

#### INTRODUCTION:

What a delight to bring together writers from the life of Richfield United Methodist Church! Many writers came together for a simple Advent theme: **Gifts**. The true gift of the Advent/Christmas season is the gift of Jesus child. for Christ arriving all humankind. Additionally, writers were given extreme latitude for how they define "Gift" and how to express themselves. You'll find writings about people, places, memories, feelings, wisdom, journeys, items, and more. Each day, take in how these writers interpreted "Gifts" and each day wonder what "Gifts" means to you.

This devotional booklet is assembled with rhythms and patterns to give you tether on your Advent journey. Sundays feature the Advent wreath liturgy for worship as we light the Candles of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Faith. They are inspired by scripture and Light of the World by Amy-Jill Levine, a book which will guide our Advent worship. These appear with poems by Orlean Kovach. Wednesdays feature an image to ponder rather than words, each photograph snapped selected by the gifted Scott Ellich. Saturdays wrap up the week with an original poem by Wavne Albertson. On Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, you'll find a variety of writings from church members and clergy. May each writing give you something to ponder, perhaps spurring you to write, as well.

Two additional features are at play to give you consistent tether in Advent. The first is likely familiar. As we've done in recent Advent and Lenten devotionals, you'll find a list of suggested daily scripture readings from the Revised Common Lectionary curated by Vanderbilt University (lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu). There isn't any intended connection with the submitted writings and photos. Rather, it's an opportunity to do daily thematic scripture reading and know many others around the world join you in reading the same scripture.

The final tether is new for our devotional booklets, an Advent "Photo a Day" Challenge. For this spiritual practice, take a moment to reflect on the day's challenge word, each curated by photographer and church member Sarah Currie, then respond by taking a picture based on how you interpret it. You're encouraged to share your photo with someone close to you or post it as a comment at the Richfield UMC Facebook page (facebook.com/richfieldunitedmethodistchurch), where this devotional will appear each day through Christmas. Of course, you're encouraged to share these posts and bless your friends with the creativity of your church.

God is devoted to you daily. May this daily devotional be a tether of hope, peace, joy, and faith for you in this season of Advent. Blessings to you!

In Christ, Rev. Nate Melcher Senior Pastor

P.S. The Lent 2022 daily devotional is just around the corner. We'll need 47 entries based on the theme "Unafraid," based on the book *Unafraid by Rev. Adam Hamilton. Pray, think, and write!* 

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## **ADVENT DAILY DEVOTIONAL 2021**

WEEK	I PHOTO-A-DAY CHALLENGE
11/28	"The Light of Hope" 6 Rev. Nate Melcher Tradition "A Time for Celebration" Orlean Kovach
11/29	"Today is a gift; enjoy the present!" 7 Meg Spicher Anticipation
11/30	"All Shapes and Sizes" 8 Sandy Nelson Believe
12/01	"The Farm"
12/02	"The Gift of Contemplation"
12/03	"Marvelous Martin"
12/04	"But by Me"
WEEK II	
12/05	"The Light of Peace"
12/06	"The Gift of the Nest"
12/07	"How Can I Keep from Singing" 15 Fern Albertson Unknown
12/08	"The Family"
12/09	"The Gift of Grace"
12/10	"Tis a Gift to Be Simple"
12/11	"Inhabiting the Mundane"

WEEK	III PHOTO-A-DAY CHALLENGE
12/12	"The Light of Joy" 20 Rev. Nate Melcher Journey "From on High" Orlean Kovach
12/13	"The Gift of Mission" 21 Rev. Kent Johnson Shine
12/14	"The Pace"
12/15	"The Hope"
12/16	"The Handbook" 24 Rev. Hope Hutchison Rejoice
12/17	"An Advent Reflection"
12/18	"Somewhere in Religion"
WEEK	
12/19	"The Light of Faith" 27 Rev. Nate Melcher Open "Searching by Starlight" Orlean Kovach
12/20	"The Gift of Surprise" 28 Rev. Kent Johnson Reveal
12/21	"Gratitude Journal" 29 Rev. Nate Melcher <i>Celebration</i>
12/22	"The Falls"
12/23	"The List Is Endless"
12/24	"Moments"
12/25	"Gifts"

#### Sunday, November 28, 2021 "The Light of Hope" Advent I Liturgy by Rev. Nate Melcher

The season of Advent bids us to wait; Our bodies are still, yet they reach out to the holy.

The priest Zechariah declares his prophecy: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel! For God has looked favorably upon God's people and redeemed them!"

It is a declaration bursting with the meaning of memory. It is a declaration for a people who find hope in God. In the stillness, in the waiting, God is in this.

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

## "A Time for Celebration" by Orlean Kovach

A time for celebration With people we hold dear It's easy to get stressed out As the big day gets near

Gifts for friends and family Trees to decorate Parties, plays, and concerts Keeping folks up late.

We need an aha moment To make us stop and think Why are we celebrating With all this food and drink?

A King was born, the Angels sang We celebrate the day But somehow the real meaning Gets lost along the way.

> Photo-A-Day Challenge: Tradition Jeremiah 33:14-16, Psalm 25:1-10, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, Luke 21:25-36

### Monday, November 29, 2021 "Today is a gift; enjoy the present!" by Meg Spicher

"Today Is a Gift, Enjoy the Present" I remember reading this quote many decades ago. I came across it again recently this summer while visiting family in California. We each were asked to write a sentiment or quote to share and put on little wooden plaques, and attach it to the wooden back of a swing. It was a gift for my mother in law many years ago, the idea being that as she sat and rocked in the swing she could remember all our wishes for years to come, to continue the gift.

As I stood there in the hot California sun reading the different plagues we each attached, only a few were still legible; most had faded away over the years. The three that remained of the nearly 12 attached, were mine, and my two daughters... one "Thanks for being such a teacher" and the other read, "I love you." I wondered standing there if I had managed over the past many years to follow my own advice, to remember "Today Is a Gift, Enjoy the Present." Had I gotten so caught up in petty regrets and selfish hurts that I forgot to forgive, to thank, and to love as freely as my heart wished? If I could not be sure, then I needed to stop and remember my truth and cherish each day as the gift it is.

Along with that, to be thankful and to say I love you, for these gifts really do last.

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Anticipation Psalm 90; Numbers 17:1-11; 2 Peter 3:1-18

## Tuesday, November 30, 2021 "All Shapes and Sizes" by Sandy Nelson

They come to us in all different kinds of sizes and shapes. Some might fit into a box; however, many cannot!

Just as the leaves are now fluttering down from my Autumn Blaze Maple tree, so God's gifts and blessings continually flow down to me:

Here are just a few of my favorite gifts:

#### **JESUS**

The gift of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, coming into the world to love and redeem each of us.

Christ's death and resurrection so that we might have salvation.

#### FAMILY AND FRIENDS

My wonderful spouse with whom I was privileged to spent 47+ years.

The doctor saying, "Oh, it's a little girl," when our daughter was born.

Celebrating special birthdays or holidays with family and friends.

Taking off in a jet to visit beloved family who live far away.

Daily gifts...love, forgiveness, a chance to start a new day and to end it in peaceful rest.

#### NATURE

The changing of the seasons, the beauty of fall as the earth awaits winter, the beauty of winter's snow, spring tulips and summer's warmth.

A sunrise over Lake Superior, or a full moon rising above the Great Lake.

This list could go on and on...to infinity...

Thanks be to God for His/Her never ending gifts to us every moment of our lives.

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Believe Psalm 90; 2 Samuel 7:18-29; Revelation 22:12-16

### Wednesday, December 1, 2021 "The Farm" by Scott Ellich

Reflect on this photo devotional and its description by photographer Scott Ellich:

"This farm is a symbol of the gift of food."



Photo-A-Day Challenge: Offering Psalm 90; Isaiah 1:24-31; Luke 11:29-32

#### Thursday, December 2, 2021 "The Gift of Contemplation" by Rev. Victoria Rebeck

You know well: the weeks before Christmas are hectic. Advertising tempts us to buy generous presents and hold sumptuous parties. Offices and schools hold special events. Even activity at church intensifies.

I confess that when I was a kid, I loved Christmas for a lot of reasons, but mostly because of the presents. Every year my imagination grew as I anticipated how many packages would appear under the tree. Eventually, of course, the year arrived when my imagination outpaced reality.

Christmas and Easter are similar not only as major holidays. They are both preceded by a season of contemplation and introspection. These preparatory seasons, Lent and Advent, are the opposite of what the marketing industry is pushing. They offer quiet and focus; time to take stock and ponder what is most important. It's a spiritual oasis.

This gift is not an easy one to accept. It may be unrealistic to take off for a monastery this Advent. Why not schedule in a discipline of daily islands of prayer and quiet? You can spend this time alone in thought and prayer, on a walk though nature, or in conversation with a friend or spiritual guide who will share reflections on loving God, loving neighbor, and taking good care of the gift of your lives. You will find that it slows your mind and redirects your attention to that which is truly valuable.

This precious gift will not disappoint or surpass your imagination. And you can enjoy it well before Christmas!

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Legacy Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:5-12; Philippians 1:12-18a

## Friday, December 3, 2021 "Marvelous Martin" by Scott Clarke

Lynne and I are blessed with two wonderful daughters and a fantastic son-in-law, and they live only about five miles from our home. In June of 2020, we experienced the joy of our first grandchild, a boy named Martin. During the first ten months of his life, we could not see him as much nor as "completely" as we had dreamed (pre-COVID). His parents were understandably cautious about his exposure to others. We received many photos, videos, and FaceTime calls, but in-person visits were short in duration while wearing masks and gloves. For his health and safety, we willingly accepted these limitations. His parents also wished for a more typical experience, including well-deserved time alone with each other, with Martin safely in the care of his grandparents.

Even though it was difficult, we understood that it was a "First World problem," because he was healthy and happy, his mom and dad were already great parents, they were close by, and we were a part of his life! After receiving COVID vaccines, we have more than made up for earlier shortcomings. We see him in person (sans masks) at least once a week and he has slept over at our house several times. We hold, hug, and play like it's supposed to be! He greets us with a big smile and knows that our house and yard are also his.

So our most precious gift is that of becoming complete grandparents to Marvelous Martin!

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Family Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:13-18; Philippians 1:18b-26

# Saturday, December 4, 2021 "But by Me" by Rev. Wayne Albertson

No one comes to butterflies but by me, Said the caterpillar softly, of course, But surely, slowly, inevitably, We arrive, in color, with little force.

There's nothing magical, of drama none; But quiet change of form from furred creature Climbing stems to life enwrapped in cocoon, Dormant waiting my dominant feature.

While inside a woven web, soft and bland, Whatever happens, being, becoming, Does so without outside interference, Self-alteration, a new form forming.

You may wonder who I am in that time
Of thread-wrapped change,
and am I pleased or scared
As I no longer crawl and lose this prime
Way of being to which no one else dared.

In cocoon-wrapped moments I give no thought If where I am is proper to my end, Or a place strange to be from furry start; Form alters apace, a-thread, change contained.

Change contained, cocooned, in what was given; Nothing added to bring these wings about From what wove a softness for its living And its becoming, in time to come out.

All that is needed is in softness held, Unseen within, the destiny of flight Latent in genes, inherently propelled, -Time after time, by nature's gentle might.

And, ye, created *Imago Dei*, Look too much for miracles given thee, While inside, cocooned, yearns your destiny. You have from your birthing all that might be.

> Photo-A-Day Challenge: Arrival Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 4:1-6; Luke 9:1-6

#### Sunday, December 5, 2021 "The Light of Peace" Advent II Liturgy by Rev. Nate Melcher

The season of Advent bids us to smile; Our songs are quiet, yet they echo for an eternity.

The mother Mary sings her praise: "My soul magnifies the Lord! And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of servants."

It is a song bursting with the promise of potential. It is a song for a people who seek the peace of God. In the wind, in the grace notes, God is in this.

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

### "It All Made Sense" by Orlean Kovach

December is so hectic, I thought we'd gone too far But right amid the chaos, I found a Christmas star For last minute shopping, I went to the mall And there in the center, a Christmas tree tall

Some children were gathered, in front of the tree To sing Christmas carols, for shoppers like me I stopped at the post office, the line was awfully long But as I waited for my turn, I heard a Christmas song.

The grocery store was crowded, full carts were everywhere
Some elves were bagging groceries, and Santa Clause was there
I overbaked some cookies, much to my despair But when I tossed them in the yard, some birds appeared to share

Got out the box of ornaments, to decorate my tree And as I held a tiny creche, it all made sense to me.

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Delight Malachi 3:1-4, Luke 1:68-79, Philippians 1:3-11, Luke 3:1-6

### Monday, December 6, 2021 "The Gift of the Nest" by Rev. Kent Johnson

As we use this Advent season to prepare for the birth of Jesus I have been thinking about how the birth of a baby feels like such an amazing gift. It is, of course, the gift of new life. Then the initial amazement gives way to lots of work to raise the young. I am impressed every year by the tireless efforts of bird parents to feed their demanding little ones. As tired as they are, they don't give up feeding those demanding little mouths. But eventually the little ones fledge and are gone. A pair of local news anchors did a story this fall on the lonely feeling of being empty nesters. It's a big change to have the last child launch out. I wonder if the parent birds miss their little ones or give a cheer for having their life back? Maybe both.

Don't you think many gifts in our lives are both great blessings and great responsibilities. If we think of Mary and Joseph and the birth of Jesus in this light perhaps we can sense their humanity and feel a little closer to them.



Photo-A-Day Challenge: Wonder Psalm 126; Isaiah 40:1-11; Romans 8:22-25

#### Tuesday, December 7, 2021 "How Can I Keep from Singing?" by Fern Albertson

One of the best gifts Richfield UMC has received was when Paige Armstrong came to us as our Choir Director. Not only does she have a beautiful voice, but also extensive knowledge of vocal music and outstanding skills in teaching, enabling our choir to sing better. She has taught us how to breathe, position our jaws, mouth, and tongue, and use our whole body, mind, and spirit to produce the desired quality sound.

At the beginning of choir, she has us share joys and concerns. She leads us in a meditative exercise focusing first on God's gift of our bodies and how they help us each day to do the things we need/want to do. Then she asks us to bring our attention to God's gift of our minds that enables us to think, learn and understand. Lastly, she tells us to be in touch with God's gift of our hearts and how we are feeling, sensing God's spirit within. At the end of choir, she closes with a prayer that she shares from her heart.

During this Advent I would encourage each of you to be in touch with God's gift to you of mind, body, and spirit, giving thanks for how these gifts enable us to live our lives. How can we keep from singing God's praises?

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Unknown Psalm 126; Isaiah 19:18-25; 2 Peter 1:2-15

### Wednesday, December 8, 2021 "The Family" by Scott Ellich

Reflect on this photo devotional and its description by photographer Scott Ellich:

"Animals remind me of the gift of family and friendship."



Photo-A-Day Challenge: Watch Psalm 126; Isaiah 35:3-7; Luke 7:18-30

## Thursday, December 9, 2021 "The Gift of Grace" by Rev. Lynn Borgeson

I find the word "gift" to be such a joyful, beautiful word. At Christmas time, we associate gifts with presents... under the tree, brought by Santa, given by friends or loved ones, and of course the gifts brought to the Christ Child by the three kings. Gifts are given freely by the giver, and received with the receiver often feeling blessed.

God's gift of grace... the unmerited, undeserved love of God... is a gift given freely and willingly by God to God's people with "no strings attached." There is nothing we can do to earn or deserve God's love. It is a freely given gift from God. It is up to us as to whether or not we wish to receive this precious gift. God expressed this love in the most wonderful way by coming to earth, in the form of a baby, a human being, so God could better understand what human beings experience during their time on earth.

During the season of Advent, as we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child, the season can touch us in a variety of ways. Some magical, others spiritual in nature, but sometimes, the preparations can be too much to bear, especially if the past year has been difficult - having lost a loved one, a job, or our heart is not in it. And it's okay. God understands. This year, may we open our hearts and community to God's great love and welcome it into our midst.

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Desire Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 6:1-8; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

### Friday, December 10, 2021 "Tis a Gift to Be Simple" by Lynne Alexander

Tis a gift to be simple ... and so begins an old Shaker hymn ... Tis a gift to be free ... it continues. We celebrate God's bounty and his love. God's love endures through us. Celebrating our love and service to God and humankind brings us around to "where we ought to be ..."

Tis a gift that comes down where we ought to be ... Gifts come in many forms. Presents for Christmas and gifts for birthdays. Those are simple gifts, but most and more important are the Gifts from God ... our breath, our food, our love, our caring and our LIFE. And when we get to the place that is right, we will be in the valley of love and delight.

Thank you, God! For all your Simple Gifts and your enduring love. AMEN!

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Generosity <u>Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 8:4-12; 2</u> <u>Corinthians 9:1-15</u>

### Saturday, December 11, 2021 "Inhabiting the Mundane" by Rev. Wayne Albertson

There is a time in the doing
of life, the practical
everyday habits of
sustenance and repair mopping the floor, buying groceries,
making the bed,
sewing on a button when

a pause just to pause happens, a streak of unhurriedness enters, an aura of gratitude quiets its way forth, inhabiting the motions of mundane life;

and, we feel
the sturdiness of standing,
the anticipations of a shared meal,
the comfort and trust of warm covers,
the importance of a small needle;

and, the melodies of practicality lie underneath the eternal descant of reverence for what we do, who we are.

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Blessing Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 9:8-15; Luke 1:57-66

#### Sunday, December 12, 2021 "The Light of Joy" Advent III Liturgy by Rev. Nate Melcher

The season of Advent bids us to gather; Our resolve may quake, yet we journey together.

The Shepherds rally their flocks: "Let us go now! Let us see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us!"

It is a rally beginning the journey to joy. It is a rally for a people who find joy in God. In the shuffling, in the wandering, God is in this.

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

## "From on High" by Orlean Kovach

Tired from travelling all day Settled for a bed of hay Climactic silence Baby's cry Bright star shining in the sky Angel voices from on high

2,000 years have passed since then Each year the story's told again God's love From on high That star still shining in the sky Proclaiming hope for you and I.

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Journey Zephaniah 3:14-20, Isaiah 12:2-6, Philippians 4:4-7, Luke 3:7-18

## Monday, December 13, 2021 "The Gift of Mission" by Rev. Kent Johnson

I hope sometime in your life you can go on a mission trip. My first trip to Bolivia was sponsored by RUMC and I was hooked. There are so many gifts in a mission experience whether it is near or far, short term or long.

Since retirement Sue and I have been traveling annually to the Dominican Republic to build houses. Local Dominican pastors pick deserving families to receive new houses and our group of 30 builds 3 houses. A house is certainly a big gift for the family but the biggest gift of all is the mission experience for us. We get to meet so many people in the community while working side by side and there is so much culture, food, laughter, worship and prayer to be experienced. And there is the wonderful gift of that heartwarming feeling of doing good for others.

Consider putting a mission trip/experience on your bucket list.



Photo-A-Day Challenge: Shine Isaiah 11:1-9; Numbers 16:1-19; Hebrews 13:7-17

#### Tuesday, December 14, 2021 "The Pace" by Rev. Nate Melcher

A reflection from seven years ago, with a fresh reflection from today...

It hits me one morning: her three-year-old world is at my adult pace. Our mornings were rush, rush, rush. Out the door, to the garage, in the car, out the car, in the building, zip, dash, vroom. That afternoon, I brought a new idea, and an old friend. Looked in the rearview mirror, told her, "Let's go for a walk. Anywhere you want. I brought your walking stick.'

"Oh, my goodness!" she said.

"Where do you want to take a walk?" I asked.

"The forest," she said. We got to Wood Lake, parked, opened the back, and she's out the door. It's cold, she didn't notice. She loves her walking stick, picked it herself on a camping trip. "Which way now?" I asked. "This way!" she said. Off we

went.

A three-way fork. She lets out a big "Hmm" and turned to me.

"Which way now?" "Whichever way you want," I said. "This way," she said, pointing at the snowiest of the trails. Her walking stick stabbed the snow over and over again, crunching with rhythm in a way that made me think of dancing. She chose our trails, she stopped to look at trees and rocks, she climbed a pile of dirt, she went through the brush, and when she was done, she let me know and we went home. I suggested when asked, lent a hand when needed. She led and I walked with her, sometimes in front, sometimes behind, sometimes at her side. And when we were done, I couldn't stop thinking about whether God walks at my pace or I walk at God's and how often, if ever, I'm aware of the difference.

Maybe we'll take a walk tomorrow, too.

This year, in the crisp fall of 2021, I reread this reflection I wrote in 2014 about taking a walk with our oldest child. I smiled, and I was inspired, and I went on a new walk with our youngest child. She led the pace. The gift of being present to God and with one another is a blessing.

> Photo-A-Day Challenge: Tribute Isaiah 11:1-9; Numbers 16:20-35; Acts 28:23-31

### Wednesday, December 15, 2021 "The Hope" by Scott Ellich

Reflect on this photo devotional by photographer Scott Ellich.



# Thursday, December 16, 2021 "The Handbook" by Rev. Hope Hutchison

A few weeks ago, as I was on a road trip through the Midwest, I was listening to a podcast asking for listener submissions about unusual gifts. They were asking not about things you've received, but other kinds of gifts, like a person in your life, or an experience that changed your life. The truth is, my life has been filled with those gifts, but there was one that sprang immediately to mind as I started thinking: it was a piece of advice.

When I graduated high school, many things happened. But one that continues to stick out to me is when one of my older cousins came up to me, and told me that now that I was an adult, she could let me in on the secret. She said, "There is no handbook to being an adult. No one really knows what they are doing, we are all just making it up."

I think that advice was the greatest gift that I could have been given at that point. It gave me the confidence to go out and try new things in college. I did not have to listen to what others were doing to make decisions, I could listen to my own heart, what God had put there and make decisions on my own. If I'm honest, I still come back to this advice often. It helps me remember that there is no one right way to live this life, and that it is okay to chart my own path.

I had the chance to talk to my cousin about this piece of advice about two years ago, and I told her it was the best advice I've ever gotten. She is actually a high school teacher, and gives this advice to all of her high school seniors, and she said that many of them seem less enthused about this advice. But when she realized that there was no handbook to being an adult, it helped her. It's a gift that keeps on giving as the advice continues to be passed down: there is no handbook to life so find the one that works for you.

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Rejoice Psalm 80:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 10:10-18

# Friday, December 17, 2021 "An Advent Reflection" by Pat Norton

What is a gift? Not part of our paycheck Unearned, perhaps unexpected.

Sometimes it comes When a friend lends an ear To hear what our hearts need to say.

Maybe we find it When someone is kind In the midst of a difficult day.

When there is grace Given one to another Connecting folks in sacred space

We know God is there Loving us to perfection God's gift - beyond all compare.

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Prepare
Psalm 80:1-7; Isaiah 42:10-18; Hebrews 10:32-39

#### Saturday, December 18, 2021 "Somewhere in Religion" by Rev. Wayne Albertson

There are times of moral thought calculating, intentioned sorting principles and ambiguities
as a core melody, theme
and variations, playing
itself out to its coda,
its place of resolution.

There are rituals, meanings
kept in the doing, over
and over and over till
they are habits of purpose
as a march or a hymn in
4/4 time taking us to
the 'Amen,' the 'So-Be-It'
of our intent and rhythm.

And, there are prayers, honest ones of the heart open to God, vulnerable to unplanned and holy awarenesses as a descant of our lives soaring beyond melody and rhythm, fragile unto transcendence and lifted by God into all that's holy, without leaving melody and coda, hymn and amen, the moral and ritual.

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Thankful Psalm 80:1-7; Isaiah 66:7-11; Luke 13:31-35

### Sunday, December 19, 2021 "The Light of Faith" Advent IV Liturgy by Rev. Nate Melcher

The season of Advent bids us to give; Our gifts are humble, yet the star burns bright.

The Wise witness their vision:

"The child is born king of the Jews! We observe his star, we know its rising, we come to pay him homage!"

It is a witness of the gifts of the Gentiles. It is a witness for a people who put faith in God. In the wide skies, in the vast lands, God is in this.

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

### "Searching by Starlight" by Orlean Kovach

Searching for some quiet time, I focused on a star Marveling on how its light could brightly shine so far I thought about the wise men and how they used a star To reach their destination as they travelled from afar

Technology has changed things, we travel most by car Relying on a GPS to tell us where we are We're so caught up in the frenzy of the whole technology war That we fail to seek the guidance of the shining Christmas star

I find my time of quiet where that star led the way As I worship at the manger and reflect on Christmas day.

> Photo-A-Day Challenge: Open Micah 5:2-5a, Psalm 80:1-7, Hebrews 10:5-10, Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)

#### Monday, December 20, 2021 "The Gift of Surprise" by Rev. Kent Johnson

One of the joys of receiving a gift is the element of surprise. I have made several trips over the last 40 years to Isle Royale, the island national park in Lake Superior. One of the things it is known for is the world's longest running study of moose and wolves. The population of moose may be in the hundreds but hikers can tell you they are not easy to see and I had never seen one.

This summer, two of us were hiking the Windigo nature trail when as a total surprise we were approached by a young bull moose busy chomping down small trees and shrubs. He was comfortable enough with people to stop at a respectful distance for a photo and then return to his mowing task. The meeting was a thrill and the photo was a gift.

The Advent stories are full of surprise gifts; think of Mary's visit from the angel, Elizabeth's pregnancy, and the shepherds' angel chorus to mention a few. We

know these Bible stories well so they no longer surprise us but Advent is a season to anticipate new conflux moments, new surprises. So take some time to think back over your own surprise stories and marvel at them. Also, imagine what surprises might be waiting for us this Christmas season.

May you be blessed with a God surprise and a moose sighting this year.



Photo-A-Day Challenge: Reveal Psalm 113; Genesis 25:19-28; Colossians 1:15-20

# Tuesday, December 21, 2021 "Gratitude Journal" by Rev. Nate Melcher

As Richfield UMC kicked off the fall season, I issued a challenge to all members and friends of the church: start a gratitude journal. Write 1 sentence of 1 thing you're grateful for every day for 1 year. We even gave out wonderful journals to encourage the practice. At the time of this writing, over 175 journals have gone out, thanks be to God!

Research shows that being grateful and giving thanks raises your brain's levels of dopamine which gives you that immediate gratification sense of satisfaction. More importantly, it raises your brain's levels of serotonin, the neurotransmitter that makes you feel happy, and is tied to overall mood, physiological functions like sleep and digestion, plus your willpower and motivation. Wouldn't you like more of that? Studies have demonstrated that expressing gratitude can lower pain, increase optimism, and lower one's level of cortisol, the stress hormone. Wouldn't you like to have less stress?

I've really enjoyed writing in my gratitude journal this year. Here are five entries, selected at random. May my vulnerability in sharing inspire you to record your own gratitude. Get a journal from the church, buy your own, or use your phone. Just write! Here are some of my entries:

- 09.08.2021 I'm grateful that my kids had a good first day at their new school.
- 09.13.2021 I'm grateful for Conan O'Brien. It is so wonderful to simply rest and laugh!
- 09.23.2021 I'm grateful for a partner and that we will listen to each other about anything.
- 10.21.2021 I'm grateful that I can be at home and just be. It's good!
- 10.30.2021 I'm grateful for a hardworking team that pulled off Trunk-or-Treat!

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Celebration Psalm 113; Genesis 30:1-24; Romans 8:18-30

### Wednesday, December 22, 2021 "The Falls" by Scott Ellich

Reflect on this photo devotional and its description by photographer Scott Ellich:

"Minnehaha Falls experiences the gift of seasons. Something powerful like a river or water fall can stop in its tracks."



Photo-A-Day Challenge: Patience <u>Luke 1:46b-55; Micah 4:1-5;</u> <u>Ephesians 2:11-22</u>

## Thursday, December 23, 2021 "The List Is Endless" by Rev. Lynn Borgeson

If someone were to ask me what the best gift I'd ever received was, I would not think of a physical gift. I think the best gifts I've ever received were things like a prayer, a kind word, a hug, a story, encouragement, love, support, music, an experience, meeting someone new, worship, family, enlightenment, understanding, friends... the list is endless. It may differ for each of us, but I think we can all put together such a list.

When King Solomon asked God for the gift of wisdom, God gifted Solomon with wisdom. You might remember the time two women both claimed to be the mother of a baby and asked Solomon to determine which woman truly was the mother. Solomon allowed both to tell their story and then he said the baby should be cut in half and each woman would receive half. The real mother cried out for Solomon to give the baby to the other woman. Solomon was then aware that the real mother was the protesting mother, not the woman who had lied.

I suspect if we wished to live righteously, we, too, might ask for the gift of wisdom. I pray that during the season of Advent, we might share intangible gifts with others. These gifts will be remembered by those receiving them long after they are received. The gifts of God's love and his Son, our Lord, are two of the most glorious gifts ever given. May we give of our hearts and love.

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Love Luke 1:46b-55; Micah 4:6-8; 2 Peter 1:16-21

## Friday, December 24, 2021 "Moments" by Sara Watne

I think many of us would say one of the most valuable gifts is time, and time is really just a series of moments. When our twins were brand-new there was a period of adjustment to our new normal of caring for these precious and utterly helpless little humans. It was then that the idea of appreciating the gift of each moment became very real for my husband John and me.

Neither of our beautiful baby boys were what you might call "easy babies," so if we managed to get them fed, changed, and sleeping simultaneously it was like we had finally won a round of "whack-a-mole." There was a feeling of triumph mixed with some uneasiness about when it would all begin again. With a sigh of relief one of us would say, "Ok, for the moment they're both quiet," and the other would reply, "...yes, and all we have is this moment."

After I became a parent I had a new appreciation for Mary and Joseph. I thought of them more as actual people with the big job of raising God in human form. I wondered if they could have known all the moments of Jesus' life in advance how that might have affected them. They knew their child was special but I don't think they knew the whole story. The magnitude of His miracles, the horror of His death and the mystery of His resurrection would surely have overwhelmed them. It is good and merciful that they only had to contend with one moment at a time, just like the rest of us.

Advent is the perfect time to practice appreciating the gift of this present moment because it seems like everything is urging us to skip ahead to the future: the worries, the joys and the anticipation of what is to come. Those moments are gifts to be opened later, but right now we have this one to savor.

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Honor Isaiah 9:2-7, Psalm 96, Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2:1-14, Luke 2:15-20

### "The Light of the World" Christmas Eve Liturgy by Rev. Nate Melcher

The season of Advent bids us to rejoice; Our eyes shine bright and our core is warm.

The Angels herald a message for the world: "Glory to God in the highest heaven! And on earth, peace among the beloved children of God!"

It is a herald of the light of the world. It is a herald for a people in need of the love of God. In the manger then, in our homes now, God is in this.

On this Christmas Eve, we light the Christ Candle. The Light of the World for you, for me, and for this beautiful, broken world. May light burn bright in every corner of our lives. Amen.



# Saturday, December 25, 2021 "Gifts" by Dorothy DeFreese

- 1. Time Each day is a gift of time use it wisely.
- 2. Talents We each have different interests and skills
- 3. Listening Learn to listen. You will learn a lot.
- 4. Observing Same as listening.
- 5. Common Sense This will make life easier.
- 6. We are all born with different gifts. Find yours.
- 7. Be yourself. That's what the creator intended.
- 8. The best gift to give is LOVE.

Photo-A-Day Challenge: Gather <u>Isaiah 52:7-10, Psalm 98,</u> <u>Hebrews 1:1-4, (5-12), John 1:1-14</u>



MERRY CHRISTMAS

### CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP

Friday, December 24 at 4:00 pm—Family Worship Friday, December 24 at 9:00 pm—Traditional Worship

You can worship in-person, online at <u>youtube.com/richfieldumc</u>, or by touchtone phone, 1-888-650-5835.



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