



Prepare the Way

*Advent devotions from
the people of Mountain View UMC*

2020

Prepare the Way: Week 1

1. By Rev. Beverly Fest

Matthew 1:23

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel which means "God with us."

These words from Matthew are the words the angel speaks to Joseph in a dream. But in Luke 1:31, another angel, Gabriel tells Mary, ". . .you are to give him the name Jesus." So, Joseph gets one angelic message about the name for the baby, and Mary gets another angelic message about what to call the baby. Apparently, Gabriel won, because Mary did name the baby Jesus.

Jesus is an OK name, taken from the name Joshua, and it's certainly easier to spell than "Emmanuel." But I love the meaning of Emmanuel: God with us. And in these times, that's how I need to experience Jesus.

I once did a memorial service in mid-December for a young woman who had died suddenly, very unexpectedly. The sanctuary was decorated with Christmas trees, poinsettias, candles, wreaths, a manger scene: just what one would expect during this celebratory season. And yet, here was a family weighed down with grief. It seemed so insensitive to be flaunting the idea of joy and celebration. How does one reconcile the joy of the Christmas season with the pain of grief? I couldn't do that with names like Jesus, Lord, the Word, Son of God, Lamb of God, or Light of the World. But I could reconcile the contrast with Immanuel: God with us.

In this time of chaos, drama, division, and isolation, when Christmas can't be "normal," can't be celebrated the way we've always done it, when families can't gather, I need more than ever to think of that baby as "Immanuel," God with us.

And I trust in the promise from Matthew 28:20, ". . .I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

God is with me. God is with you. Always.

O Emmanuel, Thank you for always being with me even in these difficult times. Please help me to always remember your loving presence. Amen.

Prepare the Way: Week 1

2. By Kris Bakich

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus by Charles Wesley

*Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.*

James W. Moore begins his advent book *Let Us Go Down to Bethlehem* with a story about a recent flight. A veteran cross-country flyer, Moore was seated next to an older woman who was experiencing her first flight. Her enthusiasm and excitement were remarkable. She reveled in the smallest of things---“Be sure to take peanuts, they’re free, you know.”--- to the grandest, viewing in awe the snowcapped mountain peaks thousands of feet below her. Moore could not help but compare her utter joy and anticipation of what was to come next with the other passengers on the plane. It was obvious that most, like himself, were not new to flying: some were reading, some were napping, some were cocooned in the isolation of headphones, some were working business reports, and some were staring blankly at the seatback in front of them. Most passengers were in the grips of what he called “The Frequent Flyer Syndrome”, a condition he realized not dissimilar to one experienced by many Christians during the December days leading to Christmas. Too often we, who claim the Advent season as one of our most sacred times, find ourselves enveloped in the ennui of “been there, done that.” We lose the vitality that should accompany anticipating the already in the now. Let us make this season of waiting a time of preparation. Let us open our hearts to the marvels of anticipation. Let us experience awe in remembering and not let this time be one of the mundane fueled by the stress of outside expectations.

Creator God, we want our hearts to experience the awe of the season. We want to look forward with joy to the blessedness of Christmas. We want to anticipate and experience the already as we mark the days leading to the great celebration. Amen

3. BELIEVE Good is Coming

by Toni Gray

Luke 1:18-19

Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I be sure this will happen? I’m an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years.”

Then the angel said, “I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news!”

A relative of mine was 44 when she married. She and her fiancé told everyone who expressed any interest that they did not plan to have children. However, she believed she would have a child. To my great surprise, just over a year after they were married, their son was born.

This relative obtained her education and professional license abroad, and wanted to practice her profession in the U.S. She failed the necessary exam in the U.S. several times. Even her husband wondered if she could pass it. She believed that she could. She has now been practicing her profession for many years in the U.S.

Holy Spirit, turn my thoughts and beliefs about the future to God’s blessings and gifts which are coming my way. Keep my heart hopeful and thankful. Amen.

Prepare the Way: Week 1

4. By Pastor Stephanie Kidwell

Matthew 3:3

This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'

Imagine the curviest road you have ever driven on. For example, the Million Dollar Highway here in Colorado. Highway 550 between Silverton and Durango, is a very beautiful stretch of road, not for the faint of heart! There are many rumors around this nickname: it cost a million dollars a mile to build it, it is made from gravel from silver mine tailings, some say after driving it, "I wouldn't do that again for a million dollars!" It might just be because of the million dollar views around every turn. Once you have pictured that road, imagine what effort it would take to make it straight! Getting rid of every curve and loop would be a monumental task, and certainly cost more than a million dollars a mile!



It is this monumental task the John the Baptist calls us to in Matthew 3, "He was the one of whom Isaiah the prophet spoke when he said: The voice of one shouting in the wilderness, "Prepare the way for the Lord; make his road straight." Of course he is not speaking of roads, but the path that we are on in our lives. He is telling us to prepare our hearts and souls for Jesus. Are you ready for Christmas? Not the presents, decorations,, and cooking, but in your heart. Are you ready to do the spiritual work of Advent?

Gracious God, we hear the voice of the one calling us to prepare, to make the way ready for Jesus, and we ask your guidance. Shine your light into our hearts that we would find those places we need to smooth, to work on. Give us your grace and love as you open our hearts to prepare the way to receive those gifts this Christmas season. Amen

Prepare the Way: Week 2

1. Waiting is Still Difficult by James Clements

Matthew 17:20

"If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20).

We are in an instant world of gratification, expecting everything to be at our fingertips the moment we have the desire for it. This is becoming an addicting world without waiting. We live in a world of easy downloads, instantaneous email, on demand and food prepared in a few minutes.

God finds ways of making us wait, that random stop light or the slow moving vehicle in front of you when you're in a hurry.

Waiting and faith go hand-in-hand. We should slow down and listen. Sometimes he speaks to us in whispers and if we are too big of a hurry we can not always hear his words. why should we wait?

- Some are waiting for the prodigal son to return and take us home.
- Many of us are waiting for the phone to ring so we can return to a job with a normal salary and benefits.
- Others are waiting for an eye-opening spiritual breakthrough.

Advent is about faith and waiting. Remember the years of silence as God's people waited for the Messiah. Take time today, right now, to reflect on the fact that God's timing is quite different from ours.

The story of Jesus' birth gives us assurance and joy because even though the waiting lingered for decades, God broke through at just the right time.

Are you struggling with a lack of faith? That's OK. It doesn't take much faith to get God's attention. Jesus encouraged his frustrated followers this way:

"If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20).

Waiting is sometimes the fastest way to hear God's words. I find that when I calm myself and get away from distractions that is when he speaks to me the loudest. Other times he has to hit me in the back of the head. Whatever your way is. God will speak to you only if you listen and wait.

*Lord, Please help me in my waiting. I get anxious and worried even though I know that Your time may not be my time. Help me to remember that You are always with me while I wait.
Amen*

Prepare the Way: Week 2

2. Angels Prepare The Way

by Judy Davis

Luke 1:11

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him

Luke 1:28

The angel went to her

"Preparing the Way" for Advent in this "Covid 19" time will certainly have a different feel. We come to it with perhaps fewer family gatherings, limited church experiences and anxieties abounding! Yet, as we turn to the birth narratives we realize that Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph, and Mary were also experiencing confusing and anxious life situations.

Angels were God's messengers to them to help them prepare the way for the birth of the Christ child. The angel told Zechariah that his prayers had been answered, his wife Elizabeth would have a son, John. In a dream an angel told Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife because the child conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit. Mary was quite perplexed by the words the angel said to her, "the Holy Spirit will come upon you and you will conceive a child". Angels gave the same message from God to each of them "DO not be afraid" .

This year as we see artistic images of angels, as we sing of them and hear their story in scripture may their heavenly messages touch us deeply.

Do you believe that there are earthly angels among us? Have you had someone who prepared the way for new experiences in your life? Persons who have touched you with listening ears when you most needed them? A person who opened doors you thought you could never go through? Or just one who sent you a card or note that surprised you? Perhaps these were earthly angels sent to you by God to bring you His Grace.

This Advent may we prepare the way for others by being an earthly angel. In whatever way possible can we ease anxieties, give helpful encouragement, hope and joy where needed. Let us remind all of God's message

"Do not be afraid" and most of all the Angel's message to Mary, "For nothing will be impossible with God!"

Holy and Loving God, may each of us be your earthly angels this Advent season. Amen

Prepare the Way: Week 2

3. By Lynne Pierce

Isaiah 40:3-5

A voice cries 'In the Wilderness, prepare ye 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 plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Mark 1:2-3

As it is written in Isaiah the Prophet, 'Behold I send my messenger before thy face who shall prepare the way: the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Luke 3:4

As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

John 1:22

And they said to him then, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself? He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness 'Make straight the way of the Lord, as the Prophet Isaiah said.

Those four passages about John the Baptist, who walked the earth more than two thousand years ago, are equally relevant enter our hearts and lives. But what are we doing to "Prepare the way of the Lord?"

Instructions are given by John, the one 'crying in the wilderness.' In Luke 3:10 the multitude asked him, "What then, shall we do?" And he answered them: "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none, and he who has food, let him do likewise,"

As we enter the Christmas season, let us open our hearts to those in need by our gifts, our prayers and our service. For this is the message of Advent:

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord."

Dear Lord, help us open our eyes and ears and hearts this Advent season. We look to you to use us to help those in need in our world now and all year long. Amen.

Prepare the Way: Week 2

4. Share-A-Gift by JoAnn Joselyn

Matthew 19:19b

Also, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Philippians 4: 12-13

I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

The mission of Share-A-Gift is to provide toys and gifts for the less privileged children of the Boulder County School District during December, and it certainly does. Every year since 1973, hundreds of families have received beautiful things. But the reason why this program appeals to me, is that I am able to experience the Christian ideal of loving your neighbor as yourself.

The program started in the First Christian Church – now gone, except for its iconic west-facing stained-glass façade near 28th and Baseline. At that time, the pastors of Atonement Lutheran, Mt. View Methodist, and First Christian cooperated on ecumenical services, like Good Friday and Thanksgiving eve. The First Christian pastor had asked Virginia Rowe to gather toys for Christmas gifts, and she had dutifully filled every storage closet in the church basement. But when it came time to give them away, she needed help and the tri-church union was called upon to assist. I showed up. I had never seen parents so grateful for some simple, used toys. The three churches vowed to take it on (there was even one year when the program was held at Mt. View), but it soon became a program of the Boulder Council of Churches – which became the Boulder Council of Churches and Synagogues and eventually the Boulder Interfaith Council. Share-A-Gift became a stand-alone non-profit organization in 1993 so that we could assure donors that their contributions were tax deductible. Through several changes over 48 years, we have maintained our focus to strengthen families by inviting parents to choose their gifts for their children – we hope the kids never know where the toys came from.

For me, it is not the gifts but the giving, and that must be true for the hundreds of volunteers that make this program possible. As parents arrive on the designated day (flyers are distributed as widely as we know how), they are greeted with a teen or adult volunteer with a shopping list and a bag who accompanies them through the tables of toys, books, and bikes to help select what they would like for each of their children. This human touch can be quite eye-opening and fulfilling to a volunteer who may not have understood the need in Boulder county. During shop set up, we are also grateful for school children as young as toddlers who both donate their own toys, and then help separate toys among the tables. They learn-by-doing what sharing means.

Share-A-Gift 2020 will be different – the Board is carefully considering how to manage under new restrictions. But we are committed to the cause of loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Dear God, the source of all gifts, help us celebrate your birth by seeking to share your love with our neighbors.

Prepare the Way: Week 3

1. Advent, a Child's Point of View in the Eyes of an Adult by Linda Chambers

When celebrating Advent with children we want to help them understand that Advent means anticipation.

Waiting for the Christ Child to arrive.

Many children love surprises and the birth of baby Jesus is a surprise every year for them. We hear the story about Jesus' mother and father journeying to get to the place of Jesus birth, the star that everyone is looking for and the Shepherds who see the star and come to worship the baby.

The children don't get it that riding on a small horse or donkey when you are 6-8 months pregnant isn't the most glamorous of ways to travel. They don't see the cattle stall full of scratchy hay that Mary lays on as she birthed the baby Jesus. They don't understand baby Jesus is born and laid in a manger where the cattle ate all their meals as well as using it for a bathroom.

What they see is the MAGIC of a baby being born that signifies they will get presents on the day celebrated for his birth. Why shouldn't they feel the joy of Jesus' getting presents on Christmas day, presents that they will get to use or play with.

As the children get older and start to understand the trial and hardships Mary and Joseph experienced we hope they also understand how Mary and Joseph depended on God to keep them safe and that He will keep us safe through all the trials and hardships we experience in our daily lives. Read or sing the prayer below.

LONG AGO, FAR AWAY

As sung by St. Andrews Episcopal School Kindergarten 2016 ([youtube.com/watch?v=hRB5Kt7P2eU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRB5Kt7P2eU))

1. Jesus, Jesus, little baby Jesus

Long ago far away

Jesus, Jesus, little baby Jesus

Born to show God's love

2. Star light, star light, star light

shining brightly

Long ago, far away

Star light, Star light. Star light

shining brightly

Shine to show God's love

3. Shepherds, Shepherds,

Shepherds come to worship

Long ago, far away

Shepherds, Shepherds, Shepherds

come to worship

Come and worship Him

If you would like to try and sing this song here is a little idea of how the melody goes. Read it as if it were a music staff.

Phrase 1

(so) _____ sus, Je- _____ sus.

(fa) _____ li-

(mi) Je- _____ sus _____ tle

(re) _____ ba- _____ Je-

(do) _____ by

Phrase 2

(so) _____ a- go

(fa) _____ Far

(mi) Long _____ a-

(re) _____ Way

Phrase 3

(so) _____ sus, Je- _____ sus.

(fa) _____ li-

(mi) Je- _____ sus _____ tle

(re) _____ ba- _____ Je-

(do) _____ by

Phrase 4

(la) Born _____

(so) _____ to

(fa) _____ show

(re) _____ God's

(do) _____ love.

Prepare the Way: Week 3

2. Be Still

by Connie Balazs

Psalm 46:10 NIV

He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

As Christmas approaches the preparations for the season begin to spin out of control. So much to do...so little time. Remembering in this time of preparation to prepare my heart and soul brings some needed relief and peace. I have enjoyed the writings of Henri Nouwen and others to help me slow down the pace and return to scripture. Psalm 46:10 is one that speaks to me during Advent and other times of the year. How can I slow down? The scripture says "Be still, and know that I am God." When I have a need to slow down during this busy season, I return to this passage. I use it in prayer -

Be still, and know that I am God.

Be still, and know.

Be still.

Be.

Simply Be ... wait... in God's presence for the One that will be exalted among the nations and all the earth.

Advent Prayer of Henri Nouwen

Lord Jesus,

*Master of both the Light and the
darkness, send your holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.*

*We who have so much to do to seek quiet
Spaces to hear your voice each day.*

*We who are anxious over many things look
Forward to your coming among us.*

*We who are blessed in so many ways long
For the complete joy of your kingdom.*

*We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of
Your presence.*

*We are your people, walking in darkness,
yet seeking the light.*

To you we say, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Prepare the Way: Week 3

3. By Jean Wainwright

Matthew 1:21 RSV

You Shall Call His Name Jesus

Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. The fact of His birth is not just a beautiful dream. Jesus lived on the earth, and people touched him and saw Him face to face. In Jesus, God appeared as a person. Those who really want to understand Christmas know Jesus today as a living person—a presence in our lives, an unseen friend at our side. Many people today worship a historical picture of Jesus, frozen in time. Looking wistfully back toward Bethlehem, they wish that they, too, could have brought gifts of gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

There is no need to be regretful about such things, for we too can offer to Christ gifts of our own—faith, hope and love. Then the son of Mary, Jesus of Nazareth, will come down out of the picture of memory in which we have framed Him. He will step right into our lives today, the friend who will never leave or forsake us. Then we shall know the message of Christmas—God is with us!

Dear Lord,

Let us attend to our little errands of love early this year. So that the brief days before Christmas may be unhampered and clear of the fever of hurry. The breathless rushing we have known in the past shall not possess us.

Then shall we be clean in our souls and ready at last for Christmas—the Mass of Christ. We shall kneel and call out His name. Let us take time to watch the light of a beautiful candle's flame. Let us have leisure to go out alone from our roof and our door.

*May we not miss the silver silence of the stars as we have before. And, oh perhaps, if we stand there very still and very long, we shall hear what the clamor of living has kept from us—the angel's song—
"Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men."
Amen.*

4. By Sherron Shuffield

Luke 2: 10, 11

"And the Angel said to them...I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people, for to you is born this day...a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. " RSV

John S. Workman was a newspaper columnist for the ARKANSAS GAZETTE, based in Little Rock, Arkansas. He wrote on what was then accepted as the "religious page" of the Saturday newspaper. The United Methodist Bishop of Arkansas when John was writing columns said John was "A splendid interpreter of the faith."

A few of John's ideas about Advent still inspire me:

"Advent calls for pondering. Advent knows our most profound yearnings. When we despair, Advent's ancient prophecies point to a Deliverer. When the dark night of the soul closes in, Advent shows its star. When the world's babble overwhelms us, Advent gives us angels, singing. Advent reminds us that God is always capable of surprising us. Advent says to an anxious, frightened world that there is reason to hope. It tells us God wants to come, ever again, into creation. Advent sends a message that the GREAT SURPRISER is poised again to shower us with unimaginable gifts."

Help us, oh Lord, to welcome the Surprise you have for us, not only at the Christmas season but as we meet every day of the life you have given us. Amen

Prepare the Way: Week 4

1. Prepare the Way! by Mary Beth Downing

Here is what comes to mind when I hear "Prepare the Way!"

"We have been telling the people that this is the
Eleventh Hour.
Now we must go back and tell the people this is the
HOUR.

And there are things to be considered:
Where are you living?
What are you doing?
Are you in right relation?
Where is your water?
Know your garden.

It is time to speak your truth.

Create your community.
Be good to each other.
And do not look outside yourself for the leader.
This can be a good time!

There is a river flowing now very fast.
It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid.
They will try to hold on to the shore.
They will feel they are being torn apart and they will suffer greatly.
Know the river has its destination.

The Elders say we must let go of the shore, and
push off and into the river, keep our eyes open, and
our head above the water.

See who is in there with you and CELEBRATE.

At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally,
Least of all, ourselves.
For the moment we do, our spiritual growth and journey
comes to a halt.
The time of the lone wolf is over.

Gather yourselves!

Banish the word "struggle" from your attitude and your vocabulary.
All that you do now must be done in a sacred manner
And in celebration.

"We are the ones we have been waiting for...." "
-The Elders, Hopi Nation, Oraibi, Arizona.

LORD , creator of community and Spirit, On this day may WE open our hearts and be prepared to be surprised by you. The challenges of our lives are real and the need for faith and courage is strong. We venture into the unknown but know that we are not alone. We are grateful for your message of HOPE. In Jesus Name we pray. AMEN.

Prepare the Way: Week 4

2. By Cheryl Runyon

O Little Town of Bethlehem

"The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

Every year our Sunday school teachers would select a new Christmas carol for us to learn and sing at the pageant. In first grade, it was "O Little Town of Bethlehem" and we sang loudly, and hopefully, in tune! By fifth grade, my friend Teddy Gresham and I were selected to lead in all the younger children, read the Bible verses of the Christmas story, and lead the recessional. Our reward each year, in addition to the applause, was a mesh stocking of hard candy and an orange.

Mountain View continues the tradition of the children's pageant. I look forward to seeing our young children 'graduate' from portraying stable animals and angels to shepherds, Mary, Joseph and the narrator. The older children continue to watch over the younger children, reminding them of their lines and where to stand. Somewhere, I have a photo of Philip Chen, Chris LaPanse, and Ryan Schmitz as the Three (Very Serious) Wise Men. And, every year I listen for "O Little Town of Bethlehem," and remember my long-ago classmates as we sang the story of that special birth in a small town.

Many thanks to Rev. Phillips Brooks, who wrote the poem, and Lewis H. Redner, the church organist, who put the words to music in 1868. The carol was published in a Massachusetts Sunday-school hymn book and has been sung across the world in the following years.

"O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel."

Dear Baby Jesus,

Watch over the little ones who celebrate your birth. Keep them and their families safe as they learn and grow in your love.

Amen

Prepare the Way: Week 4

3. Rule No. 1: Do No Harm by Brian du Fresne

"Do No Harm" - John Wesley

May I jog your memory? This past September Pastor Stephanie led the church in a three-week sermon series of John Wesley's three simple rules.

I appreciated the lessons we learned during those weeks, and I found many ways to incorporate them in my daily interactions with people, the environment, our church. And it was a pleasure to program music that hopefully highlighted those lessons, and perhaps spoke to you in subtle or not-so-subtle ways.

Here are Wesley's three simple rules:

Do no harm.

Do good.

Stay in love with God.

So "simple", indeed! I mean, aren't they? Most times I feel yes! But it's the times when I have trouble putting aside my daily cares and worries that simple rules sometimes become easily ignored.

While we learned about these rules in church, we on the church staff took time to reflect on them at the beginning of our weekly meetings. We used Rueben Job's little book, "Three Simple Rules – A Wesleyan Way of Living" (Abingdon Press, 2007) to help guide us. I learned very quickly about what it was to know John Wesley and to understand his teachings, writings, and yes, rules for living.

But one rule spoke to me in particular. Do No Harm.

How often do I take stock of the ways I may have had a negative impact on a work colleague? Or a friend? Or my relationship with my husband or family? Or the earth and the beauty it gives me? The phrase do no harm does not have a negative feeling for me. It just reminds me to acknowledge our natural tendencies may be to harm one another, inadvertently or intentionally. And rather than look at the rule as preventing myself from doing something, the wording of the rule makes me simply look for another way of interacting – removing a negative will provide room for a positive.

During this time as we look toward the celebration of the Christ child's birth, I'm reflecting on what I can do to be the best for the baby Jesus. Like the little drummer boy, I sometimes feel I have little to offer. But I think whatever we do or offer, it ought to be with our best intention. It is a contrite heart with which we can resist our negative qualities, a heart that allows us to find the best in ourselves as we prepare for Christ's coming. I hope during this Advent season you can find opportunities to do no harm, to allow love, to prepare the way!

Gracious and loving God, I ask your blessing upon me as I prepare myself to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Help me to remember that I can be my best self when I move away from my tendency to harm others. Bring your guiding spirit into my heart so I may see your face in the world and in those I meet. In your loving kindness, AMEN.

Prepare the Way: Week 4

4. Celebrating the Christ Child's Birthday

by Barbara Knox-Bergin

Luke 1:10-16

"I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign unto you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to man on whom his favor rests." Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us all about. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

When I was much younger, we spent lots of time with family. There was hardly a weekend that went by that my siblings and parents didn't see our eight cousins and their parents who lived on a dairy farm in Johnstown, Colorado. Christmas Eve, however, was a very special holiday as we joined together to remember the birth of the Baby Jesus. My mother prepared a board by chiseling out 17 round little holes designed to hold a burning candle. This would be the focus of our celebration. As this important day approached, we piled into our Chevy sedan along with our Christmas presents and food and made the journey to the farm. We always started with a scrumptious dinner, mostly prepared by my Aunt Virginia. When we finished, we gathered into a big circle as my mother passed out a 4 inch candle to each one of us as we sang, "Silent Night, Holy Night." Many times my sister accompanied us on the piano. After our singing was over, my father read the Christmas story from Luke 1:10-16 as my aunt lit the one tall candle resting on the board. Starting with the youngest one, who was my cousin Greg, each one of us went to the lighted candle, lit our own candle and placed it in one of the small holes. Everyone placed a lighted candle in the board, including the adults and my grandmothers. When all the candles were ablaze we sang Happy Birthday to Jesus. We then joined hands and my Uncle Bill said a prayer, always giving special praise and thanks for the Christ Child's birth. We then sang "Away in the Manger" as we blew out the candles. We continued this celebration for many years until we could no longer be together for Christmas Eve. It was a solemn moment but one that never leaves me. Our family always knew why we had come together on Christmas Eve—to remember and honor the Birth of the Baby Jesus.

Dear God,

We praise you and thank you for sending your son into the world on Christmas Eve to save us from our sins. You have promised us eternal life, if we only believe in you and practice our faithfulness in our daily life. Oh Lord, our country is in such turmoil, distress, and divisiveness. Bring us together, Heavenly Father, into a common appreciation and reverence for each other and help us to come back to your teachings in how we communicate and work with each other.

*In your precious name,
Your Loyal Servants*



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