

## **2nd Sunday in Advent, December 5**

### ***Scripture Reading: Numbers 6:22-26***

*"The Lord bless and keep you;  
The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace."*

### **PEACE IS SUCH A GIFT**

**A**s we climb into these verses, it becomes apparent how much our Lord wants to calm our very soul. No wonder Numbers 6:22-26 has been used at the end of worship services, both Jewish and Christian, for thousands of years!

The blessing and "keeping" of each of us by an all-knowing, all-powerful God is such a comforting thought. As a husband, father, and grandfather it assures me that He is always present, "keeping" not only me, but all those I love and cherish.

When the dark times come, as they surely will, He is always there to comfort and guide us. My shortcomings are numerous; but, as I have found, my Lord continues to graciously work with me... like a parent working with a child who has brought home a bad report card. Like that child, I am still a work in progress.

As Christmas approaches, may we all embrace the peace that God so desperately wants to give us. May we do all we can to pass that peace to others.

**Fred Blackmon**

**Monday, December 13**

**Scripture Reading: Psalm 118:24**

## SHINING IN THE SON

I was driving to work when a patch of old oak trees caught my eye. The sun was rising, sending light streaming through some of the leaves. As I slowed at the stop sign, I watched, captivated as a breeze stirred the leaves. The ones that had been touched with sunlight appeared a brilliant emerald green. The ones that hadn't still looked old and worn. I found myself encouraging them... promising that the light was coming – just to hang on! The car behind me gave me a beep. I pulled over; I could feel an important lesson coming.

In a span of a few minutes, the sun rose powerfully. The oaks did not look so old. They shone in a magnificent show of strength. The leaves bore that beautiful emerald green - even the older leaves with a brown edge – those were the most stunning.

“Abba!” I said excitedly. “That’s us! We are like those leaves! Without Your Son, we are dull and dry. But, when your Son shines brightly within us and through us, that is the grace we need to light up brilliantly!” I could feel him smile. “Watch,” He said .

I waited as the trees moved and laughed in delight in one impressive display of love, light, and grace. I thought of Psalm 96:12:

***“Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.”***

I was so thankful for Jesus in that moment. When the Almighty God of the Universe speaks to me on a drive to work, I know I’m the most special girl on the planet. And we are all that way. He loves us all just the same. Today, listen for Him in the quiet places. Take time to see His Light.

**Abby Langenbach**

## **Tuesday, December 14**

*Scripture reading: Isaiah 12: 1-6*

*“Sing to the Lord, for he has done wonderful things. Make known his praise around the world. Let all the people of Jerusalem shout his praise with joy! For great is the Holy One of Israel who lives among you.” (verses 5-6)*

### **THE TRUE JOY IN OUR LIVES**

**S**o, what exactly is joy? Webster defines joy in this way: JOY, noun: the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires; delight.

Interesting noun this word joy, “the emotion evoked by well-being or success”... One of my goals in life as a golfer was to break a score below 80, a success I never thought would happen even after fifty years of trying. But, on May 28 of this past year at The Deltona Country Club it happened. I finally shot a 76. A very joyful day indeed. But that joy, that delight in success, was VERY short lived. Why, after fifty years of trying? Because, I respectfully submit, there was no love associated with it.

So, what really brings true joy in our lives? It is as Webster notes, the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune, but only when love is associated with it. When we look back at our lives, the true long-lasting joy is always synonymous with Love... The day of our wedding, the birth of our children or grandchildren, the love of a parent, or the unconditional love of a dear pet.

Paul put it so eloquently in his first letter to the Corinthians - chapter 13, verse 13, *“Three things will last forever- faith, hope and love – and the greatest of these is love.”*

The greatest joy and gift of all time is the love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

**Allen Murin**

## **Wednesday, December 15**

***Reading: Lyrics to "Joy to the World"***

### **THE WONDERS OF HIS LOVE**

**S**uch a beautiful Christmas Carol, and one of my all-time favorites!

The first verse tells us, "***Let every heart prepare Him room, And Heaven and nature sing.***" The second verse tells us, "***Let men their songs employ, Repeat the sounding joy.***"

Verse three goes like this:

***He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders of His love***

(Isaac Watts)

Have you ever thought about the, "wonders of His love"? Every day we can see and are graced by the "wonders of His love," but I'm not sure I always take time to recognize them and be thankful for all those wonders.

Writing this I started thinking about the evident "wonders of His love"... the oceans, mountains, stars, sun, moon, trees, flowers... the visual list goes on and on. But then I started considering my family, my friends, my business partners, my special clients, my church family; and I realized they too are all "wonders of His love."

In our busy lives, I'm not sure we take the time to truly be mindful of all the little ways He shows us His love. Perhaps when we are in a hurry to get to an appointment, and we get stuck behind a slow driver... could He be protecting us from an accident?

As we continue through this most special time of the year, let's be thoughtful and grateful for all the big and little "wonders of His love." I don't think we will have to look too far before we say, "***Joy to the World, the Lord is Come.***"

**Debbie Howard**

**Thursday, December 16**

*Scripture Reading: Micah 5:2-5a*

## IS HE THE ONE?

I have spent the last year studying three great leaders of the Old Testament—Samuel, Saul, and David. Over and over I am reminded that great though these leaders might be, they are not the leader for which I am looking.

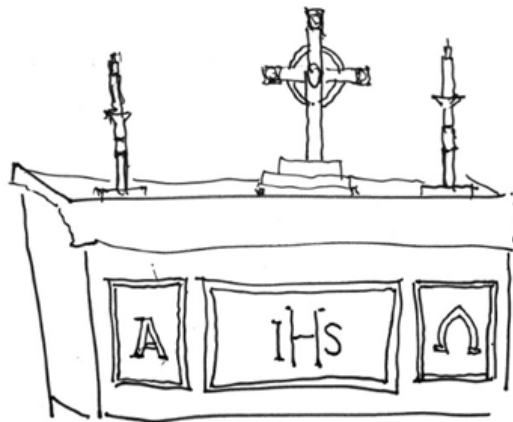
Every election we vote hoping for great leaders. But no matter which party or how successful, these are not the One. Over and over again we are let down by our heroes.

The One we are looking for will not be found in a voting booth, on center stage, in the highest-ranking athletic stadiums, or in our church pulpits. This One, *“shall come from old and ancient days, a descendant of David. He shall come in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And the people shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.”*

He came once and people did not recognize him. He was not what they expected (or wanted) so they crucified him. But the risen Lord will come to lead—and to lead faultlessly to the ends of the earth. Only He will bring righteous peace on earth.

Is He the One you look for?

**Sandy Escontrias**



## **Friday, December 17**

### **Scripture Reading: *Philippians 4:4, 10, and 13***

***“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”*** (verse 4)

### **JOY LOST, JOY FOUND**

**A**t times, most of us have had joy wrenched from us and found it difficult to rejoice. We have lost family and friends to accident, disease, crime, sickness, unemployment, or age.

I lost my son, David, in 1989 when he was returning from a holiday ski trip; the car in which he was riding hit black ice and skidded into a tree. Only 23 years old and weeks away from graduating with bachelor’s degrees in both electrical engineering and physics, my handsome, kind, witty, and strong son was taken from this world.

Following his death in January and during the season of Lent, I went to church daily to pray and meditate. This lessened my devastation; however, I still felt furiously angry with and disappointed in God.

Because of an earlier divorce and the college graduation of my daughter Kerry, I felt my ties to New York loosened. I quit my job and moved to New Orleans in 1991 to start afresh. There, a friend of twenty years welcomed me into his life, supported me in locating an apartment, and introduced me to welcoming friends. Soon, I returned to church and slowly began to heal.

Joy returned to my life and exists to this day. I must share that my life in DeLand with my marriage to Carlyn and acceptance at First Pres DeLand continue to enhance my joy.

Philippians 4:4-13 properly describes my journey. ***“I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me...but you had no opportunity to show it.”*** (verse 10).

Certainly, ***“I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.”*** (verse 13).

**Dave Langell**

***Saturday, December 18***

***Scripture Reading: Luke 1:39-45***

## **PROTECTION, SUPPORT, AND LOVE**

**W**hat amazing JOY Mary must have felt at knowing that she was with child, the child of God! Mary knew, however, that within this blessing there was also a cold reality. Being an unwed mother in her Jewish culture meant being severely disgraced... or even killed. God did not leave Mary alone with this truth. He provided her with protection, support, and love on her journey... starting with her aunt Elizabeth.

God is always with us, and he places PEOPLE in our lives to support and love us throughout our journey. This past year and a half I have been on a journey that would have been impossible to make without others.

All of us were told to isolate because of COVID-19, and my husband and I were considered high risk. This meant limiting contact with our daughter, her family, and our grandchildren. In addition, the sheer number of people succumbing to COVID was breaking my heart.

Sadness brought me to my knees, and I was crying out to God; waves of emotions crushed my spirit! ...until the Lord began to answer my prayers.

Just like He provided Elizabeth for Mary, He supported me with friends and family who have a heart for God. They encouraged me to live in faith that does not fear, to reflect on God's kingdom, to trust that God is working, and to count blessings instead of focusing on troubles.

With much JOY, I find that my prayers are being answered.

**Debby Patterson**