### **ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2020**



RICHFIELD UNITED METHODIST CHURCH | MINNEAPOLIS, MN
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#### **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to the 2020 Advent Daily Devotional of Richfield United Methodist Church. I'm glad you're taking a daily journey with your fellow members and worshipers as we countdown the days leading to Christmas.

This year's theme is "Heart of the Holy." The church calendar begins with Advent, the season of preparation as we await the coming of baby Jesus into the world. It is a time of longing and strain, of coping and stress. Though the days have grown short and the air has grown cold, the Spirit burns bright. Let us open our hearts to the holy, to the one who cares for us with tenderness in our season of anticipation. We love out, giving and receiving tender care to one another.

You'll find the submissions vary in their style. Each week starts on Sunday with the Advent Wreath liturgy for worship as we light the Candles of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Faith. On Wednesdays you'll find a photo reflection to ponder, for a bit of a twist. And on the rest of the days you will find a mix of poems, prose, lyrics, and prayers. On each page you'll also find suggested scripture readings taken from the Revised Common Lectionary. Vanderbilt University curates this resource (lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu) assigning readings to particular days. There isn't any

intended connection with the submitted photos or writings, but rather it's an opportunity to do daily scripture reading that you can know many others are reading across the world at the same time as you.

Some submissions were written specifically for this edition and others were written before but found there way here as they fit the season at hand. In each case, submissions were crafted with vulnerability and a desire to share with you in this season of waiting. Thank you to all of our writers and photographers this year and I hope to count some of you among our next batch of creative souls, dear reader. In fact, the 2021 Lenten Daily Devotional will be here before you know it, so of course stay tuned for submission details on the theme "Day by Day."

For now, put this devotional somewhere you can pick it up every day. Or go to our Facebook page, facebook.com/richfieldunitedmethodistchurch, and enjoy the daily posts there (be sure to share them with your friends). And be proud that you are spending a quiet moment with God every day of Advent. May these writings and images give you something to ponder in your heart. Blessings to you!

In Christ, Rev. Nate Melcher Senior Pastor

#### Sunday, November 29, 2020 Mark 13:24-27

### "The Heart of Hope" by Rev. Nate Melcher

In Advent we wait with intent and dwell in longing.
Our eyes close and we cast our sight upon the holy.

The prophet Isaiah cries out to God: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!"
It is a cry that pierces and declares.
It is the cry of a people who hope that God is in this.
In the mysterious, in the unbearable, in the waiting - God is in this.

On this first Sunday of Advent, we light the Candle of Hope. The Heart of Hope for you, for me, and for this beautiful, broken world. May hope burn bright in every corner of our lives.

#### Monday, November 30, 2020 Psalm 79; Micah 4:1-5; Revelation 15:1-8

### "Gracious God" by Meg Spicher

Gracious God
Welcome God into our minds and hearts,
Awaken our souls from our quiet passivity,
Stir our energy and settle our anxieties.
Lift our fears, heal our sorrows.
We ask for your gracious holy spirit
To center us as we gather to celebrate
Our love for you and one another.
Amen



# Tuesday, December 1, 2020 Psalm 79; Micah 4:6-13; Revelation 18:1-10

#### "I Have Hope" by Pat Schilling

I have "Hope" that God's dream of healing and love will get us through the lives lost from this pandemic and the violence that this nation has experienced.

It saddens me that our son John and his family, who were going to fly here and stay with us for Christmas, have now canceled those plans. Also that our family members can't gather at our house for Thanksgiving. We, as a country, are all experiencing these things, so where does God bring Peace and Joy to me? It's the beautiful online Sunday church services at Richfield UMC. It's the FaceTime, texts, emails, phone calls from our children and grandchildren. It's Jerry getting up so very early in the morning to go grocery shopping because our age falls in the risk category. Finally it's walking by my candle, with all the rocks surrounding it, that say Joy, Dream, Imagine, and Hope.

I deeply feel that God lives in my heart and that that love will carry me through these trying times.

#### Wednesday, December 2, 2020

## "Hope" Photo and writing by Rev. Kent Johnson



"Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength." Isaiah 40:30-31

One theme of Advent is the importance of hope. The work and difficulties of 2020 have made us all weary. The key to renewing our strength is hope that God will bring us through these times and we will actually be changed for the better by it.

This young person and her dad were helping us build a new house for the family in the Dominican Republic. A new house was a tangible sign of a hopeful future.

# Thursday, December 3, 2020 Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Hosea 6:1-6; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

## "In the Dark December Sky" by Orlean Kovach

In the dark December sky
A star shines bright
Like a beacon reaching down to earth
Reminds us of the manger birth
On that first Christmas night

We may not see the Angels
As they appeared that night
But as we celebrate that birth
Our hearts are touched with light

If we keep Christmas every day And keep the star in sight The world will be a better place And things will turn out right



# Friday, December 4, 2020 Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Jeremiah 1:4-10; Acts 11:19-26

#### "A Time of Expectant Waiting" by Sandy Nelson

For Christians Advent is a time of preparation for the celebration of Jesus' coming into the world. It reminds us to prepare for the birth of Jesus, our Savior. It is also of a time of waiting filled with hope. The Bible often speaks about waiting. Here are three of my favorite verses:

Psalm 27:14 "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."

Isaiah 30:18 "Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!"

Psalm 40:1 I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry."

2020 has certainly been a year of waiting. But, isn't every year? Every day? Every morning we are given we wait expectantly to see what the new day will bring?

This year has been a lot to manage. It has brought us pandemic, injustice, unrest, bitter politics and murder hornets. And yet, every day has been a gift given to us by God. For me it has been especially difficult since with the COVID-19 shut down in nursing homes and memory care residences. It meant that I could not visit my husband for 150 days this spring and summer. Now we are back to no visits and it has been a month since my last visit. This week my husband has tested positive for COVID-19.

This has been a very difficult challenge for me. Even though I haven't seen him for over another month, I am waiting with hope to be able to visit him when it is safe. But God has provided me with His perfect peace and comfort during these days. I am so grateful for good friends who call, for my deck where I could entertain a couple of friends at a time—socially distancing outside.

Our church has provided me with much joy. Frequent phone calls, virtual choir and, virtual Bible Studies have all added to my peace and comfort in difficult days. Prepare our hearts, Lord Jesus, as we anticipate your coming!

#### Saturday, December 5, 2020 Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Mark 11:27-33

#### "With Whom We Wait" by Rev. Wayne Albertson

With Whom We Wait
Of all those with whom I might stand
I choose to be with one who waits,
who waits upon God's revealing faithful and humble, expectant.

I choose to be with one who waits with no condition to be met, willing to be surprised in time when God as child appears sublime.

I choose to wait with Simeon who's seen so much of life go by, who could be tired, a cynic made, yet holds out hope for all he's prayed.

I choose to wait with those at the cross, seeing their sadness and knowing their loss; till a lone guard declares greatly awed, 'This truly was the Son of God'.

I choose to wait with the naked, unfed waiting for clothing, a small piece of bread; and I shall know God revealed when one appears in Jesus' stead.

So, here I wait, and looking no less than those of gospel and ages past; Oh God, I pray to see Thee at hand, shaping my life, with love Thy command.

Long Meter, to tune: Hamburg, #298, ("When I Survey the Wondrous Cross")
Or: Canonbury, #463, ("Lord, Speak to Me")

#### Sunday, December 6, 2020 Mark 1:1-8

#### "The Heart of Peace" by Rev. Nate Melcher

In Advent we ponder what has been and consider what is to come.
Our lips purse and we whisper of the holy.

The prophet Isaiah cries out to God: "Prepare the way of the Lord!"
It is a cry that remembers and reminds. It is the cry of a people who know that to be still is to know God.
In the silence, in the wind, in the calm to be still is to know God.

On this second Sunday of Advent, we light the Candle of Peace. The Heart of Peace for you, for me, and for this beautiful, broken world. May peace burn bright in every corner of our lives.



#### Monday, December 7, 2020 Psalm 27; Isaiah 26:7-15; Acts 2:37-42

### "A Nightly Prayer" by Jerad Whitaker

A Nightly Prayer:

Thank you Lord for today.

I have given it my best.

Thank you for ....

Thank you for ....

Thank you for ....

Please watch over and guide my family tomorrow.

If you grant me another day, I will do my best with it.

Amen.



#### Tuesday, December 8, 2020 Psalm 27; Isaiah 4:2-6; Acts 11:1-18

### "Mystery" by Marilyn Dodge

Mystery and waiting are words that I associate with Advent. When I can look beyond the Christmas trees and the hectic shopping I come to the waiting and the mystery of it all. It kinda stops me cold. Just what am I waiting for? Why is there so much mystery involved?

Soon, I begin to realize that it is really the Heart of the Holy that I am trying to tap into. Just how do I tune into God's heart, God's gifts of peace, very difficult ioy, hope? lt is at times. Mysteriously, somehow, some way, the Heart of the Holy seeps into my being and brain. It can be a slow process or it can be lightening fast. But, what is the key to finding these gifts? Ahh, yes, I find that I need to be guiet and go inward. This can be difficult because life brings all sorts of challenges.

But, if I can zero in on the word "mystery" I am beginning to open the door to receiving the Holy's gifts. The word mystery for me is a gift that lasts all year long, I just have to access it. How do I do that? I pull apart the word, letter by letter.

Mystery

M-My

Y—Yearning

S — Spirit

T-Tries to

E - Embrace the

R – Real

Y-You.

The Heart of the Holy One brings me peace, joy, hope, direction and more! Yes, it is a mystery!

#### Wednesday, December 9, 2020

## "Persistence" Photo and writing by Rev. Kent Johnson



We have all heard that the Bible says, "seek and you will find." But like the Wood Duck, the first nest house you find might fit a Chickadee better than you. This illustrates the Advent theme of persistence. We have learned a lot this year about how long and hard one must work to get an effective vaccine or keep an economy or a family going. But even in this difficult year we persist in proclaiming each Sunday that we will live in faith, justice and joy.

"So I say to you,
Ask, and it will be given you;
search, and you will find;
knock, and the door will be opened for you."
Luke 11:9

#### Thursday, December 10, 2020 Psalm 126; Habakkuk 2:1-5; Philippians 3:7-11

## "The Heart of Healing" by Rev. Nate Melcher

In the Hebrew Bible, we find many prophets, one of the most famous being Jeremiah. Sometimes known as "the weeping prophet," Jeremiah weeps to God and about God. He weeps about the people and their situation. He sees what is to come and that nothing will stop it and it fills him with grief and weeping. When life ends up with such tragedy, Jeremiah wonders how it could be so if God is truly there, or perhaps even is it that God put tragedy there.

I've felt this way with God. I know many who have, too. When we're experiencing wounding, trauma, or heartbreak, we don't always talk about it. Sometimes, it feels like we're not supposed to, either. But here it is in scripture, huge swaths of writing in the Hebrew Bible, sometimes known as the Old Testament, filled with lament to - or even about - God. We are assured, then, we can bring it all to God.

God is a God who meets us where we're at and invites us to the next step. In healing, each step is filled with an emotion. If a step is in anger, God is there. If a step is in sadness, God is there. If a step is in numbness, God is there. God is meeting you in your step and inviting you to the next one.

May you take that next step with God in your healing.

#### Friday, December 11, 2020 Psalm 126; Habakkuk 3:2-6; Philippians 3:12-16

#### "The Christmas Chair" by Orlean Kovach

The day had been so hectic Rushing everywhere I need to take a break I said And sat down in a chair I closed my eyes And bowed my head And said a little prayer

I thought about how Christmas
Brought the love of God to earth
And how for centuries the world
Still celebrates the birth
And in that quiet moment
I sat there in the chair
I felt the peace of Christmas
That all of us can share



#### Saturday, December 12, 2020 Psalm 126; Habakkuk 3:13-19; Matthew 21:28-32

### "You're Welcome, No Problem" by Rev. Wayne Albertson

I don't know when it happened, but we lost something in the popular shift of language from "You're Welcome" to "No Problem" which we say when someone thanks us for something. We say it to indicate that some act incurred no significant demand upon the one who provided it. It was done from a position of strength. There was "no problem".

When, as a response to "thank you", we say "you're welcome" we're saying something of greater value. By using the word "welcome", are we not saying we've accepted the other person into our life no matter what the demand, problematic or not? We say it whether we have expended little effort or great, incurred little cost or great, known joy or struggle. You're Welcome!

This is Advent. We thank God for the anticipated reconciling, joyful, humble gift of the mangerborn Emmanuel, a gift given after Joseph's embarrassed engagement to a pregnant virginwoman; after a donkey ride by a pregnant woman; after rejection by several inn-keepers; after Herod's child-murdering orders. We thank God for the gift. And God says . . .

It is not that God's so mighty as to give with "no problem". Rather, God took on the experiences of our lives that we might know how welcome we are in God's. I think what we lost with the shift in language is saying and believing that love involves not helping others from only positions of strength, but from efforts of struggle and weakness as well. What we've lost is the "welcomeness" of relationship to the "unbotheredness" of individuality. You're Welcome!

#### Sunday, December 13, 2020 Luke 1:46b-55

### "The Heart of Joy" by Rev. Nate Melcher

In Advent we glimpse the future and peek at the horizon.
Our brows lift and we turn our thoughts to the holy.

The prophet Isaiah cries out to God: "God will give... a mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit!"
It is a cry that reassures and blesses.
It is the cry of a people who seek and find gladness in God.
In the laughter, in the dancing, in the song - find gladness in God.

On this third Sunday of Advent, we light the Candle of Joy. The Heart of Joy for you, for me, and for this beautiful, broken world. May joy burn bright in every corner of our lives.

#### Monday, December 14, 2020 Psalm 125; 1 Kings 18:1-18; Ephesians 6:10-17

#### "Thankfulness" by Meg Spicher

When we accept who we are as a gift from you, Lord, We can open up to your love for us. As we give thanks for your love, we are filled with gratitude. We thank you for the gifts you shower upon us each day, In the natural beauty of the world; the kindness of a friend; The unity of our prayers. We open ourselves up to share all these gifts and more with you and With one another. Giving thanks to Jesus, our brother and Savior. Thanking him for our eternal life and his unending love. We hope to treasure each day and be filled with your grace. Amen

#### Tuesday, December 15, 2020 Psalm 125; 2 Kings 2:9-22; Acts 3:17-4:4

"Emmanuel / God with Us" by Ann Johnson

Many years ago, after the birth of our daughter and son, I became pregnant. It was unexpected but we began to see it as a blessing (once we got used to the idea.) The pregnancy was ok at first but then complications began. The doctor put me on bedrest. It was Advent. Our family was excited about Jesus' birth and looking forward to the birth of a new baby at our house. On Christmas Eve, I miscarried.

While Bill and I were at the hospital, our children were at church singing in the Christmas Eve service and then staying with church friends. I need to tell you that through all of this, there was a sense of peace. Bill and I both felt "God With Us - Emmanuel."

This year, our celebration of Advent and Jesus' birth will be different from any celebration of the Holidays we have experienced. May you know the constant presence of Emmanuel - God with Us through all of Advent and Christmas!

#### Wednesday, December 16, 2020

# "Pay Attention" Photo and writing by Rev. Kent Johnson



(Jesus says) "Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." Luke 21:36

One theme of Advent is paying attention. This is a really good idea for 2020. By paying attention we have a better chance of escaping the difficulties and darkness of this pandemic time so we may still be standing to see Jesus come with new life.

# Thursday, December 17, 2020 Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; 2 Samuel 6:1-11; Hebrews 1:1-4

#### "The Heart of God" by Rev. Nate Melcher

At bedtime, our family does the Faith5, a five-minute break to share our highs and lows, read a Bible story, talk about it, pray together, and bless one another. We've done this every night for over five years now unless circumstances make it absolutely impossible - which, I must admit, has happened here and there because if plans always went according to plan we wouldn't be human.

Hearing my children talk about their day has always been important to me. My hope is this openness to sharing is being kindled early and will pay off down the road when life gets more complex and the desire to keep the hard stuff to themselves is tempting. Likewise, as adults who already have complex lives, finding a way to talk about that honestly and appropriately with our children is an interesting exercise every day. In both cases, I cherish the mutual vulnerability we find as a family in these moments.

The Heart of God is in that mutual vulnerability. The celebration we can have for one another, the solidarity we can show for one another, and the sharing and listening we offer one another, this is where we experience the Heart of God. The most vulnerable form of God was the baby Jesus, a form of God that was celebrated by shepherds and wise kings. He grew to show solidarity in his suffering along with we humans. And in his resurrection we share something special together.

May we bless each other with Jesus.

#### Friday, December 18, 2020 Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; 2 Samuel 6:12-19; Hebrews 1:5-14

#### "I Need More Time on Kevin's Bench" by Jen Pacyga

Feeling the warmth of the Sun and the contrariness of the wind upon my skin

Reflecting on the Goodness that is so prevalent

(I saw round fat robins the other day feasting upon dried up berries, preparing for flight. Now only twittering chickadee types flutter about)

Changing of the seasons right before my eyes

Listening to the exchange of comments between the people groups walking by

Such wind! Leaves and seeds getting a free ride

Gazing up into the blue sky: What is man that Thou art mindful of him? And the Son of Man that thou visited him?

Thankful for the calm residing deep within me yet realizing the amount of Work yet needing to be done

Older hands and feet able to move well and a mind mostly nimble (mostly)

Trundling along as fast as it can go- a bronze/black caterpillar moves along.

Every one I've seen has the same amount of bronze...

#### Saturday, December 19, 2020 Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Judges 13:2-24; John 7:40-52

### "Once We Have Seen Christ" by Rev. Wayne Albertson

- King Herod was a power-man, Who called Wise-Men aside. He feared his power would be lost, should God with us abide.
- 2. These ancient-three to Herod came; the king's command obeyed. He asked of them, 'Where do you go, with hope, and unafraid?"
- Bring news, O wise and seeking men, of One who calls your forth.
  And let me see what you would find,
  and bend my knee with yours.
- These seekers-three the king did leave, and on their journey went, Until the star announced the place, God was so innocent.
- The gifts they brought, they had to give; God's birth deserved no less.
   This fragile babe, this manger child, was of no inn a guest.
- 6. And then they rose to go their way; but would not meet the king. Fearful hate would not guide their path, for they had seen God's child.
- 7. And now, we are as wise men led, to Jesus in our world;
  To Christ in lives outcast, unfed, Humble and without power.
- We must go back another way, when we to Christ have been; When we have seen humanity, in love, so pure, our kin.

#### Sunday, December 20, 2020 Luke 1:26-38

#### "The Heart of Faith" by Rev. Nate Melcher

In Advent we step to the edge and stand steadfast.
Our breath slows deep and we draw in the holy.

The psalmist cries out to God:
"You are my Creator, my God,
and the Rock of my salvation!"
It is a cry that clings and relies.
It is the cry of a people
who believe in the presence of God.
In the doubt, in the assurance,
in the wonder - is the presence of God.

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we light the Candle of Faith. The Heart of Faith for you, for me, and for this beautiful, broken world. May faith burn bright in every corner of our lives.



#### Monday, December 21, 2020 Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Samuel 1:1-18; Hebrews 9:1-14

### "The Heart of Prophecy" by Rev. Nate Melcher

At the time of this writing, early November, I have no idea what our world will be like once this comes up on the calendar, late December. So much has happened this year, from the beautiful to the tragic. And 2020 just keeps getting new names: unprecedented times, challenging times, unexpected times, liminal times, unpredictable times. We all have mystery, even appreciate it to an extent. But when there is so much mystery that it blots out what we know, it can threaten to cast despair.

I don't know the future. And if I could, I don't know that I'd want to, either. I'd probably fall to despair trying to change what I cannot. Theologically, I believe God knows all possible futures and is big enough to shift with us as life unfolds. That means God is prepared even when I am not.

This has been a rough year for me and for many, many others. A lot has happened we simply didn't see coming. Whether or not we should have been prepared, in many cases, we simply weren't. I am glad God is prepared to be in the mystery with us, before us, even. God casts out despair, the holy blots it right out. Mystery may be unpredictable, but it is never faced alone.

#### <u>Tuesday, December 22, 2020</u> Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Samuel 1:19-28; Hebrews 8:1-13

#### "His Presence" by Orlean Kovach

Rising early... late nights too There's so many things to do Shopping and wrapping Parties and more Seemingly endless trips to the store

Christmas tree trimming
Tinsel and lights
Baking of cookies and other delights
Greetings are written to friends far and near
Trips to see Santa and his reindeer

In all this confusion, chaos and uproar Let's all take some time out To center once more On the Babe in the manger whose birth long ago Is the reason for Christmas we celebrate so

As we greet those around us And wish them good cheer Let's thank the Lord Jesus for his presence here Not only at Christmas But all through the year.

#### Wednesday, December 23, 2020

## "Humility" Photo and writing by Rev. Kent Johnson



We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:6b-8)

We don't use the word "iniquities" or "sins" so much. They seem so old fashioned. We are more familiar with "bad choices", "mistakes", "flaws in our thinking", "flaws in our systems." Whatever we call them, Advent is a time for humility and self-examination. What can we do about the racism, sexism, classism and other "isms" in our culture? For we are surely being delivered "into the hand of our iniquity". Yet we are your clay, O God, make us the people Jesus is calling us to be.

#### Thursday, December 24, 2020 Isaiah 9:2-7

#### "Each Day" by Jerry Schilling

God has been instrumental in instilling in me a continuing spiritual light; a light that shines in my mind, and in my heart. This light warms me to the core, and fills me with energy and peace, both working in unison. During these difficult times, it is easier to focus on what we don't have, and what we can't do, rather than being so thankful for the multitude of good around us. Opening up my heart to God enables me to breath in his life giving support.

I start each day with an open mind, and an inward bright spiritual light, and with the confidence that God is with me every step of the way. As I experience various Conflux Moments, the light is always there, always bright. God's benevolence and love instills me with a positive attitude, which gives me the ability to find joy, to celebrate, and to rejoice. This mindset makes it easier to cast away the negative rhythms which can cause fatigue, confusion, and fear.

Going forward, my goal is to be creative, to be positive, and to be thankful for my life. I am confident that as long as I commit to this personal ambition, I will not sink into the quicksand of depression. I will continue to find many reasons to celebrate God's healing powers.

I will continue support of our Church, our staff, and our volunteers, as we work through this season of storms. I thank God each day for my kind and loving family, for our church community, and for being blessed to be a part of this wonderful country that we live in. I have faith that out of darkness comes the inevitable light. God's light is healing, God's light is energetic, God's light is healthy, God's light is our future.

"If you want light to come into your life, you need to stand where it is shining."

Guy Finley - self-help author



#### Friday, 25, 2020 Luke 2:1-20

#### "Bethlehem's Manger" by Rev. Wayne Albertson

Never was a star so intended for our guiding as that pausing by Bethlehem's manger.
Never were humans so intended for sacred discovery as those kneeling by Bethlehem's manger.
Never was a gift so intended for remembered giving as that laid by Bethlehem's manger.
Never was a babe so intended for purposed living than One born by Bethlehem's manger who made every babe born by every manger intended for purposed life.



# CHRISTMAS EVE ONLINE WORSHIP

Thursday, December 24 at 4:00 pm Family Worship

Thursday, December 24 at 9:00 pm Traditional Worship

Online at <u>youtube.com/richfieldumc</u> and by touch tone phone: 1.888.650.5835.

Both services are intended for all ages and feature the same sermon and end with singing "Silent Night." They each have a different atmosphere and musicians, and the Family Worship has elements specifically designed for young children to experience the Nativity story at their level. You're welcome to experience both services.