



He will bring us
Goodness & Light

A McFarlin Devotional for the Advent Season



| Advent Greetings from Pastor Rockford

What is the best display of light you can remember? Have you seen the aurora borealis, the rim of the sun seeping out around a full eclipse or maybe some exquisitely designed Christmas light extravaganza? Do you recall at least one, if not many displays of the beautifully lighted color of a sunset? Beauty and brilliance, goodness and light have an awesome way of coming together.

We also know the darkness that comes along at the end of every day, but there is a deeper darkness of course. The prophet Isaiah talked about people who walk and live in that deeper kind of darkness. They see a great light, a light that shines upon them. Hope begins to dawn. Light in the darkness points to the deeper light, the spiritual light. It refers to the promised arrival of what may well be called “goodness and light”—the good light.

In the well-loved Christmas carol, “Do You Hear What I Hear,” the night wind sees a star, a lamb hears a vast song and a shepherd boy informs a king. In these poetic lyrics we hear a cascade of experience from night wind, to wooly sheep, to a young shepherd, to a potentate who delivers good news—that a Child will bring the people goodness and light. It’s a song of Advent, of the promised coming of peace on earth and the Light of the World.

The child, the child

Sleeping in the night

He will bring us goodness and light!

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Pastor Rockford". The script is fluid and cursive.

Pastor Rockford

There's no place like Advent at McFarlin!

Special Events & Concerts

Nov. 28

Advent Festival, 3-6pm

Join us for McFarlin's annual Advent Festival with music, crafts, goodies and more! We'll begin in Fenn Hall and then head to different areas of the church for activities.

Dec. 5

Handel's Messiah: Excerpts and Reflections, 8:30 & 11am Services

During Sanctuary services, we will hear excerpts and reflections from Handel's Messiah with Pastor Rockford and members of the Norman Philharmonic.

Dec. 5

Handbell Christmas Concert, 7pm Sanctuary Service

Bring your family and enjoy an evening of festive and beautiful arrangements performed by our handbell choirs.

Dec. 7

UMW Christmas Program, 6:30pm

All are welcome to attend the UMW Christmas program. There will be special music by Daphne Fix and Stephen Wurst, and a live nativity scene. RSVP on the Advent Hub.

Dec. 12

Candlelight Carol Concert, 7pm

Join McFarlin's Music Ministries for a beautiful concert of choral performances and beautiful music as we celebrate Advent. **Livestream will be available for this event.**

Dec. 19

Modern Worship Caroling Sunday, 11am Modern Service

Join Modern worship at 11am for a special Christmas caroling service. This is a family event you won't want to miss!

Dec. 19

Blue Christmas Service, 7pm

Sensitive to the hurt & grief many are feeling this season, this service looks toward the hope & healing of Jesus' birth.

Dec. 24

Christmas Eve Services

4pm Family, 7pm Sanctuary & Modern, 11pm Sanctuary

Give + Serve During Advent

Angel Tree Sponsorship

Bring joy to families in our community! Our angel trees will be ready starting Sunday, Nov. 21. You can grab a tag from a tree in the building OR choose a "virtual tag" from the online angel tree. Bring your unwrapped gifts to the church office by Friday, Dec. 17.

Questions? Contact Scott Meier // 321-3484 ext. 109 or smeier@mcfarlinumc.org

Poinsettia Orders

Order a poinsettia in honor or in memory of someone you love, and we will fill the Sanctuary stage with poinsettias during the season. Proceeds benefit our community partner, Meals on Wheels.

Questions? Contact Shouna Massey // 321-3484 ext. 132 or smassey@mcfarlinumc.org

- Plants are \$9 - please complete 1 submission per plant.
- Order forms will be available at the welcome desk from Nov. 21-Dec. 5.



Scan the QR code with your camera for a full calendar of all the Advent-related events!
mcfarlinumc.org/advent2021

As we enter the very holy season of Advent, we join together from wherever we are to look and listen for the

Goodness & Light

that Christ brings to all this season.

Let's pause day by day for the special Advent devotionals in this book, which has been created just for you by your church clergy, staff and lay leaders. We are so privileged to serve Christ with you, and we pray that seeing familiar faces and names and hearing personal insights from those in your church family might offer extra warmth, encouragement and a feeling of connection with your church family.

As you experience goodness and light this season, look for ways to share those moments with friends, neighbors, co-workers and your community.



Pastor Rockford Johnson

Senior Pastor

Read John 1:1–5

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (v. 1)

Reflect As winter comes, we may relish the warmth and light of a patio or fireplace fire for fellowship and family time. The sun rises over the eastern rim and that great ball of brilliance generates a new day—light comes into our world and pours through our windows, even into our feelings about the day. We open a phone, lift a switch—light comes into being.

On a day in May, after months of anticipation and hours of labor, we looked into the face of our newborn son. In those darling eyes and that supple skin, we saw the light of life! The new light in his little face lit up our hearts and wrapped us in the warmth of a new love. Reflecting on the arrival of Jesus, the Gospel of John bids us trust that darkness scatters by virtue of the generative Message of God—the light of all people.

November 28, 2021

1st Sunday of Advent

Pray *Darkness has a way of creeping in, O Lord. Help me today to anticipate with faith that your message of life in Christ equips me to say "yes" to life not only for me and mine, but for all people. Amen.*

Bring goodness and light today: Attend the Advent Festival from 3-6 pm and invite someone to join you.

27 days till Christmas





Trudy Sickles

Lay Leader

Read Jeremiah 33:14–16

"In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." (v. 15)

Reflect "He will bring us goodness and light!" During Advent, these words ring especially true for me. In our own McFarlin community of faith, we do see His goodness in hungry bodies and spirits being fed through our food pantry ministry workers. We do see the light of hope (and, literally, light!) being provided by our utility assistance ministry servants to those who are temporarily without resources.

As individuals, we experience the goodness and light of Jesus through our ministers' meaningful sermons, the beautiful, moving music shared by our music ministry in all its forms and while participating in volunteer-led Bible studies, Sunday school class experiences, UMW, UMM and many other opportunities.

You might find yourself wondering, as I sometimes do, what would our city, country and world be without the guiding example and spirit of Jesus? I am grateful that isn't our reality!

Jesus has, does and will forevermore bring us his goodness and light. As beneficiaries, might we then prayerfully strive to bring them to others?

November 29, 2021

Pray God, in every season of life you come offering the fullness of your life. Give me, and all of your people, patience; now, as we approach Christmas Day, and always, as we approach the day on which you shall destroy unrighteousness and cause justice to reign over us all. Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as in heaven. Amen.

Bring goodness and light today: Take a name ... or two ... off the Angel Tree and bring a child or children some joy this Christmas.

26 days till Christmas





Matt Jankowski

Chair of Trustees

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

"And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you." (v. 12)

Reflect Today's scripture speaks to a longing to be in the presence of other believers and a desire to grow in love for one another, which I see play out year after year. One of my favorite parts of Advent is watching families gather together to worship and celebrate the birth of Christ.

Having the privilege of sitting in the choir loft, it is such a joy for me to watch the congregation gather for Candlelight Carol and Christmas Eve services. The pews are full of families and friends coming together to reflect on the season and enjoy being present with loved ones. It is a blessing to see young adults who grew up in McFarlin coming home from college, or later returning with a spouse and sometimes their own children. The joy on the faces of both is such a sight to behold and speaks to the longing to gather together with our loved ones.

November 30, 2021

Pray Caring God, you who gave your beloved Son to ransom all people, guide me through this season with quiet, glad anticipation. Help me to pay attention to the poor and needy, and to the lonely among us. Give me a spirit of reflection, patience with others and a heart brimming with thanks. I ask this through Christ the Lord. Amen.

Bring goodness and light today: When you see a Salvation Army Red Kettle this season, put some change in.

25 days till Christmas





Daphne Fix

Pastoral Assistant & Sanctuary Worship Coordinator

Read Matthew 2:1–2

"In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.'"

Reflect The Magi had traveled some distance when they arrived in the court of King Herod. Can you imagine how excited they must have been to have finally arrived? When I read today's scripture, I see them: wide-eyed, smiling, anticipating an excited response that might match the joy they were feeling. Their faith had led them there. God had led them there. In that moment, Herod had the opportunity to share in that faith or turn his back on it. Unfortunately, we know what his response was at that time, but that didn't stop the Magi because God had led them there and God would continue to work in their lives until they met Jesus face-to-face.

I remember the day I first heard the words "prevenient grace," words used by John Wesley to describe the passionate love of God at work in our lives even before we know it or recognize the One who loves us. I remember that I was in the church choir during a worship service and when I heard those words I wept. And, I mean, I wept to the point that the person sitting next to me asked if I was ok. Was I ok? I was more than ok because that was one of the moments in my life that God became more real to me. Prevenient grace means God is at work. All. The. Time. God never gives up on you, never gives up on me, never gives up on anyone. God's goodness and light multiplied exponentially in my soul that day.

Many times since, I have had someone come to me like the Magi came to Herod, and they are seeking Jesus. Sometimes they don't say exactly those words, but the message of needing the love, grace and mercy of God comes through clearly, and I know that Jesus will be there for them. In that moment, I believe God is saying to me, "Do you see what I see? Share my goodness and light with them."

Thank God for those moments.

December 1, 2021

Pray O come, thou radiant Morning Star, again in human darkness shine! Arise resplendent from afar! Assert thy royalty divine: thy sway o'er all the earth maintain, and now begin thy glorious reign. Amen.
(John Wesley)

Bring goodness and light today: Donate needed supplies to a local animal shelter.

24 days till Christmas





David Gore

Chair of the Administrative Council

Read John 8:12

"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'"

Reflect To our McFarlin family,

I am delighted to share these words with you during this glorious time of the year as we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He truly is the light of the world and those who follow him will certainly experience God's work in their lives.

The message that I wish to share with all of our wonderful McFarlin family is that we have truly missed those of you who we are anxious to see again. We are so pleased to see those who share the light of Christ at McFarlin each and every Sunday. Many of you have returned and we would love to invite everyone to join us again during this wonderful Advent season.

My time at McFarlin began as a student at OU some 55 years ago, and Denise and I were married here 43 years ago. During our time at McFarlin, we have thoroughly enjoyed raising our two children and sharing the hope and light to all of the wonderful people we have met. Will you strongly consider sharing your hope and light with your wonderful McFarlin family each Sunday? We look forward to seeing your shining faces in worship.

December 2, 2021

Pray *○ Morning Star, splendor of light eternal and bright Sun of righteousness: shine on all who dwell in darkness and in the shadow. ○ Emmanuel, hope of the nations and our Savior: come and save us, Lord our God. Lord Jesus, come soon! Amen.*

Bring goodness and light today: Write a “thank-you” note to someone who has made a difference in your life and let them know how grateful you are for them this Christmas.

23 days till Christmas





Chris Gentry

Co-Chair of the General Conference Team

Read Psalm 148

"Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the Lord!" (v. 13-14)

Reflect Day after day, we go about our lives conversing and traversing across our communities. How often does one think about the fact that we're doing these things on a giant sphere that's spinning one thousand miles per hour, precisely rotating around an even larger giant fireball every 365 days, both of which are hurtling through a seemingly infinite and magnificent universe along with millions of other rocks?

The author of Psalm 148 supplies a reality-check jolt for us. An intricate Psalm of praise that starts in the heavens, proceeds to the sun, moon and stars, then to the awe and fury of earthly clouds and skies, the depths of the oceans and the majestic mountain heights.

Finally, attention turns to God's most precious creation, encompassing the old and young, the powerful and the lowly. God has "raised up a horn" and given victory to the oppressed. All praise for God's glorious creations; may our awareness of the awesomeness of God's handiwork grow and grow.

December 3, 2021

Pray *Move me, joyful God, take my hand and lead me. When I am uncertain, guard my heart with your peace. When my steps falter, surround me with the strength of your Spirit. Guide me until I am moving and singing with the joy of your salvation. In the name of Emmanuel, God with Us, I pray, Amen.*

Bring goodness and light today: Watch a favorite Christmas movie and celebrate the joy and hope of the season.

22 days till Christmas





Jane Cook

Director of Care Ministries

Read Isaiah 52:13–15

"See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up and shall be very high." (v. 13)

Reflect My parents were wonderful in preparing for Christmas and making it a very special day for their children and our extended family. Yet, Jesus was never included in the center of our Christmas gatherings. I was lucky, though, in that a young friend (we were seven at the time) invited me to her church down the street and, eventually, I arrived at McFarlin where Advent is done well, and Jesus IS the center of our worship and ministries.

In the song "Do You Hear What I Hear?" the announcement of the first Christmas is passed along like a game of telephone. The night wind, lamb, shepherd boy and king all experience the mystery of Christ's birth in a different way, and then gently share what they have seen and heard with the next. This news reaches the highest place in the land, and the King himself proclaims that Christ will "bring us goodness and light."

I can relate.

December 4, 2021

Pray Heavenly Father, as once again I prepare for Christmas, help me to find time in my busy life for quiet and thought and prayer, that I may reflect upon the wonder of your love and allow the story of the Savior's birth to penetrate my heart and mind. May my joy be deeper, my worship more real and my life worthier of all that you have done for me through the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Bring goodness and light today: Have a winter coat, hat or gloves you have outgrown or can spare? Bring them to the church and we will get them to someone in need.

21 days till Christmas





Rick Zielinski
Director of Music Ministries

Read John 1:6–9, 14–15

“The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” (v. 9)

Reflect I have always believed the light of God was witnessed to and given to everyone in this world. How do we keep God’s light shining in our complex world?

Pray for God’s message of hope and love, believe and see the goodness in everyone, help those who need our help the most, be a community of appreciation for God’s love and forgiving power, believe in the truth, live in the light of God and let it shine.

Glory to God in the highest and peace to those of goodwill!

December 5, 2021

2nd Sunday of Advent

Pray *In the hushed anticipation of your coming, O Lord, kindle in me the desire to remain awake; that I might be ready for your coming, and eager to pray. In the fulness of time, O God, you sent your son to be born of our sister, Mary. And his name was Emmanuel: God with Us. I thank you for your presence with me, and I pray that you might be always present with those whom I love but see no longer. Come, O God, and hear my prayers; so that when your Son, Jesus, comes with great might, and in manger mild, I might recognize His face and His voice and come to adore Him. Amen.*

Bring goodness and light today: Participate in worship and experience Handel's Messiah in the Sanctuary worship services. Also, attend the Handbell Concert at 7pm and bring a friend!

20 days till Christmas





Harris Phillips

Lay Leader & Chair of the Just Action Team

Read Malachi 3:1–4

"See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts." (v. 1)

Reflect Through the prophet Malachi, we hear God's good word about the coming of Jesus. First, Malachi tells us of a messenger (John the Baptist) who will prepare the way for the Lord of hosts. Then, Malachi tells us of a second messenger: Jesus the Messiah is coming with the message of a new covenant.

What an amazing message God gave his people! Not merely a new or better prophet was coming, but the Lord Himself: Jesus, the Word made flesh.

I appreciate Messianic passages like this from the Old Testament because they remind us of the love and hope God's people must have felt with the anticipation of the Lord's coming. We have those same feelings every Advent as we celebrate the coming of the Lord on that first Christmas. I especially like this passage because it goes on to tell us that we can also look forward to the Lord's second coming.

December 6, 2021

Pray O God, in days to come, the mountain of your house will be established, and your joy shall reign. I pray that you might teach me your ways and that I might walk in your paths. I pray for our nation, and all nations, that your peace would be manifest in every corner of the earth. Come, Lord Jesus, and hear my prayer. Amen.

Bring goodness and light today: Sponsor a child in Tanzania through McFarlin in the name of someone you care about, as a gift for them this season.

19 days till Christmas





Madison Hatter

Student Ministries Intern

Read Philippians 1:3–11

"And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God." (v. 9–11)

Reflect "Do you hear what I hear?" makes me question how well I'm listening. Growing up in a choir I was always told "listen louder than you sing," which applies to me now more than ever as I try to listen to others. I think most conflict arises from poor communication, so I have been working on my active listening.

Active listening is reflecting on what is being said and, most importantly, waiting your turn to speak. It is listening with the intent to hear instead of to respond. I do not think anyone is randomly silent. I think we, as a society or even church, have stopped listening. We need to listen to those who have been previously silenced.

In Philippians, Paul talks about loving in quantity and quality. I think the first step to loving like God with quality is to learn how to listen like God during this season of Advent.

December 7, 2021

Pray *In your Kingdom, O Lord, wolves lie down with lambs and children play with serpents without fear. I pray for the sick, the suffering and those in distress of any kind, that you would heal all injuries, comfort all grief and settle all wrongs. Help me to hear and be attentive to what you and others are saying. Come, Lord Jesus, and hear my prayer. Amen.*

Bring goodness and light today: Instead of a White Elephant gift exchange, have people at your next party bring their favorite childhood toy to be given to a boy or girl in need.

18 days till Christmas





Austin Leeviraphan

Director of Student Ministries

Read Luke 3:1–6

"... as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, 'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."'" (v. 4)

Reflect Without all the preparations during Advent, Christmas can easily slip by us without a second thought. It seems that so much is lost in the busyness of life, especially considering our ongoing run with battling the pandemic.

We've come to think of things that take any amount of substantial preparation as inconvenient and inefficient, and before engaging in any such activity, we should take thoughtful pause about whether we can afford the time and effort the preparation will take.

Christmas and Easter are the two Christian holidays where preparation is part of the holiday, Advent and Lent respectively. Meaning that we can't truly come to the glorious celebration of Jesus' birth on Christmas Day unless we've done all the preparation, and I'm not talking about the hanging of lights and the wrapping of presents. I am talking about the preparation of our hearts.

Can I take the time to prepare my heart through prayer, worship and devotion—opening it to receive the gift of God's salvation through Jesus? Or maybe the better question is—Can I afford not to take the time to prepare?

December 8, 2021

Pray Great God, I need to remember that your kingdom has come, that it is growing among us now and that the time will come when it fills the world with justice and love. And so, I pray for your coming. May your coming be something I hope for, but also be something I experience moment by moment. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Bring goodness and light today: Give the gift of warm feet this season. Buy a package of socks and underwear and take them to Food & Shelter at 201 Reed Avenue in Norman.

17 days till Christmas





JR Kabwe Mayanga

Pastoral Ministry Intern

Read Isaiah 30:18–22

"And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" (v. 21)

Reflect How have you heard God's word of goodness, light, love and hope in your life?

When I was meditating upon this scripture, I saw how far God has brought me. God lightened my life when I was going through a dark period, but it takes patience to witness the faithfulness of God in our lives. When we cry to the Lord, he will always answer and lighten our lives. Verse eighteen says, "Blessed are all those who wait for him." I have waited for so long to see the goodness of God in my life. I have gone through many challenges and hard times to be where I am today. Still, God has answered my prayers. So, today I want to encourage us during this time of Christmas when we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus. I want us to have hope in Jesus because God will lighten our lives through His love and mercy.

December 9, 2021

Pray *Saving God, long ago you sent your Son, but sometimes I am not aware of His presence. Wake me up, make me recognize Him, that he may be the light of my life and that I may lead people to Him. I ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Bring goodness and light today: Send a Christmas card to someone you know who's missing a loved one this year.

16 days till Christmas





Carol Warner

President of McFarlin's United Methodist Women

Read Luke 1:67–80

*"Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:
'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people
and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his
servant David, ...'" (v. 67-69)*

Reflect During the months of the COVID-19 pandemic, I cleaned out closets, drawers, etc. In doing so, I found a poem written by my husband, Bob, during his college years. I kept it on my desk for over a year and finally I told him I had found it when asked to write this devotional. He gave his permission to share it with you as it has a special meaning for us.

"Dream without limits, build plans upon hope. Fear no task or challenge. Let no man pass by without being a friend. But if one's daydreams should die, and plans should fold, if the task should appear too large or an enemy be made, retreat only to the faith of God taking each day in stride. Then charge from the downfallen struggle with the hidden strength of love within and only die knowing the rest of having given all. And only rest knowing the soul has given all and the body has died."

In the scripture for today, verse 76 tells us John the Baptist "will go before the Lord to prepare his ways." We are also asked to pave the way for those who follow us. We are asked as members of McFarlin UMC to faithfully participate by our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. We are also asked to love one another; and during this time of Advent, the gifts of love and family are special to me. I wish you a beautiful season and pray we find light, love and hope in our lives.

December 10, 2021

Pray Holy One, as the advertisements turn Christmas into a product, and elevate prosperity and material possessions, help me to show that the greatest gift of all is your presence at the center of my life. Let my witnessing be to a deeper source of hope than that which can be wrapped in bright paper. Let me celebrate in Jesus' name! Amen.

Bring goodness and light today: Read a favorite Christmas children's book and donate some books to your local library.

15 days till Christmas





Eve Hawley
Director of Connection Ministries

Read Matthew 13:10–17

"But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it." (v. 16–17)

Reflect A familiar Christmas song asks the questions, "Do you see what I see? Do you hear what I hear?" We live in a global culture where there are different perspectives on absolutely everything. Growing up in southeastern Oklahoma, I saw things from the perspective of my own little corner of the world. Christmas for me included pancake suppers at the fire station and driving three hours to my grandparents' home in Arkansas. My seeing was limited by my experiences.

While Jesus' answer to the disciples may seem cryptic, the encouragement He gives in verse sixteen rings clear and true for us today, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear." We have been given the privilege and joy of seeing Jesus, God's answer to man's problems. He is the Savior of the world! King of Kings and Lord of Lords! Through faith in Jesus Christ, we can hear the heartbeat of God, his promise of love and life to all who will come!

Remember the song I mentioned earlier? After each question in the song, an answer is given. People won't always see what we see or hear what we hear, but we can share the truth of what we know. The Christ child—born of a virgin, Son of the living God—brings us goodness and light!

December 11, 2021

Pray *Holy One, healer of the world, shed your light upon this world. Holy One, healer of brokenness, make me bold to share your light with others. Holy One, healer of the world, lead me to wholeness and make me shine with your light of healing love. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

Bring goodness and light today: Drive around your neighborhood and look at Christmas lights, giving thanks that Jesus is the light of the world.

14 days till Christmas





Pastor Wendi Neal

Senior Associate Pastor

Read John 1:10–13

"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God." (v. 12–13)

Reflect Carlos and I served in Elk City for five years. One of the favorite annual traditions was the living Nativity the church hosted for a couple of evenings during Advent. Across the street from the church building, the church owned a piece of land that had an old, historic barn on it. It was the perfect place for live cattle, sheep, horses and even a camel! Members dressed up as the characters we are so familiar with in the story of Jesus' birth and people from all over came to witness the truth of this story once again. Our son, Miguel, was born in August, and so he was a full four months old when he got to be baby Jesus. There were no plastic dolls in this Nativity; only real babies in the flesh.

And so it is that we pause here as we near the Christmas season to marvel once again that "the Word became flesh." With all of its risk and all of its promise, Jesus became one of us. No, this is no "plastic Jesus." This Jesus lived like us, as we did and do. Just think of it: God came to be with us, lowering himself, so that we would know how real God is! And of course, we who know the rest of the story know exactly what happened to the "Word become flesh" who lived and died among us. That, of course, is the greatest wonder and gift of all!

December 12, 2021

3rd Sunday of Advent

Pray *Lord Jesus Christ, I await your coming; I wait filled with hope, knowing your light will shine in the darkness. I wait anticipating your peace, believing that one day it will fill our world. I wait embracing your love. May I reach out to share it with my neighbors. I wait with joy, bubbling up in expectation of your birth. Lord, I wait. Come soon and fill me with your life. Amen.*

Bring goodness and light today: Attend the Candlelight Carol service at 7pm and invite someone to come, too.

13 days till Christmas





Jonathan Bryan

Co-Chair of the Vision Next 100 Team

Read Zephaniah 3:14–20

"The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; ... " (v. 17)

Reflect Do you know what I know? There is beauty in being imperfect. I've always struggled with perfectionism through life—that need to validate you are worth something because of the things you do and the success you can attain.

The problem is that attempting to be perfect is frustrating and impossible. The prophet Zephaniah saw imperfection all around him in ancient Israel—bad decisions and actions right and left. Imperfection is our reality.

The prophet envisioned justice—but justice was more than punishment or revenge; justice was the promise to be gathered back in God's family. I embrace God as a God of second chances, who loves me despite my human imperfections. He welcomes me back home.

December 13, 2021

Pray *Breath Prayer: (Inhale) God, I thank you; (Exhale) for second chances*

Bring goodness and light today: The holiday season can be stressful for people working in the service industry. An extra tip, an encouraging word or a heart-felt "thank you" sure goes a long way.

12 days till Christmas





Kevin Kelleher

President of McFarlin's United Methodist Men

Read Philippians 4:4–9

“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (v. 6–7)

Reflect “At the end of the day people won’t remember what you said or did, they will remember how you made them feel.” -Maya Angelou

Once my children reached middle school age, they were able to attend the annual youth mission trip to Mexico to build casitas. During every Spring Break for the next nine years, I joined this wonderful youth-led mission. The youth and adults were split into teams and each team was responsible for building a small cinderblock casita in a week. I’m goal-oriented by nature, so I wrote down as many details about the building process as possible so next year we could build the casita more efficiently. After a couple of years, I combined my notes, photos and diagrams into a “how-to” manual that allowed us to finish the casita in just a few days.

I thought this was a great accomplishment ... but slowly over time I realized this trip wasn’t about building the casita at all; rather it was about relationships forged between the youth, the adults, the families receiving the homes and God. What seemed like crises at the time (running out of supplies, construction mistakes that had to be redone, team members getting distracted or ill or not completing the casita) really did not matter.

Over the years no one remembered how fast they built the casita. What people remembered was playing soccer with the village children, comforting the Mexican family whose father just died unexpectedly, and the warmth and incredible generosity shown by the village when they somehow found the resources to feed all 180 of us on our last day. So it was in these moments that I witnessed how God was at work transforming and changing young (and old) lives that would eventually change the world.

December 14, 2021

Pray God, in this season suspended between hope and fulfillment, let me never forget what you have done. May I be overwhelmed by your mercy, which flows in wave after wave. May I be honest about the darkness within me, and perceptive of the light around me. May I make straight the path for the Lord, that together I may see God's glory revealed. Amen.

Bring goodness and light today: Leave a "thank you" note for your mail carrier in your mailbox.

11 days till Christmas





Sandy Minty

Director of Children & Family Ministries

Read Matthew 2:1–12

"When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh." (v. 10–11)

Reflect When I was in elementary school, our Senior Pastor always gave the message on Christmas Eve. Carols and candlelight, scripture and choir anthems ... and then came time for his message. "What in the world happened? Or, what happened in the world?" Every Christmas Eve these eleven words were the introduction to the message. The familiar words were as exciting to hear as those from Luke 2. The Savior of the world was about to be born and we were right there to see and hear the joy of the Heavenly Host praising God! There was, and is, no better place to be on Christmas Eve than in worship with God's family!

What happened in the world on that first Christmas night was that God sent us goodness and light. The goodness of the Lord is all around us. And the light? Jesus Christ is truly the light of the world. Glory to God in the highest!

December 15, 2021

Pray *Lord Jesus Christ, who is, who was, and who is to come, I pray for the virtue of hope, that amidst the trials and difficulties of this world I may keep my heart fixed upon you, who reigns over the cosmos. May your grace enliven me, strengthen me and defend me, as I await your coming in glory. Amen.*

Bring goodness and light today: These past two years have taken a toll on medical professionals and teachers. Send an encouraging note to a local school, hospital or doctor's office thanking them for their perseverance.

10 days till Christmas





Karen Hill

Co-Chair of the General Conference Team

Read Isaiah 12:2–6

*"Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord
God is my strength and my might; He has become my salvation." (v. 2)*

Reflect Returning home from Tulsa, I was still singing the song "I'll Love You Forever" from the school program my granddaughter, Ellison, had performed that afternoon. Just ahead, huge clouds of smoke billowed over the turnpike, undoubtedly a grass fire. I remembered signs warning motorists not to drive into smoke, but it appeared there was enough visibility, so I continued. Mistake!

Suddenly, I was surrounded by a wall of smoke with NO visibility. A small red car sat motionless ahead of me. I quickly braked; another car was fast approaching from behind. Praying, I began pumping my brakes and bracing for a collision. She screeched to a halt just in time. So thankful ... but the following car slammed into her, propelling her car into mine.

Trapped—a car ahead, 18-wheeler stalled on my right, another car behind and the fire at the edge of the turnpike. My only choice was to drive left, over the debris, to move away from the smoke and approaching fire. A few miles down the road, I inspected my car. No visible damage.

Driving home, I was reminded of my prayer, the first Bible verse that I memorized as a young child: "When I am afraid, I will trust in You." Thanks be to God that He is my strength and my defense!

December 16, 2021

Pray Emmanuel, humanity waits in darkness longing for your light. In the center of darkness, rekindle our hope. As I pray for enemies to be reconciled, be with me. As I pray for hearts to be restored, be with me. As I pray for kindness and community, be with me. Let your word set alight the hope the world needs to bring to life your love and goodness. Amen.

Bring goodness and light today: In the busyness of the season, practice patience and let someone go ahead of you in line.

9 days till Christmas





Melissa McElderry

Chair of the Evangelism Team

Read Luke 3:7–18

“As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, ‘I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’” (v. 15–17)

Reflect In 2001, we were expecting twin boys and were preparing for the upcoming holiday season with much joy and anticipation. Two weeks before Christmas, they were born one month early, and as staff at the hospital went into emergency mode I was left feeling confused and frightened. We spent that Christmas at the hospital. When the boys were released after a month in NICU following an initial unknown chance of survival, the doctors were amazed at how quickly they gained strength. I knew it was God. My peace and hope were found in Him.

Today’s scripture is sobering; however, verse sixteen brings the reassurance that those who believe in Christ and follow Him will find hope as they participate in the resurrection of life through the baptism of the Spirit. As believers, we find comfort during this season in God’s promise that our sin was judged at the cross. May your life be a testimony to those who have not yet placed their trust in Jesus, so that they, too, may live in the presence of God for eternity.

December 17, 2021

Pray Heavenly Father, John's message reinforces feelings of gratitude that I have been baptized into the body of Christ and saved by grace. I praise you, Father, for my salvation. Use me as an instrument to share the gospel to those who have not placed their faith in you. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Bring goodness and light today: Call a faraway friend or relative to say "hello" and wish them a "Merry Christmas."

8 days till Christmas





Stephen Wurst

Associate Director of Music Ministries & Principal Organist

Read Micah 5:2–5a

"But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days." (v. 2)

Reflect When reading this Scripture passage, my mind was immediately drawn to the hymn "O Little Town of Bethlehem" (#230 in our hymnal). Through all its verses, this hymn tells the story of Christmas night and the silent awe and wonder that accompany it. The verses of this hymn work so perfectly with our theme of experiencing God's hope, goodness, and light and is most perfectly summed up in the end of that first verse: "Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight."

While we so often associate this hymn with a packed candle-lit church on Christmas Eve, the real joy comes from the quiet realization that this Savior is sent for all of us. God's presence in and with us through the great mystery of the Word made flesh becomes so tangible as we prepare during the Advent and Christmas season. We join so many others throughout the ages as we proclaim in verse 4: "O come to us, abide with us, our lord Emmanuel!"

December 18, 2021

Pray *○ God, in this season of short days and long nights, of grey and white and cold, teach me the lessons of beginnings; that such waiting and endings may be the starting place, a planting of seeds which bring to birth what is ready to be born—something right and just and different, a new song, a deeper relationship, a fuller love—in the fullness of your time. ○ God, grant me the sense of your timing. Amen.*

Bring goodness and light today: Sing along to some of your favorite Christmas carols or go caroling with a group and spread some Christmas cheer.

7 days till Christmas





Scott Meier
Director of Missions

Read John 1:16–18

"No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." (v. 18)

Reflect On the Sunday morning in Sanctuary worship when the McFarlin 3rd graders received their Bibles, Pastor Rockford said to the children, "The Bible contains the story of Jesus, the greatest story ever told."

The story of Jesus actually begins in the Old Testament with the prophets telling of the coming of a Messiah. But no one expected the Messiah to arrive as a baby born to common folk in a barn. And certainly no one expected a Messiah who ate with sinners and challenged the establishment.

The life of Jesus shines a light into who the God of the universe truly is—loving, caring, looking out for the hurting and marginalized and a champion of those who have been pushed out. Jesus reveals a God who is loving, who is approachable and who is willing to lay it all on the line for the good of humanity; and in the process lays before you and me a challenge to do likewise.

That is not only good news; that is the greatest news!

December 19, 2021

4th Sunday of Advent

Pray *Holy One, you have come to lead us in paths of righteousness. Guide my feet through the wilderness toward the living water of your grace, following in the steps of our Savior: Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Amen.*

Bring goodness and light today: Come enjoy the Modern Worship Carol Sing at 11am in Fenn Hall, and attend the Blue Christmas service at 7pm in the Sanctuary. Invite someone you know to experience the hope and joy at these services!

6 days till Christmas





Karen Tobey

Chair of the Food Pantry Team

Read Luke 1:39–45

"For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." (v. 44–45)

Reflect When I was preparing to retire, I began praying for God to reveal His purpose for me in this time. I was concerned about being bored and non-productive. My husband had been helping at McFarlin's Food Pantry to unload the truck from the Food Bank and he invited me to join in. When I arrived, I saw someone I knew from church, and she invited me to occasionally help with food ordering for the pantry. Before long, she gave me that fun job.

I began helping stock this food for people to shop for extra items when they visited the pantry. Then I started working on pantry days, assisting the clients. I feel I have found His purpose for me and met many nice people—both volunteers (we have dozens!) and those who come for food (we provide food for thousands of people each month).

I now spend several hours each week at the pantry, appreciating the many blessings of God's goodness, love and hope in giving me a part in this wonderful McFarlin ministry—and many new friends.

December 20, 2021

Pray God of mystery and miracles, your Word brings light into the dark places of my life; your presence gives me strength to endure when I am pushed beyond my own strength. You find me in my lostness and, with love beyond my imagining, you lead me home. All this you offer in and through Jesus Christ. In this season of longing, grant me grace to bring all that I am to you, O Christ:

- all the broken places
- all the lost wanderings
- all the weariness from trying to live lives that are pleasing to you.

Hold them all in the fullness of your love. Then, be born in me, that I may find my home, my life, my joy in you, Lord of light and love. Amen.

Bring goodness and light today: Take some homemade cookies to a neighbor.

5 days till Christmas





Joshua Chism

Director of Youth & Children's Choirs

Read Luke 1:46–55

"And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.'" (v. 46–49)

Reflect Today's Advent devotional is drawn from Luke 1:46–55 and is often titled "Mary's Song." In this passage, we see Mary's outpouring of heartfelt and genuine praise after Elizabeth's baby leaps for joy in the womb. After hearing the monumental news of the coming baby Jesus, and after a "hurried" trip to see Elizabeth, Mary's excitement and energy finally get the better of her. She can no longer contain herself. Her spirit rises up within her and she glorifies the Lord. She turns her eyes, and voice, toward the Lord to praise Him.

As many of you know, my wife Natalie and I are proud parents to a sweet baby boy—Jacob Matthew. As a fairly new parent myself, this passage of scripture is particularly powerful to me. I can now certainly understand, firsthand, Mary's feelings of overflowing joy—so intense, the only option is to channel it heavenward. The excitement of learning that a new life is on the way ... The joy. The wonder. The possibility. The blessing. I remember it well. When Natalie and I found out that we were expecting, it was, in fact, on Christmas morning! I remember leaping for joy, tears welling up in our eyes, embracing and spinning in circles with my lovely wife. Like the classic Gaither song says, "Oh the joy that floods my soul."

What blessings has our Heavenly Father poured out upon all of us? Many to be sure. In turn, how will we respond? Will we respond like Mary? This Advent season let's freshly recognize the tremendous gift we have in Jesus Christ and turn our hearts, minds and voices back to God with exuberant praise.

December 21, 2021

Pray Great God and Voice of Truth who speaks through unexpected voices, I listen in your presence. I listen for You. Let my listening reach to hear the voice of young Mary. Let me listen for her voice, the voice of an adolescent girl in an insignificant village in a marginal province, far from the centers of power. Let me listen fully and deeply for the hope you are preparing. Extend my listening that I may magnify You. Amen.

Bring goodness and light today: Pay it forward at your local coffee shop.

4 days till Christmas





Shouna Massey

Office Manager

Read Isaiah 53:1–6

"Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed." (v. 4-5)

Reflect "Do You Hear What I Hear?" has always reminded me of a game of Telephone ... one person starts a message, the message gets repeated and the fun lies in seeing what becomes of the message as it travels from person to person. Each person's ability to hear or understand impacts the next person's chances of receiving an authentic retelling.

In this case, the night wind sees the sign of Christ's birth in the stars and the true meaning makes it to all the people through the king ... if only all of God's messages could be received so completely! It makes me wonder, "Do I hear God's messages correctly? How are my perceptions clouding what He would have me know?"

This Advent season, I pray that I can see and hear clearly to bear witness to His grace and love.

December 22, 2021

Pray In a cynical and despairing world, O God, let me proclaim your hope. In a violent and angry world, O God, let me proclaim your peace. In a dismissive and disinterested world, O God, let me proclaim your compassion. In a lonely and inhospitable world, O God, let me proclaim your love. In a grieving and weeping world, O God, let me proclaim your joy. May I be so convinced by your hope, O God, that I cannot help but to whisper, to sing and to enact the message of your reign which is always coming into the world; And may my life be a channel of your restoring grace wherever I may go. Amen.

Bring goodness and light today: Have some “me-time” doing what you love.

3 days till Christmas





Kym Friels

Member of the Lay Leadership Team & the General Conference Team

Read Matthew 1:18–25

“All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, “God is with us.”’” (v. 22–23)

Reflect The Bible doesn’t really say much about Joseph after the birth of Christ, so I really just overlooked his importance. As I pondered these verses again, I began to see just how significant Joseph really is to the whole gospel story. Matthew 1:19 describes Joseph as “a righteous man.” The Greek word for righteous used in this verse is *diakaios*, which means “just, especially in the eyes of God.”

The God of the universe and creator of all that is would not, could not, entrust his one and only son to just anyone. He handpicked Joseph to be the adoptive, earthly father of Jesus Christ. God had to choose a man he deemed just to carry out his vision and trust this man to be faithful in all God asked of him. “He did what the angel of the Lord commanded him.”

December 23, 2021

Pray *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel. Walk with me now into the world. Everything is about to change. So, make everything new. Make me new. Reveal your glory in my life and in the rhythms of my life, so that nothing will get in the way of your coming. Amen.*

Bring goodness and light today: Walk around your neighborhood and offer up prayers for your neighbors, community and God's creation as you go.

2 days till Christmas





Megan Corey

Student Ministries Intern

Read Luke 2:1–7

"And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." (v. 7)

Reflect Luke 2:6–7 says, "While Joseph and Mary were going to be registered in Bethlehem, the time came for Jesus to be born and he was laid in a manger wrapped in cloth because there was no place in the inn." This story reminds me of how unexpected life can be and how God can provide hope and understanding through good times and bad.

One such moment for me was the passing of my grandmother days before Christmas last year. It was not at all how we expected that Christmas, or any Christmas, to unfold. Though the circumstances are certainly different, I imagine Mary never dreamed the birth of her first child would go as it did. But God was faithful, and she put her trust in Him.

While the passing of my grandmother has not been easy, it has taught me that in the midst of loss and uncertainty we can find peace just as Mary did through her trust in God. Our trust in God and the support of our church community and family is what sees us through the hard times.

December 24, 2021

Pray *God of life, God of light, on this day of song and prayer and silence, reawaken in me the awe of Christmas. As I hear again the story of a young woman and a surprising visitor, remind me that I am called to respond to you in unexpected ways. May I be willing to sing praises for a young woman who said “yes” to the birth that I prepare to celebrate. Let me say “yes” to you once again. I pray in the name of the child who is born to us today and every day. Amen.*

Bring goodness and light today: Attend one of McFarlin’s Christmas Eve services—4pm Family service, 7pm Sanctuary and Modern services and 11pm Sanctuary service.

Christmas Eve





Pastor Trey Witzel

Associate Pastor

Read Luke 2:8–20

"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people— ...'" (v. 10)

Reflect Sometimes we are the angels, shining and praising. Other times we are the shepherds, filled with fear.

Preparing this devotion in October filled me with emotions. What will Christmas look like for my two-year-old daughter, Sloane, only having ever experienced one "normal" Christmas? Will you be reading this after singing Silent Night in a candlelight-filled sanctuary? I truly and desperately hope so!

When the shepherds at their lowest encountered the glory of the Lord, they were afraid. When we are afraid, when our expectations are not met, when we are low, hope can be scary. Yet this is precisely when God shines brightest! When the angels leave the shepherds, they weren't left in fear, but filled with good news. This good news is still true today, no matter what your Christmas looks like.

So Merry Christmas, for to you is born this day a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

December 25, 2021

Pray *I come to adore you, little one, on bended knee, with a hopeful heart, and eyes stretched wide with wonder and awe. The gentleness of your gaze draws me into the mystery of all that lies beyond, and in that place of falling into joy, I yield all that I am to you. Bless me, O Lord, whom I adore, and turn my face ever toward you. For peace, for mercy, for the sake of all that is holy, I come to adore you, O Christ, this day. Amen.*

Bring goodness and light today: Wish your loved ones a “Merry Christmas” and thank God for the gift of his Son, Jesus, our Savior.

Christmas Day





Come worship with us through multiple Sunday worship services this season. For details, visit our website at mcfarlinumc.org or call us at (405) 321-3484.

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