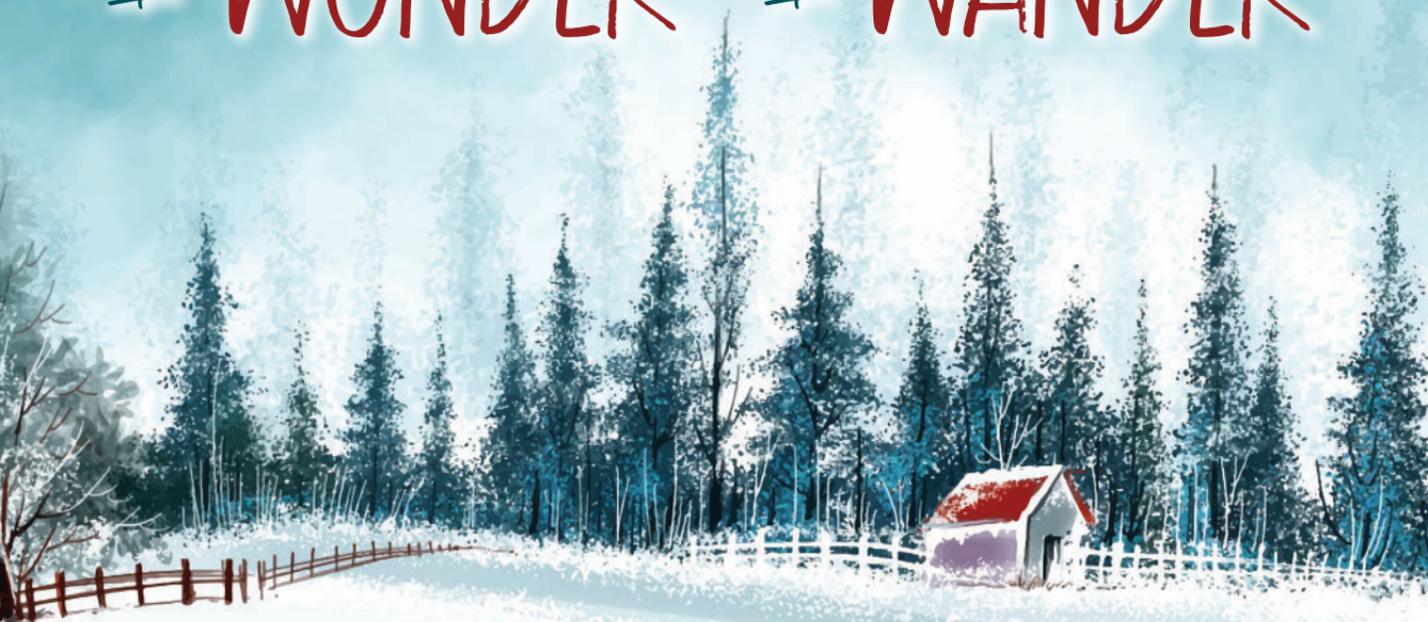


I WONDER as I WANDER



A McFarlin Advent Devotional

*"I wonder as I wander, out under the sky
How Jesus the savior, did come for die
For poor orn'ry people like you and like I
I wonder as I wander, out under the sky*

*When Mary birthed Jesus, t'was in a cow'stall
With wise men and farmers and shepherds and all
And high from God's heaven a starlight did fall
And the promise of ages, it then did recall*

*If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing
A star in the sky or a bird on the wing
Or all of gods angels in heaven for to sing
He surely could've had it, 'cause he was the king"*

As we gear up for the most magical time of the year, we're excited to share something special with you: our Advent Devotional, "I Wonder as I Wander." Based on the cherished carol, the lyrics guide us in our own wondering.

These words are an open invitation to remember the heartwarming story of Jesus' birth and what it means for us. We've crafted a little acronym for "Wonders" to help us explore the holiday season in a fresh way:

*W*orship: We'll think about what it means to truly celebrate the Savior's arrival.

*O*bserve: We'll take a good look at how Christmas still touches our lives today.

*N*avigate: How can we navigate the ups and downs of this season?

*D*o: We'll share thoughts on how we can make a positive impact in our communities.

*E*mpathize: We'll talk about the importance of understanding and compassion.

*R*est: We'll find moments to chill and embrace the peaceful side of Christmas.

*S*hop: We'll reflect on the ultimate gift and the joy of sharing with loved ones.

Some awesome staff at McFarlin share their own unique perspectives on the wonders of the season every day leading up to Christmas. We hope this devotional will sprinkle a bit of extra magic into your holiday season, helping you to connect more deeply with the true essence of Christmas.

We wish you a joyful and blessed holiday season full of wonder.

JOIN US FOR ADVENT!

Nov. 26

Handbell Concert, 6pm

Dec. 10

Candlelight Carol, 6pm

Dec. 3

Handel's Messiah Service,
8:30 & 11am

Dec. 17

Birthday Party for Jesus, 9:40am
Missions Center Groundbreaking, 12:15pm
Blue Christmas, 1:30pm

Dec. 3

Advent Festival, 3-6pm

Dec. 23

Christmas Eve Eve, 6pm Modern

Dec. 5

United Women in Faith
Christmas Program, 6:30pm

Dec. 24

Morning: 11am Sanctuary Service
Evening: Christmas Eve Services,
4pm Family, 7 & 11pm Candlelight

Dec. 8

Polar Express Movie Night,
5:30pm

Scan the QR code with your camera for a full calendar of all things Advent!
mcfarlinumc.org/advent2023





DAPHNE FIX

Pastoral Assistant / Sanctuary Worship Coordinator

December 3, 2023

1st Sunday of Advent

Worship When we worship, we stand in the presence of God and delight in God's holy nature and love for us. We come together in worship as a community of faith and experience God through the spoken word, prayer, and song. God's children in one voice singing, speaking, and praying to our amazing God. There are times when these experiences are life-changing.

Imagine for a moment what it is like to be in God's presence without the barriers of our humanity to distract us ... What do you see? What do you hear? How do you feel? How do you respond? Will you ever be the same?

The Charles Wesley hymn "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" paints a picture for us of what it is like to worship God and become " ... lost in wonder, love, and praise." From the invitation to "visit us with thy salvation" to "set our hearts at liberty" and "glory in thy perfect love," we are drawn into the wonder, the awe, the amazement of who God is and who God says we are.

May this first Sunday in Advent fill you with the wonder of God as we wait expectantly for the coming of Jesus.



SCOTT MEIER

Director of Missions & Evangelism

December 4, 2023

Observe As we step into the whimsical world of Advent, with the theme “I Wonder as I Wander,” we invite you to embark on a joyous and slightly zany journey of observing the season. Even in the role of Director of Missions and Evangelism, it’s okay to infuse a little humor into your devotion!

Advent is like the overture to a grand, slightly chaotic symphony. Just as our favorite holiday movie characters fumble through their preparations, we, too, can embrace the hilarity of getting ready for Christ’s arrival. In our mission to evangelize, humor is a wonderful tool. Jesus was the master of parables, some of which must have had a dash of humor to make people laugh and think. So, why not sprinkle a bit of laughter into our own storytelling?

As we navigate this season, let’s observe it with a twinkle in our eye and a chuckle in our hearts. Embrace the absurdity of untangling Christmas lights, the wonder in the creativity of nativity scene mishaps, and the comedy in those unforgettable church pageants. For in those quirky moments, we find a joy that is infectious. So, let’s wander through Advent together, finding wonder, and sharing a hearty laugh along the way.



DR. RICHARD ZIELINSKI
Director of Music Ministries

December 5, 2023

Navigate

As we begin the journey through the Christmas season, guided by the theme “I Wonder as I Wander,” we are reminded of the profound impact music has on our celebration. Music has the incredible ability to touch our hearts, awaken our spirits, and fill us with wonder. Just as the classic carol “I Wonder as I Wander” stirs our souls with its beautiful yet simple melody, let the entire season of Christmas be a musical adventure of wonder and awe.

It is easy to become lost in the commercial chaos of the holiday season. But through the power of music, we can find our way back to the true essence of Christmas. The timeless carols and hymns of the season invite us to pause, reflect, and experience the wonder of Christ’s birth.

During his Christmas season, let us use music as our spiritual compass. Sing carols with loved ones which will warm our hearts and proclaim the wonder of Jesus’s arrival. Share the joy of music with those who are lonely, for it has the power to bridge gaps and offer comfort. Let’s make this season a harmonious journey, guided by the beauty of music and the wonder of Christ’s birth.



KLOE YOUNG

Director of Young Adult Ministries

December 6, 2023

Do In the holiday rush, don't forget the essential task: Do! It's not about the usual shopping and decorating frenzy. It's about taking a moment to wander, wonder, and find serenity amid the holiday chaos.

One of my favorite ways to get away during the Christmas season is baking Christmas cookies with my Grandparents. The familiar scent of cookies, the sound of their laughter, and the joy we share while creating together fill me with cherished memories.

When I need a break, I cozy up with my favorite Christmas blanket and watch something heartwarming. A movie that holds special memories, or something cheesy from Hallmark. Another favorite is going to see the beautiful Christmas lights while sipping a warm hot chocolate. These moments bring pure joy, offering respite from the season's rush and rekindling my love for this time of year.

During your Christmas to-dos, it is extremely important to include personal moments that nourish your soul. Taking moments to replenish our spirits during the year's most stressful season allows us to embody Christ's love more fully.



STEPHANIE MILLER

Director of Care & 55+ Ministries

December 7, 2023

E*mpathize* During the Advent season, we often find ourselves surrounded by the warmth of family and friends, celebrating the joy of togetherness. We are also to remember the wandering Mary, and that not everyone is blessed with such a loving support system. There are many among us who wander through the Christmas season alone, hearts heavy with the absence of family.

This Advent, let us reflect on the concept of “I Wonder as I Wander” from a different perspective. Instead of focusing solely on our own wonder and joy, let us open our hearts to empathize with those who don’t have family by their side. The story of the birth of Jesus is a story of humility and love, and it speaks to those who may be feeling lonely or disconnected during this season.

Just as the Holy Family found shelter in a humble stable, let us find room in our hearts for those who seek refuge in our care. Reach out to the lonely, share a meal, lend a listening ear, or offer a kind word. In doing so, we become the embodiment of wonder and love, helping to alleviate the loneliness of others and creating a sense of belonging during this special season.



EVE HAWLEY

Director of Connection Ministries

December 8, 2023

Rest What does rest look like in your world? The calendar seems to be moving faster than ever and our days are spent trying to squeeze it all in. A 20-minute power nap sounds great, but who has 20 extra minutes! I wonder – is this the pace God intended for me to keep, with little or no time to “be still and know that I am God”?

Advent is a season of preparation and even in the church we can get caught up in the physical preparations for Christmas. What if we added a pause as part of our daily preparation for the coming of our King? A time to ponder the magnificence and mystery of God coming to us as a baby. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus tells us, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

As we prepare for God Himself to come to us, let us make time to come to Him, allowing our hearts and our bodies to find the rest that only He can give.



KRISTEN HOWARD

Lead Multimedia Storyteller

December 9, 2023

Shop During the Advent season, there isn't a day that goes by that I'm not reminded of all the shopping I need to do to get gifts for my family and friends. Don't get me wrong, I love giving my favorite people gifts, but sometimes the overwhelming nature of consumerism sucks the joy out of not only the shopping experience, but the season itself. It becomes more about finding the best deals, getting the most bang for my buck and outdoing all the other gifts under the tree.

For me, giving isn't about the price, it's about the person and I've been working on different ways to lessen my consumerism and focus on giving people I love something meaningful. It's not about spending zero dollars, it's just about being more intentional with resources, time, and money. Below are a few ideas I hope will be helpful. Instead of anguishing in consumerism, I pray that you find yourself relishing in the love, joy, and peace of the season.

- *Homemade Family Gifts: family movie night (DVD with popcorn and snacks) or Dinner Night (recipe card with ingredients for the meal).*
- *Local Economy Boost: Only visit local stores and find unique gifts made by unique people.*
- *Shared Experiences: Purchase tickets to a local concert or event for both of you to enjoy.*



KAYLEY WILLIAMSON

Director of Children's Choirs & Modern Worship

December 10, 2023

2nd Sunday of Advent

W*orship* Christmas toy catalogs. As a child there was something special about being able to see the toy possibilities all at once. It filled me with such wonder to imagine myself zooming around the neighborhood at .05mph in a Barbie jeep or cooking up something amazing in my EZ Bake Oven or beating my little brother in a rousing match of Nintendo 64. As an adult, imagining life's possibilities can still evoke wonder. Sometimes we can see the possibilities mapped out before us like a catalog and sometimes there does not seem to be any tangible direction at all. Wherever you are during this time of Advent, I want to invite you to join me as I ask the Lord to align the desires of my heart with the desires of his heart as we consider the possibilities of this season before us.

May a childlike wonder for life and faith illuminate your time of worship today.

December 11, 2023



JON GEORGIADIS
Facility Manager

Observe As the one overseeing the care of this church building, I've learned that preparing it for Christmas is more than just hanging up decorations. It's about creating a space where people can feel the wonder of the season.

When I set to work on this place, I think of it as dressing it up for Christmas. I climb the ladders, string up the lights, and untangle those dusty ornaments that have seen more Christmases than I can count. It's hard work, and sometimes it feels like an uphill battle.

As I hang the wreaths and set up the nativity scene, I'm reminded of the story of Jesus' birth, how simple and humble it all was. That's what we aim for here, too. This building may not be fancy, but it's a place where folks can find a little peace and wonder.

In this season of Advent, I want all of you to know that it's not about how fancy or polished things look. It's about the heart and soul we put into it. It's about making this place a warm and welcoming home for anyone who walks through those doors. So, let's roll up our sleeves, get our hands dirty, and make this place shine with the warmth and wonder of Christmas. That's what it's all about, and it's a job I'm proud to do.



KATIE LANIER

Director of Children & Family Ministries

December 12, 2023

Navigate

I love the Advent season and all the wonders it holds! It's a joyous time of year full of love and cheer, but underneath it all, I can't help but feel the crushing worry of making sure I visit everyone, do all the things every single night because Christmas only comes once a year, and buy the perfect gift for each person on my list. And if you're anything like me, you overthink every gift decision and make yourself out to be a terrible gift-giver, adding even more stress to an already stressful activity. The weight of it all is enough to make a season of joy turn into a season of pure anxiety and even dread!

When you begin to feel this weight, it's time to pause, give yourself grace, and remember the real reason for the season. Slow down, choose one or two activities a week to do, shop earlier and remember that it's not the quantity or even the quality of what you get for someone, but the feeling behind the giving, carve out time in your day to be in prayer and reflect on the birth of Jesus and what that means to you.



AUSTIN LEEVIRAPHAN

Director of Student Ministries

December 13, 2023

Do The seemingly monotonous nature of Advent can wear on our souls that have been left weary from the year-long marathon we've been on. Leading us to think of Advent like many other things—checking off boxes on a to-do list. If you find yourself slipping into that feeling, I challenge you to experience the wonder of Advent by shaking up the routine and embracing what your spirit really needs.

If you've never gone to one of those Christmas light shows synced up to songs on a radio station, throw your family or friends in the car and go! If gifts have lost their meaning, grab a tag off the angel tree and see how little is required to spread joy this Christmas. Suppose you're tired of the never-ending Christmas outings, parties, and hubbub. Then take a night off, wrap up in your warmest blanket, and watch sappy Hallmark movies—that one about the girl returning to her small hometown and falling in love with the geek-turned-stud is one of my favorites (The joke being that's literally every Hallmark movie). Regardless of how you navigate this Advent season, promise me this: you won't lose the wonder as you wander this year.



ZACH JAMES

Associate Director of Children & Family Ministries

December 14, 2023

E*mpathize* As we approach the Christmas season, it's important to remember that the true spirit isn't found in the number of gifts under the tree or the extravagance of our celebrations. It's found in the love, warmth, and togetherness we share with one another.

We understand that there are families facing financial challenges, and the thought of not being able to provide gifts can be disheartening. But let us remind you that the most precious gifts are not bought in stores; they are felt in the heart. In the simple joys of a warm hug, a shared meal, and the love of family and friends, we find the true magic of Christmas. It's a time to gather, to cherish one another, and to be grateful for the love that surrounds us.

So, to those who may be struggling this holiday season, we want you to know that your worth is not measured by the gifts you give or receive. Your worth is in the love you carry in your hearts. You are cherished, you are valued, and you are not alone.

Let us come together as a community, reaching out with empathy, understanding, and support. In these acts of kindness and compassion, we can make this Christmas a more loving season for all.

December 15, 2023



KELLY POTEET

Accounting & Payroll Coordinator

Rest This is the time of year when every day has an opportunity. Special concerts, decorating, parties, shopping, wrapping, baking ... and it goes on and on. Plus our lives don't stop, we still go to work, take care of our families, and perform all of the regular functions of life in spite of it all.

Advent is a time of preparation, but it's so easy to get in the busyness of preparing for Christmas, that we forget to get ready to receive Christ!

Saying no is difficult, but particularly during Advent it's important to remember that sometimes that is exactly what we need to do. By saying this one simple word, we can find the time to center ourselves for the true preparation for Christ's arrival.

We must find time to feed our souls. Psalm 46:10 instructs us to "Be still, and know that I am God". I hope that you can find a chance to do this during Advent.



MEAGAN BARR

Lead Graphic & Web Designer

December 16, 2023

Shop This year the Advent season is looking a little different for me and my little family. As I am writing this devotion, my husband and I are expecting our first baby. He should be here very soon and we are beyond thrilled to have this little bundle bless our lives!

During this time of year, I am usually frantically making lists of all the gifts I need to get for everyone in our family. Then after creating the lists I have to actually go out and find and purchase the gifts for everyone. I absolutely love giving gifts to our family and it is something that always brings me so much joy. However, I have been a little preoccupied and shopping for all those gifts just doesn't seem to be at the top of my list this year.

I hope this season you are able to take a step back and find what is most important to you. Maybe it is family game nights during the holidays, attending worship services together, or maybe it is picking out the perfect gift for a loved one. As my husband and I prepare our home, hearts, and minds for this sweet baby boy, consider how you are preparing your family for the arrival of the Light of the World.



STEPHEN WURST

Associate Director of Music Ministries & Principal Organist

December 17, 2023

3rd Sunday of Advent

Worship The third Sunday of Advent is when we light the candle of joy on the Advent wreath. We remember the joy and excitement of this season as we anticipate the joy of our Savior's birth. But this season is not always a joyful one. This afternoon, we will observe our Blue Christmas service, where we hold space for the emotions that sometimes seem out of place during this joyful time.

I invite you to attend this reflective service, where you can experience God's peace. May this peace keep us ever hopeful for God's everlasting joy!



GIOVANNI CORRODUS
Director of Youth Choirs

December 18, 2023

Observe As we approach the Christmas season, let us embark on a journey guided by the theme “I Wonder as I Wander” and explore how we can immerse ourselves in the magic of the season through the profound influence of music.

Music has the extraordinary power to transport us to a place of enchantment, wonder, and spiritual connection. Just as the classic carol “I Wonder as I Wander” evokes a sense of awe, the entire Christmas season can be an exquisite symphony of melodies and lyrics that fill our hearts with the spirit of Christmas.

In the midst of the hustle and bustle of the holidays, let’s remember that music can be our sanctuary. Take a moment to revel in the time-honored carols and songs that captivate our senses and remind us of the wondrous story of Christ’s birth.

This Christmas season, let us use music as a means to embrace the wonder of the holiday and share it with others. Invite friends and family to join in a carol sing-along, or simply enjoy the melodies that are an intrinsic part of the season.



SCOTT MEIER

Director of Missions & Evangelism

December 19, 2023

Navigate

As we continue on this sacred journey of Advent, I can't help but think of the mission field; those places that God calls us to serve. Advent is a season of anticipation and preparation, mirroring the spiritual journey of those in mission who wander the world in search of purpose and service.

During this season, we are invited to rediscover the wonder in the story of Christ's birth. In our wandering, we bear witness to the diverse ways people across the globe long for hope and salvation. The Christmas narrative, set in a humble stable, reminds us that God's greatest wonders often emerge from the most unexpected places.

We are tasked with guiding others through unfamiliar territories, just as the wise men navigated the starlit night to find the newborn King. Our wondering has a purpose. It leads us to moments where we witness lives transformed by the message of Christ.

May this Advent season be a time to reflect on the awe-inspiring journey of faith. Embrace the wonder as you wander, for it is in the unknown that we discover the true meaning of the season.



EVE HAWLEY

Director of Connection Ministries

December 20, 2023

Do Where do you do most of your wandering? Maybe you're an outdoors type of person who likes to hike, run, walk, or bike. Or maybe you find yourself wandering the aisles at Wal-Mart or Target, lost in the multitude of stuff and wondering what you came to get in the first place!

The Israelites wandered the desert for 40 years, waiting for God's perfect timing to bring them into the Promised Land. As we approach these last few days of Advent, I encourage you to be intentional in your wandering. Take God with you as you go about these final days of preparation and into the celebration of the gift of Jesus, our Savior. Plan and carry out a prayer walk in your neighborhood, at a nursing home or assisted living facility, on the OU campus ... you pick the place.

Go on your own or invite friends/family. Ask God to speak into your thoughts as you walk and make it a sweet time of conversation with the One who loves you more than you can imagine! The KING of Kings and LORD of Lords! His name is Jesus.



STEPHANIE MILLER

. Director of Care & 55+ Ministries

December 21, 2023

E*mpathize* Advent is a time of gathering to rejoice and celebrate. As busy and exciting as the season can be, for those who are grieving, it may feel depressing, lonely, and isolating. The anticipation of the season cannot be escaped, as the sights and sounds of Advent are constant reminders that this year is different. Once joyous occasions are clouded by waves of emotions such as dread, anger, guilt, and despair.

If this Advent season coincides with a season of grief, you are not alone, even though it feels that way at times. Be gentle with yourself as you navigate this bittersweet season. Acknowledge that this year is hard, but holidays won't always feel this dreadful. Adjust your expectations. Give yourself permission to let this season be what it is. Take time for yourself to rest and reflect.

Grief demands rest and the holiday hustle and bustle can be quite exhausting. Stay present in the moment and pay attention to the glimmers of hope. May you feel the comfort of peace and unforeseen moments of joy as the Holy Spirit guides you through this delicate season.



KATIE LANIER

Director of Student Ministries

December 22, 2023

Rest Raise your hand if you have at least three holiday parties to go to this Christmas season. Now raise your hand if you also have children that have their own holiday parties and activities. Anyone out there have an event almost every single night of the Christmas season? Whether you're visiting family or viewing lights, this season of peace is transforming into a season of hurry. Taking in the splendor can be a challenge when we keep rushing by it. To get rest this season, we are all going to need to be intentional about it.

Look at your calendar and find at least one evening each week between now and New Year's where you have no plans. It might be a good idea to find two or three whole days where you can just reset and relax.

During these times, focus on God. Think about the peace and the calm that emanated around Jesus when he was born. Find that stillness and quiet in your soul, even if it's only for five minutes. Jesus is the Prince of Peace and he wants to give us that peace, all we need to do is ask and be still.



PASTOR TREY WITZEL
Associate Pastor

December 23, 2023

Christmas Eve Eve

Shop You did it! It's Christmas Eve Eve! There's probably no longer time for Amazon to deliver presents, so however it went, it's done! Now what?

There's probably some wrapping still to be done. Maybe you're waiting until everyone's in bed to place the last few presents under the tree. Stockings undoubtedly must be filled and hung with extra care. Did you get everything? Is it all done? Does it really matter?

I know it matters in my household. It's the first Christmas with an infant sibling, bringing explicit and implicit expectations galore. At the same time, now that shopping is out of my control, it's time for my attitude to shift from being so concerned with buying and now is the moment of expectation.

Isaiah 7:14 declares that God is giving us the sign of Emmanuel, God with us, and while giving gifts is equal parts stirring and stressful, they play the part of reminding us that we are to receive the greatest gift of God in our lives.

So finish up those last few items on your to-do list, and make sure that the final one is opening your heart to wonder what new ways God will be with you this season.



PASTOR WENDI NEAL
Senior Associate Pastor

December 24, 2023

Christmas Eve

Worship I wonder if Jesus, Emmanuel, “God with us,” were to become incarnate in the same way again today, would his birth take place in a stable? Not exactly a restful place for such an occasion. Yet, I suppose it doesn’t matter where as long as it leads us to wonder at the meaning of the story here and now; as long as it has us looking to encounter Jesus once again.

I find myself wondering just where this might happen today. If Jesus were to come again in human form, would it be like the last time? Would it be in a country far away or would it be in our own town? Or at a homeless shelter? Or under a city bridge? I do wonder where Jesus would be born today. And I wonder how my wondering changes the ways I encounter those who are in those places now. How does the possibility that those places are already made ‘holy’ by the presence of the Christ Child change everything? And, how does the truth that, “to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord” (Luke 2:11), change everything?



PASTOR ROCKFORD JOHNSON
Senior Pastor

December 25, 2023

Christmas Day

Observe On Christmas mornings Dad spared us our usual daily routine of rising very early to make warm bottles of milk substitute for hungry baby calves and put crunchy oat food in their mangers—their feeding troughs. The floor of the barn’s “cow stall” was dirt covered with straw. It sure smelled like cattle lived there. Dad would do our work in the cold, meagerly lit dark, a winter wind moaning outside, creeping inside.

Set in a somewhat similar scene, the Gospel of Luke highlights a celebrated manger, slobbered over perhaps by a cud-chewing cow or two. We are invited to observe, to pause, and to wonder at the story of God’s love swaddled in the mundane as a sign for the rescue of all people—the powerful and ordinary, the poor and the ornery. May the gentle arm of the Spirit cradle your heart and our world in the beautiful message of this holy day. And may the strong message of liberating love increase our hope and empower our actions for peace on earth.

Joy to the world!



Come or connect for worship with us in multiple regular and special Sunday services this season. For details, visit our website at mcfarinumc.org or call us at (405) 321-3484.

419 S. University Blvd.
P.O. Box 6390
Norman, OK 73070