



NASSAU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Advent Devotions

2020

DECEMBER 6-DECEMBER 12



Unidentified mural artist. Virgin of Guadalupe, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. Original source:
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/msdonnalee/16764672346> - Donna Cleveland.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 6, 2020

2 Peter 3:8–15a

...and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation (2 Peter 3:15 NRSV).

Even in the best of times, it requires patience, waiting for Christmas Day, does it not? And these are not the best of times, are they? The days get shorter. The sun disappears as if it were late for another appointment. And we lie awake at night, contemplating one cold fact after another: a virus that has upended our lives, a wrecked economy, a country that seems at war with itself, our stewardship of the planet consigned to an afterthought. God may not have turned his face from our suffering, but at times it feels like he is wearing a mask.

But we are not the only ones who have to be patient. How long has God had to be patient with us, waiting for us to see what he is so determined to make us see: that he does not hide his face from us, that he will feed his flock like a shepherd and gather the lambs in his arms, that goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives? How long before we are able to see? At Advent, his patience buttresses our own. He waits as we wait. He suffers as we suffer. His patience *is* our salvation, because we know that part of his promise to us is a new world, *right here at Nassau*, where we will once again place our arms around one another and sing praises to our God.

Dear God, remind us, yet again, with your enduring patience, of what we know to be true: that your face will never be hidden from us; that you walk with us through every valley, no matter how dark; and that we shall dwell in your house forever. Amen.

Ned Walthall

Ned is a photographer based in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. He received his MFA from the Institute of Art and Design at New England College (formerly the New Hampshire Institute of Art). He has shown work at the New England School of Photography in Boston, The Midwestern Center for Photography in Wichita, Kansas, the Glasgow Gallery of Photography in Glasgow, Scotland, and Gallery 14 in Hopewell, New Jersey.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 7, 2020

Psalms 24–26

***Lead me in your truth—
teach it to me—
because you are the God
who saves me.***

I put my hope in you all day long.

***God guides the weak to justice,
teaching them [God's] way (Psalm 25:5, 9 CEB).***

We often seek the guidance or the presence of God when we feel weak or when we are troubled or sad. We often praise or give thanks to God when we experience beauty or blessings. But how often do we invite God into every moment of every day? God is always present, and God's promise is always with us, however so often we forget and we try to do things on our own or we lose hope.

Lately, we have been feeling the need to seek God for help to bring justice in the world and to teach us and guide us as we seek to do justice in the world. We seek wisdom when we try to make the best decisions we can as we go through our days. We lose faith. We lose sight of God. We forget God's promises. We seek to try to control things ourselves, and find mortal solutions to our problems. This clouds our vision and covers our ears to see God's ways and hear God's voice. These verses call us to remember God's promise is for all of us and never wanes.

Through our days may we always remember that God is our strength and we can trust in God's promise without wavering.

Dear God, help us to always remember that you provide the guidance and strength that we need for all of our journeys. You already know the way. Help us trust you to teach us. God, help us to listen to you. Help us to hear your voice that will guide us to your promise of peace and justice. Amen.

Holly Hardaway and Claire Mulry

Holly and Claire have been Nassau Church members since 1988 and 2004 respectively. They are both occupational therapists. They were married at Nassau Church in 2013. They live, with their dog Hap, in Franklin Park, in a home built in 1790. They are grateful to God for each other and for their Nassau family.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 8, 2020

Psalms 27–30

***Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name.
For his anger is but for a moment;
his favor is for a lifetime.
Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes with the morning (Psalm 30:4–5 NRSV).***

After a lifetime of singing in church, this lightning bolt strikes me today: *Singing is not always borne from a spontaneous, joyful moment; the ability to sing is not dependent on our state of mind or passion of conviction.* We simply choose to trust the directive of Scripture, even if we have momentarily forgotten our commitment to the Lord, and God's eternal commitment to us. We sing.

Whether as a soloist, a choral singer, or as a member of the most important choir – the congregation, we each choose to sing. Sometimes the choice is easy. Sometimes the choice is challenging, requiring conscious discipline and determination. But we can sing.

When we share a statement of faith in worship, it is as members of the body of Christ. The individual, that person among the assembled body of Christ, may suffer in doubt, in wounding pain or confusing conflict—even crippling fatigue of body, mind, and spirit. Yet it is no less valid for that believer to voice the truth of the creedal words, to simply stand with their friends and Spirit-siblings, or even to sit quietly in contemplation. Truth prevails over doubt. The faith of the gathered congregation lifts up the hurting one who may not speak, who may not sing.

Even if a single bulb flickers, the Advent light of Christ shines with undiminished brilliance and warmth, promising that Jesus is coming once again. As a body of believers, we sing in the dark night, sometimes with faint hope for the coming day. Even if momentary spiritual blindness hides hope from our impaired eyes, the joyful light of Christ will surely break through on Christmas morning! We will sing.

Lord, help us to remember that joy comes with the morning. Thank you for the promise of the light of Christ, shining in the darkness of 2020 and beyond. We have a lot of singing to do! Amen.

Elem Eley

Elem and his wife, Miriam Eley, have been Nassau members since 1997. In addition to singing as bass soloist/section leader in the Adult Choir, Elem is professor of voice at Westminster Choir College and an active performer.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 9, 2020

Psalms 31—32

***Many are the woes of the wicked,
but the LORD's unfailing love
surrounds the one who trusts in him.***

***Rejoice in the LORD and be glad,
you righteous,
sing, all you who are upright in heart! (Psalm 32:10–11 NIV).***

I am extremely thankful for the strong upbringing in faith provided to me by my parents. My mother's stock phrase, "Count your blessings," is forever etched into my being. I am more than willing to admit, however, that 2020 feels like a year when "counting my woes" has been more the order of the day. These verses in Psalm 32 are a faith reality check, much needed by most of us, and definitely needed by me at this point.

Now in the Season of Advent, we are anticipating the wonder and joy of the nativity—a scene filled with more examples of God's love certainly than any stable or town of Bethlehem can hold. That beautifully quiet, simple scene, at the very core of the faith we celebrate, has given me more pause this year than at any other time. God's love for us knows no bounds. God's unfailing love surrounds us when we trust in him. How much of our present anxiety could be alleviated or quelled entirely were we to stop looking into where we will be this time next month, next summer, in 2022, and just trust in that unfailing, unfaltering, steadfast love?

Rejoice in the season, whatever that season may be—even if the singing needs to wait for now. "Count your blessings." Oh, Mom, you were so right.

God, we are grateful for the stability of your love. Help us to stop anticipating, stop stressing and to be still. Lead us to a place of quiet, to ponder all that you have done, all that you do, and all that you are each day of our lives. Amen.

Lois Foley

Lois has been a member of Nassau since March of 2018. She enjoys her participation in the Church Mouse program and has met many new friends in Nassau's small groups. Lois is a family law paralegal to a New Brunswick firm and finds the current remote/in-office hybrid to be very challenging. She is the proud mom to grown children Meghan, Rachel (husband Adam), and Bryan.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 10, 2020

Psalms 33–35

***Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous;
it is fitting for the upright to praise him.
Praise the LORD with the harp;
make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.
Sing to him a new song,
play skillfully, and shout for joy.
For the word of the LORD is right and true;
he is faithful in all he does.
The LORD loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of his unfailing love (Psalm 33:1–5 NIV).***

We all say we praise God. But do we actually praise God if we don't make a celebration out of it? Rejoicing in the Lord should be a celebration. We love our God so we should make it known throughout the world. Because at the end of the day, what we're doing is being happy and thankful and hopeful. We need that in our world, especially now. A positive mindset and to celebrate everyday things. There's so much tension and stress in our world today: a pandemic, a presidential election and the continued fight for racial justice. If we celebrate every small victory, along with the big ones, of course, life will be filled with more gratitude than grief. Choose gratitude when you can't take any more grief. And maybe one way of showing your gratitude is to sing and celebrate and shout for joy as the psalmist suggests. Music heals the most broken souls. Gratitude over grief.

Father, thank you for showing us that it's okay to celebrate the small things. Thank you for helping us to choose gratitude over grief in the times we're living in right now. Lord, we acknowledge that these may be unfamiliar and uncomfortable times, but I believe that with you in charge, our world is already on the way to healing and being united instead of remaining divided. Lord, help us to continue to praise you with song and prayer. In your name, Amen.

Julia Hill

Julia is a junior at Princeton High School. She is currently serving on the Children and Family Ministries Committee. She is also a proud member of the card making group, The Cardigans. She is involved in her school's drama department and their production of "12 Incompetent Jurors: Stay At Home Edition." When she is not on Zoom for school, rehearsal or church, you can find her in her playroom dancing and singing her heart out to Broadway shows.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 11, 2020

Habakkuk 3:2–6

***God came from Teman,
the Holy One from Mount Paran.
His glory covered the heavens
and his praise filled the earth.***

***His splendor was like the sunrise;
rays flashed from his hand,
where his power was hidden.***

***The ancient mountains crumbled
and the age-old hills collapsed—
but he marches on forever (Habakkuk 3:3–4, 6 NIV).***

Habakkuk saw man's pain and suffering but remained faithful, always believing that good would triumph. Habakkuk lived through Joakim's evil reign of Jerusalem and later, the 6th Century BC invasion of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Joakim forced his army to commit atrocious sins. He ordered his people to sacrifice themselves in times of war. He murdered many men, violated their wives, shed innocent blood and plundered. Although he released the plundered property to Nebuchadnezzar, his allegiance to Babylon changed. When Joakim sided with the Egyptians, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, bound him in chains, dragged him away and cast him out beyond the gates of Jerusalem to die.

Habakkuk's faith was in God. He saw God's light and love through darkness and despair. No place is too dark or too difficult for God to overcome. The human condition is filled with suffering but Habakkuk understood that darkness depends on how you relate to your experiences and how you perceive God's love. Are you overwhelmed, or do you soldier on?

***“Though the fig tree does not bud,
and there are no grapes on the vines...
yet I will rejoice in the LORD.” (Habakkuk 3:17a, 18a)***

When the gangs of Chaldeans are plundering the land and leaving everything bare, Habakkuk says,

***“...I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my savior” (Habakkuk 3:18).***

He takes oppression and violence and rejoices, not in the circumstances, but in the Lord himself.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

Dear Lord, thank you for reminding us that when we suffer and when we are threatened by trauma and when the mountains crumble, we will follow your lead. We will march beneath heaven and sing your praise. Amen.

Jody Erdman

Jody was born in Princeton and later raised her son Spencer in Princeton. She is the director of the Princeton Day School Art Gallery and Spencer is currently enrolled in law school in Manhattan.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 12, 2020

Habakkuk 3:13–19

***Though the fig tree does not blossom,
and no fruit is on the vines,
though the produce of the olive fail,***

***...yet I will rejoice in the LORD;
I will exult in the God of my salvation (Habakkuk 3:17a, 18 NRSV).***

We have all been running a marathon, running for our lives, for months and months. Ahead is a winter of dreadful pestilence that we may never tame, and a civic and moral collapse that will require reassembling brick by brick. What fears are gaining on you?

The community of joyful work that has nourished and often enthralled me for decades is hollowed out. So I turned to Habakkuk, and began with the strange directions at Shigionoth [3:1], which are included in some translations. No one is sure, but this term seems related to the performance of music, surprising for a poem featuring the violent wrath of God's judgment: as the Lord who "split the earth with rivers" and caused the mountains to writhe. But I welcome a little string syncopation with glissando harps. (Read More: biblical "[word of the day](#)")

But as the orchestra tunes up, its melody is dismaying, off-key: the fig, the olive, the fruit trees are all barren. While the Lord is sorting out the chaos of churning waters and trampling horses, at home we must look for an Elisha who will show us how the love of God flows like oil from one vessel into another, and into another ([2 Kings 4:1–7 KJV](#)).

The plucky band has deftly executed these fast-moving emotions in varying keys and signatures; the musicians take a well-earned bow, but soon return with a mysterious encore from Psalm 39:7 "And now, O LORD, what do I wait for? My hope is in you." (Watch: https://youtu.be/DqWZGUO_eoc)

Dear Light of the World, join us here in our darkness with your radiant humility and forgiveness. Loving Jesus, teach us gratitude and even more gratitude, and give us strength to embrace your saving labors. O, come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel. Amen.

Debbie Tegarden

Debbie gives deepest thanks that she is among the lucky few who can work from home and draw a paycheck. The fellowship of Nassau Presbyterian Church is the greatest blessing of her world.