



Caught Up In Christmas

A McFarlin Advent Devotional to Center You in Christ

Get Caught Up in Christmas at McFarlin!

Special Events & Concerts

Nov. 27

Advent Festival, 3-6pm

Our annual Advent Festival is a longstanding tradition to celebrate the beginning of the Advent season. We will be having crafts across the entire church, live music, a hot chocolate truck, hayrides and family photo booths.

Dec. 4

Oratorio de Noël, 8:30 & 11am Sanctuary Services

During Sanctuary services, we are looking forward to having the Norman Philharmonic accompany us in worship as we feature the music of Oratorio de Noël by Camille Saint-Saëns.

Dec. 4

Handbell Christmas Concert, 6pm

Bring your family and enjoy an evening of festive and beautiful arrangements performed by our five handbell choirs spanning from middle school to adulthood. Your spirit will be lifted during this musical medley of Christmas cheer!

Dec. 6

United Women in Faith Christmas Program, 6:30pm

This year's program will have music provided by our own Chancel Bell Choir, led by Stephen Wurst, with singing of traditional Christmas Carols.

Dec. 11

Candlelight Carol Concert, 6pm

Join the entirety of McFarlin's Music Ministries for our annual concert of moving choral praises and beautiful music as we get Caught Up in Christmas.
Livestream will be available for this event.

Dec. 18

Modern Worship Caroling Sunday, 11am Modern Service

Gather with your McFarlin Modern Worship family to don your favorite Christmas sweater and sing some of your favorite Christmas carols.

Dec. 18

Blue Christmas Service, 1:30pm

Knowing that Christmas can be a delicate and painful season of memories and grief, gather with your church and pastors to seek out the hope and healing encountered in the birth of Jesus Christ. A lunch will be provided at 12:30pm prior to the service.

Dec. 23

Christmas Eve Eve, 6pm

Join your McFarlin Modern worshipping community for our first ever Christmas Eve Eve worship! Filled with candlelight and carols, this is a great opportunity to worship with the Modern Worship team.

Dec. 24

Christmas Eve Services

4pm Family, 7pm & 11pm Sanctuary

Dec. 25

Christmas Day

One church-wide service at 11am in the Sanctuary. Head online to our Facebook & YouTube for a special McFarlin Christmas Day Worship service.

Give + Serve During Advent

Angel Tree Sponsorship

Bring joy to families in our community! Our angel trees will be ready starting Monday, 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 Thursday, Dec. 15.

Questions? Contact Scott Meier // 405-321-3484 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 Daniel Mitchell // 405-321-3484 ext. 132 or dmitchell@mcfarlinumc.org

- Plants are \$14 - please complete 1 submission per plant.
- Order forms available on the Advent Hub or at the welcome desk until Dec. 4.



Scan the QR code with your camera for a full calendar of all the Advent-related events!
mcfarlinumc.org/advent2022

*“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude
of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’”*

-Luke 2:13-14

The return of Christmas traditions can bring about feelings of excitement or trepidation, or even both! This Advent Season, we hope this devotional helps you get

Caught Up in Christmas!

While we know there are expectations and customs that are both meaningful and cumbersome, we hope that you'll take time each day to read these daily devotionals prepared by your pastors, staff and fellow church members, knowing that it's all of us together that helps give Advent that special Christmas feel.

As you become Caught Up in Christmas, we pray that you can look up and see that star pointing towards the coming birth of Jesus Christ.



Pastor Rockford Johnson
Senior Pastor

November 27, 2022

1st Sunday of Advent

Read Matthew 1:18-25

"But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.'" (v. 20)

Reflect Joseph, descendant of the revered shepherd boy turned king, is now distant from the center of God's grand story. His story is simple; continue to work as an artisan in woodcraft, making things useful in his village—a harness yoke perhaps, plows, wooden tools, doors, etc.,—and to wed Mary, have children, go to synagogue, see his grandchildren. His life is disrupted, caught up in a scandal, he thinks. Mary is pregnant, not his, and fear dictates that he squelch his plans. Although Joseph heeds his fear and assumes the obvious worst, that Mary has been unfaithful, he is a man open to the work of God in the world. In a dream he perceives a message that is characteristic of the God he knows—"Don't be afraid" (a counsel found about 144 times in the Bible). "Don't be afraid" to join with Mary in the amazing, unfolding work of God; she's carrying Emmanuel—the "God with us" child, alive by the creative work of the Spirit of the Holy One. Don't be afraid to be caught up in the Christ child story of God's saving presence coming to release us from our fears and sins. Let yourself be caught up in the adventure of the good news of great joy!

Pray *God of light and love, help me be swept up this season; not in to-do lists or expectations, but caught up in the miracle of you with us. Give me a spirit of reflection to know what you want me to be caught up in during Christmas this year, knowing that I can always say yes to you. Amen.*

Today: Attend the Advent Festival from 3-6pm and invite someone to join you.

28 days till Christmas





Stephanie Miller

Director of Care Ministries & 55+ Ministries

November 28, 2022

Read Isaiah 9:1-7

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined." (v. 2)

Reflect Ever since my daughter was old enough to walk, she could (and still can) be found in the still, dark, early mornings of the Advent season sitting on the floor staring up at the lights and sparkles of the Christmas tree. It's one of the few times she sits still, speechless, mesmerized by the beauty of the lights and reflections. I remember the wonder of Christmas as a child.

Hustle and bustle. Shopping lists. To-do lists. Cooking lists. Wrapping lists. So many lists! And life is still happening. For many of us the holidays come with a painful reminder of loss, or the fear of what's to come. In all the busy-ness of Christmas and the weight of life's burdens, when I see my daughter sitting in awe and wonder, caught up in Christmas, I am reminded of the Miracle of Christmas. The moment I walk out and see the lights reflecting in her eyes, my soul rejoices much like Isaiah 9 describes how those walking in darkness have seen a great light.

Whatever burdens are weighing you down, may the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Eternal Father, the Prince of Peace grant you precious moments when you are "caught up in Christmas."

Pray Most Gracious God, help me be mesmerized once again in the light of your love. I know in my heart that I need, want and desire your presence in my life. So I come during this time of Advent, expecting to be caught up in rejoicing in you! Amen.

Today: Find instructions online about making an Advent wreath and make one to use during worship each week.

27 days till Christmas





Carol Barnes

Hospitality & Operations Assistant

November 29, 2022

Read Isaiah 2:4

"He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Reflect Being the first person people see when they enter the doors of McFarlin during weekdays, I feel it is important to show love and a welcoming spirit to everyone. I see faithful members, children, hurting people, marginalized people and those needing our church's help.

During this season of Advent (and always) my prayer is that I do God's will. God makes it clear his will is "peace and goodwill to all." It is our calling as Christians. During this busy season of Christmas with presents to purchase, foods to cook and parties to attend, I'm starting the change with me—to be a better human and have more kindness and understanding for my neighbors, Normanites, Oklahomans, Americans and the people of the world. God promises there will be a day when there will be no more wars between nations. There will be "peace and good will to all" and Christians will lead by the example Christ has shown us. May God bless you and yours during this special season and always.

Pray Holy God, as I wait for the Christ Child to come into my life once again, teach me how I can be a gift to others. Help me to seek out your way. Show me how to love others the way you love me. Guide me in your way of peace. Amen.

Today: Listen to Christmas music and spend some quiet time in prayer.

26 days till Christmas





Elizabeth Horton-Ware

Director of the OU Wesley

November 30, 2022

Read Psalm 122: 3, 6

"Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together." (v. 3)

Reflect We stood on the roof and overlooked Jerusalem. Our day included walking to Church of the Holy Sepulchre. That night we looked at the city revered by Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Throughout, Old City structures represent each of the three faiths. Old City of Jerusalem is "built like a city that is closely compacted together" (verse 3). To our amazement, the church's roofline was no more than 100 yards away! We had taken twists and turns among ancient streets to get from one location to another, but if we could have crossed roofs we would have been there in mere minutes.

Christmas reminds us how close we are to God's intentions for creation. God intends us to be caught up in Christ, an abiding relationship. Fullness of that intention is near, but it is not complete. There are twists and turns that keep us from fulfillment.

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (verse 6). Jerusalem's history is full of unrest and strife without a long-term peace. The peace of God is so close. It is a vision all three faiths share, but is a difficult journey of all God's people. I find myself caught up in Christmas—longing for the fulfillment of God's promises and committing to travel the twists and turns.

Pray *Lord of all, you are a God of plenty, a Lord who provides for us in our need. As I begin these early days of Advent, help me to believe that you know what I need. Show me the path to listen to your voice and the freedom to trust as you guide my every step. Amen.*

Today: Donate supplies needed to a local animal shelter.

25 days till Christmas





Jennifer May
Digital Content Manager

December 1, 2022

Read Romans 13:11-12

"Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light"

Reflect The season of Christmas, of Advent, is one filled with joyous preparation, anticipation and celebration. We are busy little elves decorating our homes, shopping for gifts, preparing for travel to see family over the holidays ... but with all of this scurrying about, sometimes we lose that sense of joy. The anticipation turns to anxiety. The preparation becomes a seemingly never-ending "to-do" list with a swiftly approaching deadline. The delight of celebrating gets lost in the stress.

One of my favorite ways to slow down a little during this time is with my son, Logan. We always take a night (or two or three) to drive around and look at Christmas lights. We also drive out into the country for an amazing Christmas light show at a local farm. The lights are timed to a variety of songs including traditional carols and more current Christian artists. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through the show, they present a beautiful light display and rendition of 'O Holy Night.' Out in the countryside, with only the glow of Christmas lights dancing around you ... for a moment you are transported away from the chaos of the season and can revel in the joy that the birth of Christ brought to the world.

A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn'.

The world is indeed weary. But we can have hope; for in all the preparation and anticipation, we can celebrate the night of "our dear Savior's birth." Paul directly challenges us to wake up and be a light in the darkness through our faith. To see that 'new and glorious morn' and find the thrill of hope in our fatigue. This season let's do just that. Slow down and rejoice, for the light, faith and grace in which we surround ourselves—both literally and figuratively—was born unto us by Him.

Pray *In all of the requirements, to-dos, and calendar items, fill me with the thrill of Christmas. Wherever there is weariness, break through in a new and glorious way that I might encounter Christ in a profound way this day. Amen.*

Today: Donate a winter coat in good condition to McFarlin's coat closet.

24 days till Christmas





Debbie McConnell

Lay Leader

December 2, 2022

Read Matthew 24:42

"Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming"

Reflect Reading this verse during the Advent season brings back many Christmas memories with family and friends. Each year, each celebration has been filled with tradition, food, family. Though we live in a secular world, our focus has been on the birth of the Son.

Each Christmas celebration, we never dreamed the next year we would not all be together again. But, through the years, we have lost family, friends. We rejoice having had those among us but with each loss comes sadness. My family loves the quote from Billy Graham, "The best is yet to come." Ten years ago, my dad reminded us of this quote as he was going into the hospital, a trip that would be his last. These words have become words of refuge that give us strength and conviction. The greatest part of the redemption story is knowing that through Jesus Christ we will all be together again. The Best is Yet to Come!

Pray Jesus, I long for your coming. The promise of new light is there, if only I can believe. Protect me from dangers and lead me through the gloom and darkness to the joy I so long to find in you. Let me witness you in the here and now, knowing in the near and far you will also be present in my life. Amen.

Today: Watch a favorite Christmas movie.

23 days till Christmas





Gunter Hammett
Audio & Visual Director

December 3, 2022

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10

"How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith."

Reflect The miracle of Christmas comes every year. The miracle itself can be tangible and intangible. The warmth of family. The Christmas festivities. The clearing of snow off the pathways to make it easier for family and friends to reach the warmth and love that the houses hold reminds us of what Jesus and his father continue to do throughout our lives to aid us in coming together in joy and celebration.

During this Christmas season, where do you see the tangible and intangible miracle? How do you receive the miracle of Christmas, and how could you give the miracle of Christmas? Could you, this Christmas season, aid Jesus and his father in spreading joy and celebration?

Pray *Almighty God, it is dark outside and the nights are long. I watch and wait with mounting expectation for the coming of your son into the world. I ease my waiting with the adornments of tinsel and tree. I delight in their beauty, but Lord, in my eagerness, guard my heart from being caught up in the right things this season. Amen.*

Today: Bake a sweet treat and share with a neighbor.

22 days till Christmas





Sandy Minty

Director of Children & Family Ministries

December 4, 2022

2nd Sunday of Advent

Read Matthew 2:6

"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."

Reflect I love the Sunday that we celebrate Epiphany with the children in Sunday school. The "magic" of Christmas is still in the air and Epiphany helps us to hang on just a bit longer, before the world goes back to Ordinary Time.

You might be asking, "What is Epiphany?" Epiphany is observed on January 6th and is one of the three principles and oldest festivals of the Christian church. Epiphany means "manifestation"—to make known. The ah-ha moment is the realization that the long-awaited Messiah that the children of Israel watched for was coming to all—Jews and Gentiles alike.

When I was a child, Epiphany traditions in my house were as much fun as Christmas itself. The Christmas tree never came down until after Epiphany was fully celebrated on January 6th. The Magi had a journey to take each year. When the Nativity was set out and put in its place of honor in the living room at the start of Advent, the Wise Men found a place in another room in the house (a child's choice). The journey for these Wise Men was to move them a little closer to the manger everyday of Advent and Christmas until they finally reached the manger on the day of Epiphany.

The night before, we baked a cake called King's Cake to be eaten on Epiphany. We'd then place a tiny plastic baby inside, representing baby Jesus. On Epiphany, when the cake was cut, the person who received the baby in their slice got a small prize and the honor of placing the baby in the cake the coming year. After the cake was eaten, my family read Matthew 2:1-12 and then prayed together, thanking God for the gift of his Son and for sending him to the world.

Jesus is truly "The Light of the World." May we be caught up in traditions this year to help us shine God's light in our world today.

Pray Most High God, thank you for all the ways and traditions which help us be caught up in you. Bless those we share our traditions with, that they might carry us through all the waves of this season. Amen.

Today: Join us for our Handbell Concert tonight at 6pm!

21 days till Christmas





Kloe Young

Director of Young Adult Ministries

December 5, 2022

Read Isaiah 40:1-5 & Isaiah 40:21-23

"A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'" (v. 3-5)

Reflect I have always loved Christmas. I start to prepare in anticipation for the Advent and Christmas seasons starting in October. I dream of the day I get to replace my fall decorations with all things Christmas. Setting up my little Christmas tree, placing the Nativity on my mantle and hanging lights all around the house. I find the Christmas season warm and comforting. My feelings of Christmas also reflect how I feel about the anticipation of Jesus' birth and what He means to us. I am comforted by who He is and what He came to earth to do.

I know for some the holiday season is hard and comes with many burdens to take on. Grieving a loved one you once used to spend the holiday with, the lists of things you have to accomplish before the 25th, the financial burden it can take, the busy schedule the month of December entails. In today's verse, Isaiah says "Comfort, comfort my people says your God." "Prepare the way for our God." Amid this holiday season, how can you prepare for the comfort of Jesus this Christmas? As Christians, we are called to prepare the way for the Lord in many ways. Prayer, service and worship are a few examples. I encourage you this Advent season to find a way to prepare for Christmas so that some of the stress that comes with it is alleviated. May the glory of God be revealed to you this year!

Pray *Gracious God, help me to meet you as you come to me. Help me to prepare your way in my life and to announce to others your coming in love. Help there to be peace in my heart, peace in the Church and peace in our world. Amen.*

Today: Make a list of loved ones you have not spoken to in a while and find time to call them this week.

20 days till Christmas





Lali Ramirez-Neal
Acolyte

December 6, 2022

Read Isaiah 11:1-10

"The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." (v. 6)

Reflect Christmas, for me, means a time to be together with your family. It's a time to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus, who is also the Prince of Peace. Isaiah talks about the coming of the Savior as being a time when those who are often considered enemies being at peace with one another.

There are times when it is hard to be at peace with people. What helps me be at peace with someone is to think about their good qualities or something they did that made me smile. And, even if they do something that is upsetting, just be there for them. Hopefully, they will find peace too.

Pray Dear Lord, during Advent I look for your wisdom. I want my heart to be open to you. But sometimes in these days, it seems that so many things come between us. Help me to be awake and aware of the radiance you bring to my life. Help me to be grateful each day for the blessings of family and friends. Let me be a peacemaker in my own life and in the world. Amen.

Today: When you see a Salvation Army Red Kettle this season, throw some change in.

19 days till Christmas





Ruben Alcala

Director of Youth Choirs

December 7, 2022

Read Psalm 72:1-4

"Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor."

Reflect Christmas for my family is a time of reflection on the birth of Christ while having a chance to slow down from our often hectic day-to-day schedule. Be it decorating our home, singing carols (which the boys will sing well into March), watching movies or opening the Advent calendar, my wife and I have tried to be intentional in helping our children look to the importance of the Christ child. It is so easy to become consumed by the many events and objects that vie for our attention around this time of year, it is often over before we realize it had begun.

Our boys look forward to celebrating 'Jesus' Birthday' each year and cannot wait to decorate our house and come to the celebrations at church. Last year, my family was able to join me in the choir loft during the Christmas Eve Family Service and sing about the coming of Christ. This is a favorite memory of mine and I hope that it is one that my kids will be able to reflect on later in life. They often see me lead the congregation in singing from the choir loft and they were filled with so much joy being able to sit next to other families and help spread the Word. As we begin to prepare for Christmas, I look forward to joining with others in worship to sing the praises of the coming of Christ.

Pray Almighty God, I feel my heart stir in anticipation and I sense that you are inviting me to enter more deeply into the mystery of your birth. Help me to feel renewed patience settle in my heart and to lift my face in joy. Somehow I know that you rejoice in my desire to find you. Help me not to be afraid to believe that you are near and are coming once again into my life. Amen.

Today: Give the blessing of a compliment to someone you encounter.

18 days till Christmas





Beth Taylor
Bell Ringer

December 8, 2022

Read Romans 15:12-13

"The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Reflect One of my favorite things about the holidays is how it seems to bring people together. Friends pick up the phone and reconnect. Family that you haven't seen in months all sit around the tree and in the pew at church.

Advent is a time of togetherness. As Christians we come together to celebrate the birth of our Savior. We crowd around the manger to view the tiny child who would save us. We smile at the person next to us and, having one mind as mentioned in the scriptures, share in the common ground of wonder and awe.

So, hold onto that common ground. Search for it in those who are around you this season. "Receive one another, just as Christ also received us ..." Advent is not a time to focus on the minor ways we differ, but a time to see the major ways we are the same. "... be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may in one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Pray Jesus, as the light of day grows shorter, let me be guided by the light of your word. Give me the humility to be led by you and the wisdom to learn from you. I feel your light in my life and in the world. I am grateful for you, the Savior who awaits us, and I eagerly await the time of rejoicing. Let me look forward in hope and turn to you with great trust, knowing you will guide my steps along the unknown path of this day. Amen.

Today: Pray for students, teachers, school administrators and families as the semester's end draws near.

17 days till Christmas





Katie Lanier

Assoc. Director of Children & Family Ministries

December 9, 2022

Read Matthew 3:1-3

"This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, 'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."' (v. 3)

Reflect Christmas is quite possibly the most joyful time of the year for so many, including myself. From the festivities to the decorations and gifts, it's easy to get caught up in the craziness that is Christmas. But the question is, what part are we getting caught up in; the endless lists of gifts and things to do before Christmas day, the events you should go to or the true reason for the season?

In Matthew, chapter 3, verses 1-12, John the Baptizer was helping to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus, "change your hearts and lives, because God's kingdom is now very near." John is baptizing people in the river when many Pharisees and Sadducees came to him. He offered these people a reminder as well as a warning: "Change your hearts! And show by the way you live that you have changed ... He will separate the good grain from the straw, and he will put the good part into his barn ... "God knows what is in our hearts. Remember this season that the greatest gift ever given can conquer any to-do list, is greater than anything Santa could put in your stocking and is what brings us all together as a family. So, ask yourself this Christmas season, what part of Christmas are you getting caught up in?

Pray I lift my heart up to you, Lord, to thank you for the blessings you shower on me each day. You are the "joy of my soul." I know that in your great love, I am held and protected by you. I pray and listen to the good news you send; I ask and feel the healing. By you, I am freed from the things in this world that let me hide from you. Help me to prepare my heart to be open and able to receive your immense love. Amen.

Today: Read a favorite Christmas story.

16 days till Christmas





Daphne Fix

Pastoral Assist. & Sanctuary Worship Coordinator

December 10, 2022

Read Philippians 1: 3-5

"I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now." (v. 3)

Reflect It is easy to get caught up in daily life. Time passes one day at a time until all of a sudden, we take a look in the mirror and realize those days have actually turned into years. So how do you and I keep from getting caught up in the dailyness of life and live out our life of faith in Christ? As I think about the story of Christ's birth, I see Mary stopping to praise God for the life of the baby growing inside her; I see the shepherds taking a detour from their work to find the baby the angel told them about; I see Joseph adjusting his expectations to accommodate raising a child that isn't his; I see the Magi traveling to another land to meet the child who would be called the Prince of Peace. All of them were caught up in their daily lives but stopped what they were doing to acknowledge God at work in their lives. They changed their course and made first things first.

In today's scripture, we get to read the beginning of a letter that Paul wrote to the Philippians. He had many things to say to them, but he took time first to write words of encouragement and blessing. I imagine these words being read aloud in the presence of the church and the people sensing the work of the Holy Spirit witnessing to their faithfulness and building them up in Christ.

Today I hope you'll take some time to stop and celebrate what God is doing in your life. Write a note to one person and bless them with words of encouragement and blessing. Get caught up in the joy that the Holy Spirit brings when we encourage and bless each other.

Pray O, God of wisdom, I want to praise you and give you my life. Thank you for the peace you promise. I ask that I be always aware of the strength of your great power. May it never leave me. Please give me the wisdom and courage to be your humble servant and to serve you with joy. Amen.

Today: Write a thank you note to someone who has made a difference in your life and wish them a Merry Christmas.

15 days till Christmas





Kayley Williamson
Director of Children's Choirs

December 11, 2022

3rd Sunday of Advent

Read Matthew 2:13-15

"Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'" (v. 14-15)

Reflect We live in a society laden with pressures to seize the moment. The pressures come in the form of urgent messages like, "you only live once (YOLO), so do what is best for you, because if you don't, then you will undoubtedly be overcome by the fear of missing out (FOMO) and personal regret." It is easy to be swept up and compelled to action during the holiday season. There is a sense of immediacy in regard to how we spend both our money and time. The discounted sales for commercial items last for a limited time, and it seems as though the cherished moments with family and loved ones only last a short while before the normal routines of life reemerge. It is true that we only live once, but we have twisted the message to live and gratify ourselves over prioritizing a life of obedience to Christ.

In the Biblical narrative, we see many examples of immediacy and a call to seize the moment in obedience. Joseph packed up Jesus and Mary in the middle of the night to avoid Herod's ruthless goal to find and kill the Christ Child by killing all boys under the age of two in Bethlehem and its vicinity. Sometimes, immediate action is absolutely necessary, especially in this passage of Scripture; however, when we apply this same immediacy and hurry to non-essential things, such as buying items on sale and going on autopilot from event to event, we get swept up in the chaos of the holidays and fail to be fully present. Rather than applying "FOMO" to Black Friday sales and "YOLO" to extravagant festivities, have a "fear of missing out" on what the Lord has for you in this season, and since "you only live once," invest in things that have value in this holiday season, such as your relationship with the Lord, with family and with friends.

Pray God of us all, daily we feel the tug of something. Whether it is you or the world, we feel as if we are being forced to be caught up in something. Help us choose to be caught up in you, caught up in the true meaning of Christmas. Amen.

Today: Attend the Candlelight Carol service at 6pm and invite someone to come, too.

14 days till Christmas





Rod Foster

United Methodist Men

December 12, 2022

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 When I read the prophecies of Isaiah, it amazes me that he is describing the coming of Jesus several hundred years before his birth. He describes Jesus as God's servant who suffers the pain and mistreatment of the people. He acknowledges that Jesus will be wise and be lifted up and exalted and his service will "sprinkle" many nations.

For me, Christmas is a time of joy and hope. It is a time of year when we become more aware of people in our community and around the world who are less fortunate. We take the names of children, families or service organizations off a tree in the Atrium and go shopping for people we don't know. We become servants at community dinners to be sure everyone has a chance to have a good meal and a warm place to sit and talk.

It makes me realize that I am so fortunate that God sent Jesus to "sprinkle" me with His wisdom, His direction on how to live my life and to take the burden of my sins.

Pray Dear Heavenly Father, fill me with joy and hope once more. You have blessed me with so much, so help me be a blessing of joy and hope to someone else this day. May the sprinkles of Christmas we encounter turn into waves of mercies for others. Amen.

Today: Choose an Angel Tree recipient from McFarlin's website, and provide Christmas presents for a deserving child.

13 days till Christmas





Kelly Poteet

Accounting & Payroll Coordinator

December 13, 2022

Read Isaiah 35:1-2

*"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing."*

Pray Ever present Holy One, waiting can be difficult for us. Let me savor each and every expectant day, knowing that today is the day that you have made, so let me rejoice and be glad in it, no matter what today holds. Amen.

Reflect Getting caught up in Christmas to me means that Christmas music is coming!

Although there are radio stations that start playing Christmas music on November 1 (or earlier!), and it's available year-round on other sources, I refuse to listen to it until the Thanksgiving meal is over.

To me, there is something sacred about saving something special and meaningful for its time. Waiting to listen to the beautiful music of the season parallels the anticipation of waiting for the Christ child. The scripture tells us the parched land will be glad, flowers will burst into bloom and the people will shout for joy when they finally see the glory of the Lord. My shouts of joy are in song.

The parties, shopping, time spent in my kitchen baking and time with family and friends are all made more meaningful with music playing in the background. The music in worship will bring me to tears as its beauty washes over me and reminds me that God sent a Savior that knows me personally, and reaches out to me in melody and harmony.

Today: Send a Christmas card to someone you know who's missing a loved one this year.

12 days till Christmas





Austin Leeviraphan
Director of Student Ministries

December 14, 2022

Read Psalm 146:5-6

"Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever ..."

Reflect It is probably safe to say that for most of us, the Advent season is a time associated with joyful and warm feelings. It's a time of expectant waiting for what is, for many, our favorite time of year—Christmas! As I read Psalm 146:5-10, I am reminded that while most of us celebrate our waiting during this season, there are others who are enduring in their time of waiting: waiting for relief from the harshness of life's circumstances, enduring the seemingly never-ending grief of a first holiday season without a loved one; waiting for comfort to come.

This portion of Psalm 146 is a reminder that for the oppressed, disenfranchised, forgotten, hungry, poor and all afflicted, their help comes from God, and that is reason for rejoicing! But this verse beautifully, yet simply, says "from" where the help comes, not "how" the help comes. YOU and I are the "how". This scripture is not just a comfort for those in need, but a reminder to us that we are presented every day with the opportunity to be the "how" in God's plan of comforting and serving those who are enduring.

Pray Life-giving God, I am grateful for your blessings. In this season of Advent I pray that you might bless me anew. Give me ears to hear the melodies of praise that fill the world around me. And as I hear the songs, turn this inward joy outward, that I might be the "how" your help comes to someone this Christmas. Amen.

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.

11 days till Christmas





Eve Hawley

Director of Connection Ministries

December 15, 2022

Read Luke 1:46b-55

"My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant." (v. 46b-48a)

Reflect Over the years, my experience of Christmas has continued to morph and change. As a child, the excitement of Christmas morning included the bright lights of a movie camera (yes, I am that old!), the long-awaited gifts under the tree and lots of food and family! It wasn't until I had my second child that I experienced Christmas in a whole new way.

Our son, David, was born on November 30, 1986, the first Sunday in Advent that year. Things went well and we decided to attend worship the following Sunday. I remember slipping into a back pew of the Sanctuary holding my newborn son in my arms. The service had already started and the music, the scripture, the message all washed over me, immersing me in the beauty of Mary's story, Mary's song of praise to her God! Oh, how the Lord spoke to me in those moments! My heart was stirred to praise and worship of the One True God and His precious Son Jesus, born of a woman, born into this world, to show us His unending love! May we be caught up in the wonder of His love this Christmas and forevermore! Amen.

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.

Today: Call a faraway friend or relative to say, "hello," and wish them a "Merry Christmas."

10 days till Christmas





Melissa Shaw

Community Sunday School Member

December 16, 2022

Read James 5:7-8

"Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near."

Reflect As a kid I remember that I could not wait until Christmas. I would constantly flip through the pages of the Toys R Us book and circle what I wanted for Christmas. As I became older, I would start guessing at what gifts I thought were under the tree by picking them up and shaking them. After that I would even go so far as to tear the wrapping paper to peek to see if I could see what was inside, making sure I put it back exactly how it was. Looking back, it reminds me of James 5: 7-10, how it was so hard to be patient. Because as a young kid, having to wait for something is hard. But when the day comes that you get to open your presents, you are rewarded with something that you will enjoy even more because of your patience.

This is like our relationship with God. We can't make Him come back any sooner, but we must be patient and wait. During the "wait" period, we cannot get frustrated or lose faith. Instead, we need to work through prayer, service and act like Christ to help build His kingdom and endure whatever comes our way. He will come when the time is right.

Pray *Eternal God, I want to have glimpses of the future so that I might know that I am secure. I want to have the security to know that tomorrow will be all right. I want to have life all buttoned down and figured out so there will be no surprises. I want you to rid me of all anxiety and worry and fear. I want all darkness and all uncertainty removed from my life. In faith, help me have this patience, knowing that you are with me, that you have me. Amen.*

Today: Drop off an encouraging note or small gift for a parent you know who needs a little comfort these days.

9 days till Christmas





Daniel Mitchell
Office Manager

December 17, 2022

Read Matthew 11:10

"This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'"

Reflect Christmas is just around the corner! Advent marks the time of waiting for the coming of Christ, and therefore it is a time of hope and joy. Of peace and love. It is also a time to wrap presents, to plan parties, to spend money, to cook dinners. With this overwhelming sense of joy and love often comes an equally powerful feeling of stress.

We can choose to get caught up in the planning, spending, preparing, wrapping and cooking that surrounds this holiday season, or we can take a step back, and reflect on the deeper significance of Advent and Christmas.

When John asked Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else," Jesus did not respond to this question directly. Instead, we are provided with examples of his miracles: "the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

Actions speak much louder than words, and these illustrations are powerful examples of the transformative power of Christ. This Christmas I intend to get caught up in the joy, love, hope and peace that Advent ushers in; I pray that you get caught up in it, too!

Pray Incoming Christ, we are expecting you soon! And yet, you are already here. Many in this world are expecting you, not knowing if you'll ever show. Let us help those we see become caught up in your already present love. Amen.

Today: Leave a "thank you" note for your mail carrier in your mailbox.

8 days till Christmas





Pastor Trey Witzel
Associate Pastor

December 18, 2022

4th Sunday of Advent

Read Matthew 2:2

"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."

Pray *In your arrival, O Christ, we find ourselves returning. Returning to you. Returning to purpose. Returning to the truth of life, that you so loved the world that you showed up. Amen.*

Reflect Do you remember what it was like to return to your parents' home for Christmas after moving out? That first time to sleep in your old bed? Maybe you moved out and your childhood room transformed into a gym, with your bed being replaced by a treadmill!

Christmas is often a season where we return. We return to previous homes or towns or share a roof with loved ones where it's been a minute since you last were there. These physical returns are often accompanied with the return of emotions and memories—some good and maybe some not so good ones.

Joseph, and certainly the rest of the Holy Family, must've been filled with similar feelings. Yet we know that, because of this return, Jesus grew up in Nazareth where he was surrounded by loving and supporting parents. Jesus surely had friends and adults who cared and nurtured him.

This Christmas, whether you are returning someplace physically, emotionally or mentally, know that spiritually and through your faith God is present wherever and however you return. Emmanuel, God is with us, in the good and the bad, the known and the unknown.

Today: Throw on your favorite Christmas sweater and sing along with us in Modern Worship at 11am to your favorite Christmas carols.

7 days till Christmas





Luke Moulton

2022 Confirmand

December 19, 2022

Read Isaiah 7:14

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."

Reflect Christmastime is a time of the year when everyone gets so swept up in the joy and happiness of the season. People spend their time shopping, watching movies, on vacations, etc. It also brings a time of remembrance for our Lord and the miracle of His birth.

In Isaiah 7, God was speaking down upon Ahaz, the King of Judah at the time, and God was asking him to ask for a sign from God. Ahaz said he would never make demands of God.

Then God said, "Then listen to this, the government of David! It's bad enough that you make people tired with your pious, timid hypocrisies, but now you're making God tired. So the Master is going to give you a sign anyway." God then gave him the sign that we would have a new king coming into our lives; his name was Jesus. He tells them that the two kings we were worried about would be out of the picture and that our king has finally arrived.

Jesus is our Savior and Christmas is a time to celebrate Him and reflect on how great He really is to us and what He has done for us.

Pray Holy God, your faithful love never ends! It is as sure and dependable as the sky over our heads. Help me see you in a fresh way this season, in both the old and new. Amen.

Today: Go for a drive this evening and look at Christmas lights.

6 days till Christmas





McKenzie Ellis
Youth Praise Team

December 20, 2022

Read Psalm 80:3, 7, 19

"Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved." (v3)

Reflect During the holiday season, I have observed many Christians who get discouraged at how Christmas appears to be a time of being consumed with gifting, decorating and planning. In the Psalms, many of the chapters talk about a "revival" that focused on a renewal of spirit, passion and dedication to God. In my opinion, this is what Christmas is truly about. The revival among humans did not just start with the death and resurrection of Christ; it started in his birth. Jesus was put on this earth as our revival, which makes me wonder, "Why are we praying for revival when we are already living out one!"

God knew from the beginning that He had a plan for Jesus the same way He has a plan for us. Shepherds and kings came to visit this tiny baby because they knew that their Savior, and renewal in spirit, had just been born. The love of God radiated off of an infant in a manger.

Refocusing on what Christmas is about only requires a heart ready to love and to receive love—a heart that is prepared to take in the love radiating all around in Christmas. I pray that whoever feels like they are too separated from the true meaning of Christmas always knows that there is nothing that can ever separate them from the love and renewal that God molded perfectly for us.

Pray Lord our God, you have revealed yourself as one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people. You have called us to follow you. Be present with your Church, Lord, as we respond to your call. Open our eyes to the downtrodden. Fill us with compassion for the plight of others. Lead us into ministries that serve the least and the last. Have mercy, O Lord. Bind up the wounds of all your people. Lift up the lowly. Fill up the hungry. Give us the courage to love as you love. Amen.

Today: Make a list of the blessings you have received and thank God for each one.

5 days till Christmas





Mallory Osborn
Youth Leadership Team

December 21, 2022

Read Romans 1:1-3

"A servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ..."

Reflect At the start of every Christmas season, my mom, sister and I have an evening of decorating. My sister sets up her nutcracker collection, my mom sets up her beautiful Lenox Nativity pieces and I, with great care, set up my priceless Little People Nativity set. My earliest Christmas memories center around putting Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus in just the right spots—I loved to share the story of Holy Baby Jesus with all who came to our home.

Each year, I am reminded of how loved we all must be for God to have sent His own son to save us from our sins. In Romans 1, Paul writes that through Jesus Christ our Lord, we have received grace and apostleship to bring obedience among the nations and that we are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

Though my Nativity set is simple, I always feel the power of the gift I have been given and the calling that comes with belonging to Christ. The Christmas season is a time to celebrate the joy we have through knowing Christ and it provides many opportunities to share the gospel with those around us, so that they might also get to experience His blessings.

Pray Holy God, in a couple of days we will be celebrating the birth of Christ. Though I might be caught up in the frenzy shopping, the unreality of expectations, the pressures of gift giving and the commitments to gather, you only ask one thing of me, that I be set apart for you. Today I give my life to you once again. Amen.

Today: Go for a walk, or take a look out the window, and spend some time thinking about those things that weigh heavily on your heart and mind, and pray for God's peace to comfort you.

4 days till Christmas





Annabelle Vahlberg
3rd Grade Bible Recipient

December 22, 2022

Read Psalm 96:11-13

"Let the heavens be glad, and the earth rejoice! Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise! Let the fields and their crops burst out with joy! Let the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, for he is coming!"

Reflect Much like the crops and the trees, when I think about Christmas I think about JOY. Everything about the Christmas season is filled with excitement and fun. I feel really happy when I open presents or eat yummy holiday treats. But the things that make me most excited about Christmas are not actually "things." They are the special times I get to share with the people I love.

I feel real joy reading the Christmas story with my family, driving around looking at Christmas lights while singing carols at the top of our lungs, rolling cookie dough with my grandmother while making family recipes and acting out the Nativity with my cousins. In all of those moments I feel joy knowing that I am loved and safe. And that's why the birth of Jesus is the best joy: He came to share God's great, big, never-ending, never-changing love for us. Nothing makes me feel safer and more loved than Him. I hope you will rest in the joy of Jesus this Advent. Rest in His love for you remembering that true joy is not about the stuff. The joy of Christmas is about God's love for you and the love you share with everyone around you.

Pray You truly are the reason for the season, Jesus. With all of the "things" that take up our attention, help us never forget where our true joy comes, from you! Amen.

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

3 days till Christmas





Scott Meier

Director of Missions & Outreach

December 23, 2022

Read Luke 2:3-5

"All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child."

Reflect I often wonder what was going through the minds of Mary and Joseph as they traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, searched for a place to stay and then eventually welcomed their newborn baby, Jesus, into the world while staying in what amounted to a barn. This is the ultimate Christmas stress!

The holidays are stressful for all of us. As children we are filled with anticipation about what we will receive under the tree; as adults we wonder how we will provide those same gifts. We are filled with stress, anxiety, hopelessness and feelings of inadequacy. It is these moments that rob us of the true joy and meaning of Christmas. It causes our focus to shift from the wonder of the season to the anxiety of the moments.

But then comes those times when it all becomes clear. The true meaning of this Advent and Christmas season. I imagine as Mary and Joseph held their baby for the first time, it didn't matter that they were in the midst of a barn; nothing else mattered because not only were they face to face with their newborn, they knew they were face to face with God incarnate.

May this season, for you and yours, be filled with more moments of joy than moments of stress. May you look up and look around and see the true meanings of Advent and Christmas.

Pray Great God, I have so much on my mind, so much left to do. Yet Christmas will be here in just a few days, and I don't want to miss it. With all of my responsibilities, nothing is more important than welcoming you into my heart once again. So help me not be distracted, but let me see your face. Amen.

Today: Attend McFarlin's first ever Christmas Eve Eve worship service at 6pm!

2 days till Christmas





Stephen Wurst

Assoc. Director of Music Ministries & Principal Organist

December 24, 2022

Read Luke 2:8-20

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (v. 14)

Reflect Can you imagine being a shepherd in the silent night hearing a choir of angels erupt from the sky? What a glorious sight and sound it must have been! Growing up, I always wished that I could go back in time and hear what that must have sounded like. So many musicians throughout the ages have famously set these words to music—we just heard the choir sing a setting of this text with an orchestra a few weeks ago in the Christmas Oratorio.

When the good news of Jesus' birth is told, both the angels and shepherds burst into joyful praise. All our praises, whether sung by a heavenly chorus or a crowd of shepherds and sheep, are our natural response to the tidings of a Savior. Like Mary, we can treasure up this good news in our hearts and get caught up in the story of Christmas all over again. Merry Christmas to you all!

Pray Advent God, I have journeyed with you to Bethlehem's stable and a newborn king, my ears attuned to the song of angels, eyes alert for Bethlehem's star. Forgive me if on my journey I was distracted by the tempting offers of this world. Keep my heart aflame today with the hope of Christmas and the promise of a Savior. Amen.

Today: Join one of McFarlin's Christmas Eve worship services today and tell a friend about it.

Christmas Eve





Pastor Wendi Neal
Senior Associate Pastor

December 25, 2022

5th Sunday of Advent

Read Titus 2:11-14

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds."

Reflect Today is Christmas! And technically so is tomorrow, and the next day, and the next until January 6, when we celebrate Epiphany—the glorious revelation of God’s salvation given to the Magi and all the world. We need all 12 days of Christmas to reflect on what God has done, is doing and will do among us. The One who said, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35) and, at the Last Supper, took bread and said, “This is my body, which is given for you” (Luke 22:19b), was born on this day in Bethlehem, the “house of bread”. This One was laid to sleep in a trough where God’s creatures ate, a symbol that God is providing the only One who can satisfy what we truly hunger for in life.

What we hunger for will not be found under the Christmas tree or in a stocking today. We hunger for peace, for healing, for relief, for forgiveness, for joy, for meaning, for purpose, for redemption, for hope and for love. All of these come to us through Jesus, a baby born in a stable and laid in a trough. He is the bread of life. He alone satisfies the deepest longings of our hearts.

As you break bread today, and throughout these 12 days of Christmas, remember that there is One more with you, so don’t forget to make space for Him in your hearts and in your conversations. And may this Christmas be for you and yours a day of celebration, a day of hope, a day of love.

Pray Jesus Christ, today is the day! My ears have been filled with music, eyes aglow in candlelight and heart full of love. Now the work of Christ begins. Thank you for the invitation to be part of your great gift to all of history. Help me take each day as diligently from this moment further. Amen.

Today: Whether you join us for our one 11am in-person service or online for our special McFarlin Christmas Worship Service, 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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