42 reflects many of our thoughts as we journey through Advent. Like us, the psalmist goes back and forth between despair and hope.

The Advent season is a time to honestly confront our spiritual shortcomings and the brokenness of our world. But we also cling to the sure hope that we have in God's gift of Jesus – God's plan to save us all.

Advent is a time to meditate on how much we need a Savior and what Jesus means in each of our lives.

Because of Jesus, I think of Advent as a season of hope.

We again anticipate the joy that came with Christ's arrival among us.

Emmanuel is God with us -- the God who is working even in our waiting.

In Psalm 42, people asked the psalmist, "Where is your God?" The psalmist was confident that his hope was in God.

We can have that confidence, too.

As we consider the WV Conference theme, "Transforming Appalachia Through God's Love," we can sing with the hymn writer:

Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere; go, tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born!"

We can fix our eyes on God's nearness. God *is* with us!

Prayer: O God, you have sent your Son to be our Savior—the Light in the midst of the world's darkness. Jesus is always our hope and peace. Be with us. Let Your love and joy so fill our hearts that we, in Your name, bless the lives of all the people around us. May we, through Your grace, transform Appalachia through God's love. Come, Lord Jesus!

Sharon Miller
Warwood United Methodist Church
Wheeling, WV
Church Lay Leader, Sunday School Teacher

December 17, 2025

Busy!
Zechariah 8:1-17

¹³ . . . Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong." . . . ¹⁶ These are the things that you shall do: speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, ¹⁷ do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these are things that I hate, says the LORD."

Have you heard the phrase, "Jesus is coming! Look busy!"? Kinda funny, huh?

Even going to Church School or youth group or attending hundreds of services hasn't made us, necessarily, internalize the "*busy doing what?*" part.

Sure, when the church ladies ask us to carry something to the kitchen, or the youth group plans a day of cleaning yards, or someone needs a ride - it's fairly easy to be busy. The opportunity is right there in front of us.

But what about other times when no one is watching or there's no plan?

In Zechariah's vision, he tells us God says... "Do not be afraid but let your hands be strong... Speak the truth to each other, render true and sound judgment in your courts, do not plot evil against your neighbor and do not love to swear falsely... Therefore love truth and peace.

Being busy takes many forms. Jump on opportunities! Think up your own!

Join a friend! Pray!

Let's be busy reflecting God's character and reflecting our gratitude for God's goodness. Honesty, justice, mercy, compassion in our dealings with one another. God's unwavering love for us builds in us a desire to do God's business / busy-ness.

Jesus is coming! BE busy!

Heavenly Father: We are truly blessed! We pray that we reflect your love for us in the things we say and do. We trust in your faithfulness. We embrace community. We commit to righteous living. Amen.

June M. Nonnenberg
Trinity United Methodist Church
Glennville, WV
Financial Secretary

December 18, 2025

Best Laid Plans

[2 Samuel 7:1-17](#)

¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me.

On the day when I sat down to type up this devotion, I received a phone call from a distraught friend: her daughter had been killed in an automobile accident.

The daughter had a teenaged daughter of her own and was the one stepping in to care for her aging parents and handicapped sister. Generations of planning and preparation were destroyed one night on a country road.

This happens to all too many families: generations of plans and hopes are destroyed by accidents, illnesses, murders—we deal with them all in Appalachia and around the world. We plan for our legacies, only to have those plans laid waste when things go in ways we did not foresee.

David, described as a man after God's own heart, dealt with tragedy. One of his sons died after openly rebelling against his father's role as king. He lost friends in war. He was betrayed by people he thought were his friends.

David's plans for his legacy included building a house in which to worship God. He felt it wasn't right that he lived in a house and the Ark of God lived in a tent, so he planned to build a house for God. It seemed like a worthy idea; it would show David's love for God and was something that future generations could use.

But that was not God's plan for David's legacy. God stepped in to stop David's brick-and-mortar plan and promised something better. God would "establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (7:13). God would make a descendant of David an eternal ruler over Israel.

We know that eternal ruler as Jesus.

It is Jesus who is with us to comfort us when tragedies happen: to send friends to sit with us, cry with us, give us a hug, bake us cookies and bring extra toilet paper.

We don't all have prophets to tell us what our legacy will be when our plans are destroyed, but we have families, friends, church families, and communities who can all be there to help.

David knew tragedy and remained faithful. With the help of Jesus, the eternal ruler from David's line, we can remain faithful and rest on God's promise as well.

Prayer: Heavenly father, thank you for the promise of eternal life in an eternal kingdom. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for comforting us when we are in pain. And Jesus, you who knew our pain and our loss, thank you for walking with us on the paths of our lives, even when those paths go through darkness. Amen.

Carmen Rexrode
Fairview-Bethel United Methodist Church
Fort Seybert, WV
Certified Lay Speaker

December 19, 2025

From Slavery to Sonship

[Galatians 4:1-7](#)

⁷Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (NKJV)

For several years, prior to its closing, I volunteered once a week at the West Virginia Children's Home in Elkins. The reasons for the youth's placement at the facility varied, but one thing they all shared was a difficult home life.

Each week that I met with these kids, I shared a devotion, conversation, and some game time. I always tried to remind them that I loved them -- and, more importantly -- that God loved them. I'm sure that many, if not all, of these youth felt enslaved to the institution where they lived, much as we sometimes feel enslaved to the things of this world.

We often try to earn God's favor through our own righteousness, striving to do enough to be "good" in His eyes. But inevitably, we fall short. We cannot earn His favor through our efforts. Instead, we must place our trust in Jesus Christ as the full payment for our sins and the fulfillment of all the righteous demands of the Law.

A slave owns nothing, for his master owns all that he has—but a son is "lord of all." Through Christ, we have gone from owning nothing to possessing everything we need in Him.

What a true rags-to-riches story is ours in Christ!

We have been granted freedom from slavery, adopted as sons and daughters, given a secure identity, and promised a glorious inheritance.

In Christ, we no longer live under condemnation. We live as beloved children and rightful heirs to His kingdom -- enjoying fellowship with the Father now and anticipating eternal glory with Him.

As Christians, we have the knowledge and freedom to follow Jesus as our Lord and Savior. We have been exposed to His teaching and know His love. But what about the child, the teen, or the individual who has never experienced that love?

This Advent Season, and in the year ahead, may we walk with confidence and freedom as those who are loved by God. And may we pray daily for those who feel unloved or unwanted -- that they might come to know the joy of being an adopted child of God and an heir to His eternal kingdom.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, help me to see people as You see them, and help me to recognize the privilege of being adopted into Your family. May I never take for granted the grace of this adoption that I could never earn. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Lynn Ritter
First United Methodist Church, Elkins, WV
Certified Lay Minister
Greenbrier Wesleyan Lead Team Member

December 20, 2025

Dear God, Save Us

[Psalm 80: 1; 17-19](#)

¹⁹Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine that we may be saved.

Last December 7, I was waiting for our Ladies Zoom Prayer group to convene when I heard the WVU Medicine Helicopter fly overhead toward our hospital two blocks from my house.

It is my practice to stop whatever I am doing and pray for all involved in the medical rescue. So, I prayed that morning for this med flight.

Fifteen minutes later my phone rang. It was my sister. Little did I know that the prayer I had just sent up had been for my pregnant niece and my not-yet-born grandnephew. Baby Cal had decided to arrive three months too early, and they were inflight to Women's and Children's at Ruby Memorial in Morgantown. They safely arrived, and Cal entered this world three hours later.

He and his parents spent the next 52 days at Ruby. Baby Cal just turned one; he is a handsome, chunky, inquisitive baby. He is almost always happy and is now doing very well.

My niece and nephew were both saved that day.

We frequently use and read the word 'save' throughout the Bible. The word has many definitions. It can mean to rescue, keep from dying, preserve, keep someone in health, store up (as in treasures or money), or preserve as food stuffs.

On December 7 our Lord prevented both my niece and grandnephew from dying. Yes, Cal had challenges during the first few months. There were surgeries and oxygen issues due to lungs that were not completely developed.

But he was saved.

I account much of that to answered prayers from the many prayers my church family gave during that time and continue to lift up as well as so many others.

And now, we are at the season when we remember the birth of another baby who was sent to this earth not to be saved but to save us from the wickedness and ills of this world. Praise be to God!

Dear God, thank you for sending your Son to save the generations of this earth. Forgive us when we fail to recall the painful sacrifice you made for our benefit. Help us to see, especially this year, the goodness you still offer us and that we also recognize when you still save us from ourselves.

Deborah Shaffer
First United Methodist Church
Parkersburg, WV
Certified Lay Minister, District DCOM

December 21, 2025
Fourth Sunday of Advent

The Faith and Trust of Joseph

Matthew 1: 18-25

20. But while he thought about these things an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus..." 24. Then Joseph...did as the angel of the Lord commanded.

What must Joseph have been thinking when he discovered that Mary was pregnant with a child that wasn't his? The culture of the day didn't give him many options. He finally decided that he'd quietly divorce Mary.

Very little is known about Joseph from the scriptures. He was a righteous man, probably a craftsman, basically an ordinary man of his time.

We do know that God chose him for a reason to be the earthly father of Jesus.

In Joseph's dream, the words the angel spoke changed Joseph's life forever. His faith was strong, and he quickly accepted his new role.

It must have been difficult explaining this to his family and friends. They may have ridiculed him or even called him foolish.

However, Joseph didn't allow those close to him to keep him from being obedient to God. Joseph's willingness to listen to God's guidance and act faithfully should be an example for Christians today.

An angel may not have spoken to me in a dream, but I know the Holy Spirit has been my guide. I have not always listened and obeyed but have sometimes allowed the opinions of others to influence my choices.

Have doubts and questions made me afraid to step out in faith? Maybe.

We live in a region of our country which faces many challenges. The need for Christians to reach out to our neighbors is greater than ever. We must act with love, kindness, and empathy, without judgment, being attentive to any opportunities where God is leading us to serve—whether in volunteering, giving, or simply listening to others.

Christians are to bring the healing love of Jesus into the lives of those who are hurting by showing grace and compassion while helping others feel safe, accepted, and supported.

We can't make disciples for Jesus unless we love all His children first or our message will never be heard. Like Joseph, we must trust God and step out into the unknown with faith and obedience.

Prayer: Father, guide us each day to accept Your will and to be available in this hurting world to love our neighbors as you love each of us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Betty Lou Harris
Franklin United Methodist Church
Wellsburg, WV 26070
Certified Lay Speaker, Administrative Council Chair
Liturgist, Member SPPRC, UWF

December 22, 2025

Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

Revelation 22:6-7, 20

⁶The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place. ⁷"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book. . . ²⁰He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Christmas is almost here! The warmth and glow from our hearts show in the decorations and traditions, gifts thoughtfully chosen, joyful gatherings with friends and family, yummy baking, music in the air, children laughing – there is great anticipation as we get ready to celebrate the birth of Christ.

Isaiah and the prophets of old proclaimed that the Messiah would be coming. The world waited with hope, and all in God's time, Jesus arrived. Immanuel – "God with us." He came to Mary and Joseph in the quiet of a stable with animals keeping watch and angels singing *Gloria in excelsis Deo*.

Jesus touched the hearts of the shepherds and the magi. He came to the wedding guests at Cana and to the disciples on the hillside. He came to the distressed, the ill, the blind, and the paralyzed to heal with touch and words.

He came to Jerusalem, to the temple, the upper room, and the Mount of Olives. He came walking along a road, and to a room behind locked doors.

"God with us." Like Mary by the manger, we ponder these things in our hearts.

In the next to last verse of the Bible, Jesus said "Yes, I am coming soon." Let's invite him! "Come, Lord Jesus!"

As we remember the birth of the Baby Jesus, let us open our hearts and prepare good room as he is born afresh in us. Let us open our minds to know deep down in faith that "these words are true and can be trusted." Jesus comes.

God is with us indeed.

Let us open our hands to accept the gifts of His grace and love, then reach out to others so that they might share in it, too. Please come, Lord Jesus!

Jesus does now come among us, in love among families, in kinship of friends, in valuing *all* people as children of God.

His love comes to the Food Pantry and to the Union Mission Children's Christmas Party. His love shines in singing children and wise elders who warm our hearts.

He enters with love as people care for one another seeking goodness and understanding. "God with us." Yes, we see him, and we give thanks.

Prayer: Dear God of Grace and Love, thank you for being in our lives, for sharing your great Love all the time. Thank you for sending Jesus to love us, teach us, and save us. Guide us as we share your Love with all of your people. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Patty Moffett Austin
Cacapon Charge and Wardensville United Methodist Churches
Potomac Highland District

December 23, 2025

The Promise

[2 Samuel 7:18; 23-29](#)

¹⁸Then King David went in and sat before the Lord and said, ‘Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?’ ²⁴And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever. And you, O Lord, became their God. ²⁵And now, O Lord God, confirm forever the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, and do as you have spoken.

We Christians may wonder why Israel is set apart as God’s chosen people when we disagree on whether Jesus fulfills the Messianic promise.

However, Israel is not God’s chosen people because they are His golden children who can do no wrong. They are his chosen people because they serve a great purpose: to be a mirror, a reflection of the duality of mankind with all its beauty and all its folly.

David, the king and representative of Israel and its struggles throughout history, asked, “Who am I that you have blessed me?”

David often reflects on his own follies while demonstrating a deep devotion to God. David is also a mirror for us, as we ask, Who are we, that our perfect God blesses us?

David asks the Lord to “confirm forever” his Messianic promise. Little did David know that through the careful sprinkling of prophecies, it would be impossible to deny in good faith that Jesus was the Messiah.

Indeed, the fulfillment of all of the over 300 prophecies in one man, a statistical improbability by all rational inquiry, did in fact confirm forever the Lord’s promise to David.

Even scholars who sought to disprove the Biblical account of Jesus have often come to the faith based on this and similar statistical improbabilities that defy all other explanations.

It is sometimes said that faith and reason cannot coexist.

But they are two sides of the same coin. Anyone who seeks to find the deepest truths of the universe -- even though the most rational means is sure to find this confirmation -- not only of God’s promise -- but of his Word, again and again.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for sending us your son, and for giving us a world of evidence of your beauty to discover. That all we need do is look around and marvel. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

Lindsay Edgington
Christ United Methodist Church
Wheeling, WV

December 24, 2025
Christmas Eve

Grace Revealed

[Titus 2:11-14](#)

¹¹ For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. ¹² And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, ¹³ while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. ¹⁴ He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds.

Christmas is here! The long wait is over; the Savior has been born.

“For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people.” Thanks be to God!

Yet Paul reminds us that Jesus’ birth is only the first part of the redemption story. Through God’s grace we are not only saved but given the ability to live free of sin.

This tiny baby, God come down to earth, opened the way for all of us to be God’s children. And as God’s children, we are called to continue his work in the world.

The Greek word translated “totally committed” at the end of verse 14 is *zélótēs* – throughout Scripture, this has often been translated as “zealous” or “burning with zeal.”

Because of God’s redemptive grace, we are called to be passionate about doing God’s work in the world as we look forward to the day when his full glory will come.

If, on this Christmas day, you find yourself re-reading the story of Jesus’ birth - the messages of the angels, the obedience of Mary and Joseph, the celebration of the shepherds, and the journey of the Magi – don’t forget to think forward to Jesus’ life.

Let Jesus’ ministry, his teachings and his actions, be a guide as you live your life. May we embrace the grace God has given us and live with wisdom, righteousness, devotion, and hope!

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus. Thank you for the grace that allows us to be free of sin and live our lives worthy of you. May we be zealous and passionate about being your people and doing good as Jesus did. Amen.

Abbi Blosser
McMechen-Benwood/Mt. Olivet Charge, McMechen, WV
Northern District
Conference Staff: Information Technology Specialist

December 25, 2025
Christmas Day

The Good News, Made Flesh

[Luke 2:1-7; 8-20](#)

⁷She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger—there was no room for them to stay in the inn. . . ¹⁰but the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. ¹¹This very day in David’s town your Savior was born -- Christ the Lord!

One of the toughest challenges in my faith has been accepting a physical component—not in works, but in worshiping an incarnational God who became flesh so the world might hear Good News.

As a child, I saw faith as abstract, body and spirit separating like oil and water. Over time, I’ve realized we cannot separate them. Paul speaks of dead flesh, the sins, fears, and anxieties we carry, yet he shows faith must be lived, not merely contemplated.

Luke 2:7 shows this vividly: Heaven and Earth intersect when God becomes human, drawing us into redemption. At first, it can be terrifying.

In the Old Testament, God’s presence often inspired fear, and interactions typically required an intermediary. But here, the angels proclaim that this is Good News, bringing joy to all people.

God becomes physical, stepping into our lives to show what it means to live with compassion for the meek and downtrodden. He took on the mantle of a servant, bearing the sins of the world so we might be free.

Because of this, our hearts are turned from stone to flesh. We respond through repentance and trust in Jesus Christ, living out our faith in tangible ways.

I see this incarnational reality in Appalachia: churches providing meals, backpacks for children, and clean water for those without. The Church does not just save souls; it lifts God’s children out of pain. We are broken healers, reflecting the One who came into a broken world with humility and deep love.

The Incarnation reminds us that Good News is never abstract. It is born in a specific time and place, in a manger, into ordinary lives. It calls us to embody God’s love, to bring hope, and to act with compassion.

Faith, lived in flesh and spirit together, transforms the world because our God is not distant. He has walked among us, making joy and redemption tangible.

Through Him, we become a new humanity, redeemed in body and spirit.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for this incarnational reality, that we are a redeemed people, with a living hope in Your Son Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us. Help us to see Your presence and recognize that through Him, the life and wholeness of Eden are bleeding back into our world, through your Spirit and Church, giving us hope for the future of Your kingdom. Amen

Jason Schafer
Fairmont, WV

Certified Lay Minister; MonValley District
Assigned Supply; Colfax UMC; Levels UMC - Lay Leader; Cornerstone Charge

December 26, 2025

We Praise You for Our Gift of Love

[Psalm 148](#)

¹³Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.

When I received my assignment to write an advent meditation for December 26, I, like most people would be, was a little disappointed. How easy it would be to write something about hope, peace, joy, and love. Those are the wonderful words we concentrate on the weeks *before* Christmas.

As I studied the scripture given to me and thought, it became noticeably clear to me. I was reacting like most of the secular world: packing up the hope, peace, joy, and love given to us by our Creator.

How often have we heard these phrases:

“Boy, I am glad I can get those decorations put away.”

“I am glad that Christmas and its chaos is over.”

People are in such a hurry to put the baby Jesus away and pack up the joy of the season. The stores put Christmas on half-price sales while putting out the Valentine’s hearts and candy.

As Christians, we follow a different calendar. Christmas is celebrated until January 6 when the Magi make their visit. Yes, celebrated as the Psalmist tells us, “PRAISE THE LORD.”

In Psalm 148 the writer exhorts all the angels and creations to Praise the Lord. We should be shouting Praise the Lord for his gift of love.

Christmas day is not an ending but the beginning.

This is a time to linger in the wonder of Christ’s birth, letting the light of His coming continue to warm our hearts. Rather than rushing past Christmas, we should savor its meaning and allow the story of God’s love to deepen within us.

The invitation is not to pack away the miracle, but to let praise overflow in our lives as we carry the Good News into each new day.

Now is the time to say “Thank You” to our loving God for giving us his gift of love. Praise the Lord; The Savior has come!

Prayer: Heavenly Father help us to continue to celebrate your gift and to remember to praise your name. Amen.

Charlene Canterbury Hindman
New Martinsville United Methodist Church
New Martinsville, WV
Northern District

December 27, 2025

Spoiler Alert: This is how we KNOW . . .

[1 John 5:1-12](#)

² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³ In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

I like watching old movies. I watch them now not as much for the stories themselves as for the craft of the writers, musicians, actors and others who put the story together and tell it. I've come to have a special appreciation for foreshadowing and other mechanisms that add to the richness of the story and the production.

Being something of a history and news junkie, I love to watch for mistakes and anachronisms.

When it comes to Advent, sometimes I want to call "spoiler alert" because I know how the waiting resolves and how it's the start of a new set of chapters.

That doesn't make the waiting and the story boring or tedious. It adds to the richness and the meaning of each step along the way. I continue to marvel at the construction and the preparation that goes into the birth of The Christ and (especially) the reaction of the common folk involved.

I feel far more at home with the shepherds than Herod's Courts in Jerusalem.

When I read the wrap-up Chapter of 1st John, thinking on Faith in the Incarnate Son of God, I look at the other end of the story and use that knowledge to enrich the studies of Advent.

It's good to know how the preparation for the newborn in the stable will lead to intimate knowledge of God's love for us and that His love isn't burdensome.

It is light and leads to life abundant. That "*everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.*"

Nice to know the ending so you can enjoy the ride, isn't it?

Would you pray the song lyrics with me:

*Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
radiant beams from Thy holy face
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth!
In Jesus' name, AMEN.*

Gary Hartsog, Certified Lay Speaker
United Methodist Temple, Beckley, WV
Southern District Lay Ministry Team Leader

December 28, 2025
First Sunday after Christmas Day

God Paints a Picture

[Hebrews 2:10-18](#)

¹⁰It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. . .

¹³And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, here am I and the children whom God has given me. ¹⁴Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil...

Growing up near the woods and having access to a creek set the stage for my love of nature and the outdoors. In the winter, the creek froze, and ice skating and bonfires would commence. It was *never* too cold to go outside.

The snow would create a great sled-riding track on our hill, and someone would keep watch at the bottom in case any cars were coming. My siblings and my mother taught me names of the wildflowers that would emerge each spring, and we would pick armfuls of trilliums for our neighbor for her birthday at the end of April.

During the hot summer, we would catch lightning bugs and play outside until the streetlights came on. After wading in the creek, we fell in -- on purpose, of course -- to get cooled off and catch crabs and minnows.

God sure knew what he was doing when he created West Virginia, didn't he?

With all the beauty present and the quiet peace of the mountains, it's hard not to feel the presence of God.

With the hope of Christ in our hearts, we as Christians should try to follow His Word and plan for us.

Not just at this Christmastime, but always, we can be disciples by reaching out to those who may need our help, using our gifts to please God, and remaining faithful to his teachings in the way we live, with our words, and by our deeds.

Dear Lord, your blessings of each season are truly a wonder to behold. We revel in the beauty and gifts you give us each day and ask for your guidance as we follow the path of living as your disciples. Amen.

Diane Kopa, Lay Leader
Christ United Methodist Church
Weirton, West Virginia
Northern District

December 29, 2025

"Is That Hope I See?"

[Psalm 20](#)

¹The LORD answer you in the day of trouble! The name of the God of Jacob protect you!

²May he send you help from the sanctuary and give you support from Zion. ³May he remember all your offerings and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices. Selah ⁴May he grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans. ⁵May we shout for joy over your victory and in the name of our God set up our banners. May the LORD fulfill all your petitions.

God certainly works in mysterious ways. In July of 2024, my wife approached me with the opportunity to travel to McDowell County to deliver supplies of water that had been donated through one of the churches she serves. The goal was to help residents of Welch, West Virginia, who had been fighting for clean water for what seemed like *eons*.

The town's own water supply, poisoned beyond standard use, had been creating serious issues for its residents. Water -- what should be seen as the most harmless of liquids -- was just the opposite. The problems with the water were brought on by coal companies and the aftermath of what many call "production."

What happens when the only way of life you have ever known creates health problems and turns on its own?

The water supply was causing chemical burns when used for showering or bathing, so consumption was not an option.

This opportunity hit me especially hard given my family ties to McDowell County. My grandparents lived and worked in Welch, owning the old Commercial Hotel for a time. My dad had grown up in Gary, and I still remember looking out my grandparents' kitchen window as a child and seeing the Tug River running right behind their house.

Memories are still strong for me to this day. I did not hesitate to say yes, seeing this area as home to a degree at one time but now seeing it as home to the extreme.

I remember the looks on residents' faces when we stopped to unload our precious cargo. The thanks and joy shared by the townspeople who had been seeking relief from an enemy that was once considered a friend.

God granted me the gift of returning to a place I hold dear. God granted the hard-working residents of Welch something even greater: *hope*.

Prayer: Heavenly father, please watch over your children and enable your servants to share your love to others and be a beacon of light in this broken world as a means of hope to all whom we encounter. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

John M. Radochio
Candidate for PMLS
Lakeview United Methodist Church, St. Albans, WV
Nine Rivers District

December 30, 2025

Renewed Day by Day

2 Corinthians 4:16–18

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

At the close of another year, it can be easy to focus on what feels worn down, the fatigue of a long season, the disappointments that linger, or the uncertainty that lies ahead.

Paul reminds us, however, that renewal is not a one-time event but an ongoing work of God's Spirit within us. "Inwardly we are being renewed day by day."

This renewal is the heart of our vision to *Transform Appalachia Through God's Love*.

It happens in quiet moments of faithfulness. In churches that keep showing up to serve their communities. In neighbors who offer kindness when it's least expected. And in disciples who continue to trust God even when the world feels fragile.

When we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen, we begin to notice how God is already renewing hearts, relationships, and communities around us.

What may seem small, like a shared meal, a repaired roof, or a word of prayer, can be part of God's greater work of healing and hope across our region.

As we prepare to enter a new year, may we do so with confidence that God is not finished with us yet. The same Spirit that renews us personally is transforming Appalachia, one act of love at a time.

Prayer: God of renewal, thank You for working within us and among us. Help us to see Your unseen glory at work in our lives and communities. Renew our faith, our hope, and our love as we step into a new year. Amen.

Bryan Beaty
Charleston, WV
Director of Communication
West Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church

December 31, 2025

A Heart of Wisdom

[1 Kings 3: 5-14](#)

⁹So give Your servant a discerning heart to govern Your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern these great people of Yours.

In the quiet of the night, Solomon is visited by God, who invites him to ask for whatever he desires. Faced with limitless options – wealth, power, long life – Solomon asks instead for wisdom.

His humble request reveals a heart aligned with God's will rather than his own ambition.

Solomon's prayer is a reminder that true wisdom begins not with intellect or success but with reverence for God and a longing to serve others well. As we journey through Advent, we too are invited to consider what we most desire.

The season draws our attention to the coming of Christ – The Wisdom of God made flesh.

Like Solomon, we have the opportunity to seek hearts that discern what truly matters.

God delights in prayers that reflect humility and service, and when we seek divine understanding, God often blesses us beyond what we could imagine.

This Advent, may we prepare not only our homes and sanctuaries but also our hearts – to live wisely, listen deeply, and walk faithfully in God's ways.

Reflection Questions

1. What would you ask for if God invited you to request one thing?
2. How do you see wisdom reflected in the life and teachings of Jesus?
3. What would it look like to seek wisdom as you go forward in your continued journey with Jesus?

Prayer: Lord, give us hearts that seek Your wisdom above all else. Teach us to listen for Your voice, to love others with discernment, and to walk humbly in Your ways. As we await the coming of Christ, fill us with understanding and peace. Amen.

Lou Costanzo, CLM
Christ United Methodist Church, Wheeling, WV
Northern District

January 1, 2026
New Year's Day

All Things New

Revelation 21: 1-6a

⁵Then the one seated on the throne said, "Look! I'm making all things new." He also said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶Then he said to me, "All is done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end."

Welcome to a new year! Today is a time when many of us reflect back on the past year and look forward to a season full of promise and hope. It can be very exciting to see a clean slate before us to fill in with goals and dreams of possibilities.

In the fourth verse of today's scripture we read, *"There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*

What former things is God calling you to release?

The focus of today's reading is the promise of renewal. In some cases, we need to first release something in order to receive something new.

Verse five listed above is one of my favorite verses in the whole Bible. *"Look! I'm making all things new."*

The Apostle John is describing what God is showing him and then there is a loud voice getting his attention by saying, "Look!" Is God saying that to you today? Is God trying to get your attention with a promise of making all things new?

This new year brings with it new possibilities for transformation. For you. For your church, and for your community.

Research shows that most New Year's resolutions are never completed. There are many reasons such as: too unrealistic, too vague, no real plan, lack of motivation, etc. Rather than setting a New Year's resolution, how about asking God's Spirit to reveal to you where you need to focus this year?

Where is God calling you to take a step this season as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Where is God calling your church to grow this season to make disciples of Jesus Christ? Where is God calling your ministry to share God's love with the community?

God is still in the business of making all things new! It is up to us to release the former things so that our hands are ready to receive new things.

Prayer: God of the past, the present, and the future: open our eyes to see the new things you have prepared for us. Help us to release our fears, our doubts, and anything which maybe holding us back. We come to you today with hands wide open, and with excitement in our hearts for how you are leading us to transform our communities with your love. Amen

Ken Willard
Director of Faith Communities ReNEWal
West Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church

January 2, 2026

Lead Me Lord

Hebrews 11:1-12

⁸By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

The scripture for today gives us several examples of people just like us who were trying to serve God to the best of their ability. As they were serving God, He called on them to go and serve in specific ways.

They may not have understood the calling they received, but they followed God anyway.

God called Noah to build an ark. He called Abraham to follow him into a far land and form a nation.

God planned for Abraham and Sarah to be the mother and father of a great nation, even though they had no children. Being led by God, their answer was to follow their faith and answer the calling. Their reply was "I will --with God's help."

Today in the United Methodist Church we are being called by God to allow him to lead us into missions in our state and in the Appalachian area.

Many people are struggling with housing, food, and clean water. These are basic needs for survival. These are needs that we may not be able to meet if we stay in our own church buildings.

Noah did not know what the ark was for, but he fully trusted God to lead him in this mission.

Sarah and Abraham did not see a nation as numerous as the stars in the sky coming from them. They accepted the call of God to "Go and Do" as he would lead them in the path that he was preparing for them.

Our hope should be to allow us to open our hearts and let God lead us in the mission fields in Appalachia.

If we allow God to lead and show us where we can make a difference, the mission field will open before us. With God's help we will see great things happen in our mission and in our own lives.

Prayer: God, you know the need. We pray that we will listen and follow your call to be a servant, obeying your will to help the people around us who are in need.

Larry Thompson
Calvary United Methodist Church
Ripley, West Virginia
Lay Leader
Disciples Class Sunday School Teacher
Vice Chairman Administrative Board

January 3, 2026

Rest

Genesis 28:10-22

¹⁶ Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!"

In the middle of the night, 50+ weary high school students stood outside old school buses, ready to be loaded. These buses were taking the students 600 miles west to a summer Bible camp. While the group was excited, the group was tired.

They chose their seats. Then, most of them slept through the first hours of the trip. It was a sight to see, the students sprawled across seats, resting their heads on a friend's shoulder or a backpack, some leaning against the hard windows, and some using an actual pillow they brought with them.

The buses were their resting place, and surely the Lord was with them.

Jacob was fleeing from the murderous intent of his brother Esau. He traveled with the blessing and instruction of his parents, Isaac and Rebekah. The sun had set, so Jacob broke from his journey, laid down, and rested his head on a stone.

The stone served its purpose for a weary traveler in the wilderness, and the life-changing dreams that followed confirmed that the Lord was with him.

We have weary travelers across Appalachia. A portion of the beautiful people of our region are those who lack basic resources such as a safe home, food, clean water, and income.

While we have faithful people working to improve the lives of these sisters and brothers, there is still much to overcome.

Foster care and the work of Burlington United Methodist Family Services lay heavily on *my* heart. Maybe you are more inclined toward the hands-on work of UMCOR – the United Methodist Committee on Relief -- and its efforts to help improve communities in our region. We are not without avenues by which we can serve.

How can our love for God and God's love for us be shown in a tangible way to those who are tired out? To those who need to rest their heads in a safe space and who, in some cases, have not yet experienced the Lord's presence?

We are honored to be the hands and feet of the God who became flesh at Christmas. Let's be challenged to serve even more in this new year.

Prayer: Loving God, just as you came to Jacob at Bethel, inspire our lives to change so that lives may change around us. May we be a resting place for those in need and continue to build your Kingdom on Earth. Amen.

Karen White
Forrest Burdette Memorial United Methodist Church, Hurricane, WV
Administrative Assistant
Nine Rivers District

January 4, 2026
Second Sunday after Christmas

Crank Up That Light

[John 9: 1-18](#)

³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it . . .

The new year is underway. It's time to take down the tree, wrestle the Christmas decorations back into the totes in the garage, and trudge through the dark, dreary winter. . .

No. . .wait.

Scholars who translated verse 5 in this text indicate that "the darkness did not overtake it" comes from a Greek word *katalambano*. Kata means **take or seize**. Lambano means comprehend. Some translations use the words "**conquer**" or "overcome" the darkness."

The *darkness cannot win over the light* of the world Jesus.

When I was a child my parents bought a little farm. In my mind, it was about a million miles out in the country. The house was cute but. . . there was no electricity. This Boomer grew up watching TV in an air-conditioned room. I was mortified.

Our family trips usually involved driving through the mountains of WV to find bargains on antiques. My dad collected oil lamps.

To my dismay, we used dad's oil lamps at the farm. Let me tell you: it was *work* to use an oil lamp. You had to have oil and a cloth wick. If you turned up the crank to get more light, smoke would come out the top and the glass thingy that covered the flame would get smokey. You had to make sure the oil didn't run out. Don't even think about going to the bathroom in the middle of the night.

Darkness represents all the bad stuff. The light is Jesus who will never leave us. In Ephesians 5 we are reminded: ⁸. . .for once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light."

We are called to be the light that carries the light of Jesus throughout the world. Especially in January. Especially in a world that seems to be filled with injustice, poverty, and oppression. Especially where some of God's children are excluded, deported, and marginalized.

The darkness cannot comprehend it. The darkness cannot overtake the light.

What will we take from Advent into this new year? What will we do to drive out the darkness? It is REQUIRED that we crank up that light and **be the light** that shines in the darkness.

Prayer: Life is short and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel with us. So be swift to love. Make haste to be kind. And the blessing of the one God who creates, redeems, and sanctifies be with you always. Amen.

Pam Braden
Calvary United Methodist Church, Ripley, WV
District Lay Leader, Little Kanawha District

January 5, 2026

Growing Up in Appalachia

[Joshua 1:1-9](#)

⁷ Be very brave and strong as you carefully obey all of the Instruction that Moses my servant commanded you. Don't deviate even a bit from it, either to the right or left. Then you will have success wherever you go. ⁸ Never stop speaking about this Instruction scroll. Recite it day and night so you can carefully obey everything written in it. Then you will accomplish your objectives and you will succeed. ⁹ I've commanded you to be brave and strong, haven't I? Don't be alarmed or terrified, because the LORD your God is with you wherever you go. (CEB)

Advent is a season of holy anticipation—a time when God invites us to move forward in trust, just as He did with Joshua. Standing on the edge of the Jordan, Joshua heard God say, *“Be strong and courageous... for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”*

Those words are still true for us today as we seek to transform Appalachia with God's love.

I grew up in the small WV Pentecostal church tradition. My mom believed—deep in her soul—that God showed up for everyday people. Her faith and service shaped me long before I learned what Advent was, what “connectional” meant, or discovered Wesleyan grace.

She taught me that God's presence fills even the roughest roads, the smallest sanctuaries, and into the “fringes” of our neighborhoods.

Along with my aunt and grandmother, she went to churches around WV, ministering as the Emmaus Way Singers, dragging a young boy who couldn't sing, along for the ride. She also worked with families in the Charleston area, ministering to them in their life spaces and ensuring children were fed and families had basic needs.

It helped form my faith, and I am sure it did the same for many of the lives she touched.

Now, as a United Methodist, I hear the same Spirit calling our churches across Appalachia to step into God's promise and to live into our vision to “love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously.”

In this Advent season, and beyond, we are challenged to share God's transforming grace through simple acts of love—meals shared in fellowship, clean water offered in compassion, prayers lifted for our communities, and neighbors encouraged in Christ.

And through it all, God whispers again: *“I am with you wherever you go.”*

Prayer: Holy God, as we enter this Advent season, give us the strength and courage to trust that You go before us, as You spoke to Joshua. Lead us and guide us to shine Christ's light all across Appalachia and our lives with the peace, joy, hope, and love of the Advent season. And as we wait for Emmanuel, remind us again that You are with us wherever we go. Amen.

Jim Minutelli, Certified Lay Minister
Serving the West Buckhannon, Mt. Lebanon and Tennerton United Methodist Churches
Conference Lay Leader

January 6, 2026

Love: A Holy Cycle

Ephesians 3:1-12

³This is the reason that I, Paul, am a prisoner for^[a] Christ Jesus^[b] for the sake of you gentiles, ²for surely^[c] you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you ³and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words,^[d] ⁴a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵In former generations this mystery^[e] was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶that is, the gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

The Bible is filled with “aha” moments, but none is quite so clear as Paul’s revelation in Ephesians 3: 4-6.

In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets.

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

In his letter, Paul proclaims that the mystery of Christ is revealed to *everyone* and that a truth that was previously hidden is now seen.

Now that we know the truth that Christ Jesus is here for all, how do we use this knowledge?

The Great Commandment tells us to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus provided us with examples such as the Good Samaritan and how we should live out the Great Commandment.

If we follow the teachings of Christ, our pathway should be evident. John Wesley gave us three general rules for a Christlike life: do no harm; do good; and stay in love with God.

Priest and author Joseph Yoo explained that the more we love God, the more we are led to love our neighbors by doing no harm and doing good.

The more we love our neighbors, the more we love God – and it becomes a holy cycle. May this season of epiphany reveal to us how to become immersed in this holy cycle.

Prayer: God of truth, you revealed yourself to us through the birth of your son and have given us a guide for living. We were told to love you and to love our neighbors as ourselves. May this be our epiphany this year forward. Help us to understand that you opened your love to all so that we may do the same. Amen

Martha Hill
Conference Justice and Advocacy Team Leader
St. Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV
Nine Rivers District

Grateful Praise and Thanksgiving

With heartfelt appreciation, I extend my personal thanks to the writers of the 2025 Advent devotionals. Your reflections have been truly inspiring, and you have wrapped your conversations of the peace, joy, hope, and love of the Advent season around us all as we “transform Appalachia with God’s love.”

I am grateful to and for Diann Nickerson, Pam Braden, Abbi Blosser, Cheryl Phillips, Kim Matthews, and Bryan Beaty for their hard work and commitment to this project. It would not be possible without them and all those others who were directly involved in releasing these wonderful reflections.

Thanks to the members of the Conference Lay Ministry Team and District Superintendents who provided names of potential writers, and to Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett for her support.

And special appreciation to all our readers for signing up and engaging in this devotional, giving of your time, praying, and sharing your stories and reflections.

May we all continue to celebrate the love, joy, peace and hope of the season.

Jim Minutelli, CLM
Conference Lay Leader