



NASSAU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# Advent Devotions

2020



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# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

## PREFACE

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This Devotional for Advent and Christmastide 2020 contains a scripture reference and a meditation for each day of the month, written by a host of Nassau Church members and friends. Each author was provided four biblical texts and asked to choose one on which to write a personal meditation. Carol Wehrheim, Nassau's Clerk of Session and an award-winning Christian educator, served as editor.

While these Devotionals were originally shared online, this document was created in order to collect and record this special event. Since it's not currently possible to print hard copies to pass out at church, we offer this document to you to read and keep, electronically or by printing.

We hope you will continue to use it as you worship by yourself and in your family group. Please know that others are sharing this experience with you.

Grace and Peace,

The Advent Devotional Team  
Nassau Presbyterian Church  
November 2020

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*November 29, 2020*

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## 1 Corinthians 1:3–9

***I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus....God is faithful: by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:4, 9 NRSV).***

Paul writes these words to a congregation in Corinth that he loves but from which he is presently at a physical distance. He expresses overflowing thanks for the Corinthian congregation and for God's faithful grace that has created their fellowship of believers. Paul's words cause me to take note of two "thanks-giving" Sundays: the day of my writing and the day of your reading. I am writing this meditation on All Saints Day Sunday, and you will be receiving it on the Sunday that concludes Thanksgiving weekend on the U.S. calendar. I give thanks to God for the congregation of Nassau, as we continue physically distant from one another, and for the communion of the saints who have gone on to glory before us. Conversations in my Psalms small group have cycled between lamentation over our physical distance and deep thanksgiving for God's steadfast love and faithfulness and for the abiding joy of the fellowship we experience in God's son, Jesus Christ.

Consider taking a few moments of quiet now to name in your heart and give thanks for those on earth and in heaven whose fellowship with you in Jesus Christ supports and strengthens your walk with God.

*Ever-loving and nurturing God, thank you for the particular body of believers that is Nassau Church. May we continue to be a place of welcome, comfort, challenge, and strength. Give us courage and compassion, and keep each of us always in relationship with you and with one another. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, who binds us together and shows us the way, Amen.*

### **Katharine Sakenfeld**

Kathie retired from Princeton Seminary in 2013 after teaching Old Testament there for 43 years. An ordained PCUSA clergywoman, she has participated in the life of Nassau Church since 1970. In this time of physical distancing she is grateful for Nassau's many Zoom opportunities to spend time virtually in the fellowship of Christ's followers.



# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*November 30, 2020*

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## Micah 4:1-5

***In days to come  
the mountain of the Lord's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised up above the hills (Micah 4:1 NRSV).***

What does it mean for the house of God to be the highest in the land? Does it mean dominance and might? Does it mean inspiration and invitation?

As Christians in the United States, a nation of power and might, it is easy for us to become seduced into thinking that God intends for us to be at the top of the heap—to be at the center of power and influence in our nation, and to dictate our will on other nations.

Micah, an eighth-century Judean prophet, offers a prophecy of a different kind of power and might, one that brings about a world where

*nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.*

A world where people

*shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,  
and no one shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:3b-4).*

Is Micah speaking metaphorically? Is it a naïve fantasy to believe that there will come a day when we can resolve our disputes as a nation and between nations without violence and domination? Is it naïve or futile to work toward a world where people do not live in fear? A country where our racial strife and political discord can be healed?

I believe, as Christians, that this is exactly the kind of world God invites us to become a part of. A world, in the words of Mahatma Gandhi, in which we “fear not” and “hate not” as we devote our lives to embodying God’s beloved community in the world.

*God of power and might, who entered our world as a helpless infant born into a peasant family, instill in us the strength, courage, and enduring hope to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you. Amen.*

### **Jonathan C. Shenk**

Jonathan, a Presbyterian minister, is the owner of Greenleaf Painters, a local painting company. In addition to his business involvement, he is a spiritual director and an advocate for transforming the criminal justice system. He lives in Princeton Junction with his wife, Cynthia Yoder, an author. They are avid fans of their son, Gabriel’s indie rock band, Sonoa.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 1, 2020*

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## **Psalms 7-9**

***The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed,  
a stronghold in times of trouble.  
And those who know your name put their trust in you,  
for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you (Psalm  
9:9–10 NRSV).***

Psalm 9 provided me comfort. On display is man's mean-spirited, loud and abrasive clanging, doing harm to the earth and to others. Choosing racism and hatred over unity and choosing the economy over the life and death of others, America disappoints me. We have voted and do not yet know who will lead our nation out of this challenging time. Yet, Psalm 9 assures me that I trust in a God who is powerful and just, a God who does not forget the oppressed, nor the oppressor. I just need to study his Word, to know him, to pray not for my wishes, but that his will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. There is great comfort in that knowledge and small assignment. To know God's character is *powerful* and *just*, to spend time with his Word, that restores my soul. I enjoy Saturday mornings with my Witherspoon and Nassau family studying the Bible. We read scripture, share our thoughts, and listen to hear bits of how we are coping with the pandemic, with the election, with our parents, our children. We always find something to laugh about and we end by praising God. So, I lift up Psalm 9. I hope you will find comfort in knowing we worship a loving God who is *powerful* and *just* and who will be with us *forever*. I leave you with Jason Nelson's "Forever" – listen on YouTube: [https://youtu.be/FnVFe\\_J2zfl](https://youtu.be/FnVFe_J2zfl)

*Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for having your hand in our hand forever and ever. We don't have to worry about the evil around us or the nations that disappoint. Judgement—that is your job. Our job is to love the Lord and to be his child in faith forever. Amen.*

### **Denyse Leslie**

Denyse has been a Witherspoon Church member since 2007. She has served as clerk and is currently a member of Session, secretary of Witherspoon Presbyterian Women, and a founding member of the Witherspoon/Nassau Joint Mission Committee. This collaboration is expanding the reach of Presbyterian ministry and building, and deepening relationships Denyse has enjoyed with Nassau sisters and brothers in Christ. Joint service enlarges the heart of a beloved community.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 2, 2020*

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## **Psalms 10–12**

***Why, LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Psalm 10:1 NIV).***

After I read this verse, I knew immediately this was perfect for the times we are going through right now. I mean, we are stuck in the middle of a pandemic, social injustice is all around us, and don't forget about climate change. Those were just three examples. Sometimes I wonder, "Doesn't God love us? If God really loved us, why would there be so much pain, hurt and suffering in the world?" I can relate to David (the psalmist) right now. I feel so disappointed and upset when I have to see my teachers and friends through a screen. I feel like God has left.

David comes to learn that God is always there, and we can learn this too. As children of God, we need to believe this truth. God is always there. When we believe, we receive. Our strong, powerful, life-changing, planet-moving God wants us to call, ask and believe that he is our protection; he is our solution; he makes a way when there is no way.

When you are feeling upset, disappointed or sad about your life, believe that God is always there for you. God is not hiding in your life. God is all around us. God is answering your prayers.

*Dear God, thank you for always being there even when we don't believe. God, keep us praying and believing in you. Show us that you are present in our lives. In Jesus' holy name we pray, Amen.*

### **Rachel Berliner**

Rachel is a 7<sup>th</sup> grader at Grover Middle School. She enjoys many activities with the church. Some of her favorites include fellowship, the Christmas pageant, Loaves and Fishes, and chancel drama. She feels right at home at NPC!

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 3, 2020*

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## **Psalms 11–13**

***How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts  
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?  
But I trust in your unfailing love;  
my heart rejoices in your salvation (Psalm 13:1, 2, 5 NIV).***

How long, O God? How long? During the past ten months millions of people asked this question, more times than we should ask in a lifetime. How long, O God? Let me ask very softly how many times we prayed: “Let it be your will, O God. I trust in you; I know you love me and you keep your promises.”

When I am sad, impatient or discouraged I keep saying over and over:

*I believe in the sun even when it is not shining.  
I believe in love even when I cannot feel it.  
I believe in God even when he is silent.*

Christmas is coming and the Angel is talking: “Do not be afraid, I bring you good news!” God sent Jesus, the Savior, to rescue us, to recover us, to reconnect us. Jesus encouraged people two thousand years ago and he is still encouraging now. Jesus is offering peace, joy and salvation. How long? Forever! It’s a reason to celebrate!

Hopefully this year getting ready for Christmas will be less stressful, more peaceful and focused on trust, grace, peace and wisdom.

*Father, thank you for Jesus. Thank you for teaching us to slow down to see more. Please help us to understand that our timing is not the same as yours, but your timing is perfect. Bless us with a renewed faith and refreshed spirit in this Advent. In Jesus name, Amen.*

### **Agnes Olah**

Agnes, a retired bank executive, lives in Somerset and has been part of the Nassau Church community since 2012. Agnes enjoys assisting with children’s activities at Nassau and at Trenton. She is also leading the greeting cards and handcrafts projects that help fund Nassau’s mission partners.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 4, 2020*

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## **Jeremiah 1:4–10**

***Now the word of the LORD came to {Jeremiah}} saying..., “I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Then I said, “Ah, LORD GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy” (Jeremiah 1:4–6 NRSV).***

I am only a boy...or a girl...or I don't have a seminary education...or I can't speak in public...or I don't have the time...only...only...only.

I've been thinking a lot these past few months about the concept of *call*. Many years ago, I experienced a *call* to ministry, and spent thirty-eight very fulfilling years as the pastor of several congregations. So when I read these words telling of Jeremiah's call, it really hit home.

But my understanding of *call* has expanded greatly over the years. God's call is not just to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. God is calling all of us to say “yes” to God; to discern what God is calling each one of us, with our particular set of skills and interests, to be and to do in this dark winter of 2020, with a pandemic, racism and division abroad in the land.

We can respond with “I am only...” (you can fill in the blanks) or we can say “Here am I. Send me.”

We will soon be celebrating the birth of “the light of the world.” The best gift we can give is to make sure that our light shines a little brighter in the midst of darkness.

*Gracious God, who comes to us afresh each day through our Savior Jesus Christ. Help us to discern, today and every day, who you are calling us to be and what you are calling us to do. And then give us the strength to respond. In Jesus name, Amen.*

### **David Mulford**

David Mulford is a Presbyterian minister, retired. For the past fourteen years, he and his wife Nancy have been nurtured and challenged by Nassau Church. During this pandemic year, they are especially grateful for the care they have received as residents of Stonebridge at Montgomery.



*December 5, 2020*

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## Mark 11:27–33

***So they answered and said to Jesus, “We do not know.”  
And Jesus answered and said to them, “Neither will I tell you by  
what authority I do these things” (Mark 11:33 NKJV).***

On Wednesday, 5 December, 1792, by a unanimous Electoral College vote, George Washington was elected to his second term as President of the United States. In 2020 I think about George Washington, our *first* President, who charted the path for our country and its ideals. He carefully cultivated his image, which, at its heart, was almost god-like. He was not God on Earth, but Washington recognized his national appeal. He had charisma, integrity, honor, and the undisputed respect of the people. After meticulous deliberation, once Washington made a decision, he abided by that decision. Not all of Washington’s cabinet members aligned with his opinions on issues, but, despite this divergence, they, nevertheless, had faith in Washington’s leadership. He was not a dictator or oligarch; his authority was sacrosanct because he was *that* respected and revered...as a leader, general, President of our country, as a man of faith, and *as a person*.

Within these particular verses from Mark, Jesus indicated he should be not be challenged, but it was more than this. Those with whom Jesus was speaking were intimidated and too distrusting in their *answer* to have faith in Jesus’s question about John’s baptism. While faith is important in a leader, it is even more important in Jesus and in God. Faith is intangible, ingrained, and, indeed, not insisting we remind with a host of Post-it® Notes. Faith in leaders is paramount to bring us together as a country. Faith in God is paramount to bring us together as a church.

*Dear God, please help us remember that we must have faith. We must have faith in our family, friends, and leaders. But, overarchingly, we must have faith in the teachings of Jesus and in you who makes all things possible. With grace and faith, Amen.*

### **Cynthia Lynn Miller**

Cynthia grew up in Northbrook, Illinois (her parents live in Lake Bluff, Illinois, and her sister and her family live in Carmel, Indiana.). She currently resides in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, and works in international market research. Cynthia’s great loves are history, reading, the study of foreign languages, travel, and writing. She enjoys exploring the fascinating details of history to tell stories of the past and enlighten readers about people and places of interesting times.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 6, 2020*

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## 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*

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## **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*

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## **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*

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## **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*

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## **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*

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## 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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*

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## **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](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.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 13, 2020*

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## John 1:6–8, 19–28

***Then they said to him, “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 out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” as the prophet Isaiah said (John 1:22–23 NRSV).***

The investigative committee appointed by the ruling elders had arrived, clipboard in hand. John had been expecting them. The crowds had been getting bigger. More and more people were making the trek out-of-town to hear what he had to say. People were repenting. Baptisms were up.

Question #1: Are you The Messiah? Answer: *No.*

Question #2: Are you Elijah? Answer: *No.*

Question #3: Are you the prophet? Answer: *No.*

Question #4: Well then, *exactly* who are you? Answer: *I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord!’*

Question #5: Why are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah nor Elijah nor the prophet? Answer: *I baptize with water. The one who is coming after me, I am not worthy to untie his sandal.*

From the time he had leaped with joy in his mother’s womb, John had sensed the coming of the Messiah. John knew who he was and what role he was to play. John’s job was to be the path-clearer, the warm-up act for the one-greater-than-he. John’s job was to get hearts ready and consciences clean in order to receive the Anointed One. John was not bashful about doing his job. He spoke truth to power when he confronted Herod about his relationship with Herodias. It cost him his head — literally.

John understood. It was his job to get us ready for the one who is bringing us good news, the one who is going to bind up our broken hearts, the one who will comfort us in our mourning, the one who will set us free.

*Dear Lord, help me to prepare my heart to receive the Messiah anew. Let me hear clearly what you are asking me to do. Give me the strength and the courage to play the part that you have assigned me: to point to the one greater than I. Amen.*

### **Harriet Black**

Harriet has been a member of Nassau Church for 20 years. She has served as a Sunday School teacher, deacon, and member of the Emergency Response Team. For the greater part of her career as a nurse, Harriet worked with persons who have diabetes, helping them to improve their self-management skills. Harriet is married to Clifton, and they are the parents of Caroline, NPC Confirmation Class of 2005.



# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 14, 2020*

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## **Ephesians 6:10–17**

***Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes (Ephesians 6:10–11, NIV).***

What are the devil's schemes? My worst nightmare would be that, under distress, my **hope** is to be dashed, sucked dry by anxiety, fear and despair. But, how is **hope** possible in the face of dire realities? How could we hold **hope** when there's still so much hunger, violence and injustice in the world?

Dr. Edith Eger, a 92-year-old holocaust survivor, suggests us not to confuse hope with idealism. Idealism is when you expect that everything in life is to be fair or good or easy. To expect that is an illusion, a denial of realities. Hope is not paint we use to cover our suffering. Hope is not a distraction from darkness, but a confrontation *with* darkness.

But, how can I confront darkness with my bare hands? No, I can't. Put on the full armor of God, then I can move on.

*Dear Lord, help us to be strong and courageous. When we are engulfed by the darkness, remind us to put on God's full armor, so that we can charge on, with faith, hope and love. Amen.*

### **Benjamin Yeh**

Benjamin and his wife Emily have been members of Nassau Church since 2014, when they moved from Taiwan to Princeton. He is currently an elder and serves on the HR Committee. Emily serves on the Children and Family Ministries Committee. They have two children, Jonathan and Symphony.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 15, 2020*

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## **Psalms 48–50**

***When the kings joined forces,  
When they advanced together (Psalm 48:4 NIV).***

After reading this verse, I immediately thought about the election. This is the first election I am really aware of, and a lot is riding on it, especially the solution to COVID-19. It confuses me so much why the parties can't work together. I feel that the verse is telling us exactly what we need to know; if we all work together we can end the pandemic and advance on to other journeys of our lives. If all kings (us) can work together no matter the differences we have, we can move on in our lives.

How long will it be until we don't hear about thousands of new COVID cases and deaths every day? How much longer will it be people won't have to risk their lives helping COVID patients? How long will it be until everyone in the country has a job? These are all things we can accomplish if we just work together. By working together we can advance on to accomplish many things, and then we will look back on the pandemic, and see how we responded in faith together, not fear together. If we can't work together, we might be stuck in pandemic-life forever. That is why what this verse is telling us is so important. If we can all join together, we can advance together.

*Dear God, thank you for helping us as we try to work together to figure out the solution to this pandemic. I pray that you guide us in the right direction and lead us to a perfect solution for all. Amen.*

### **Sarah Berliner**

Sarah is a sixth grader at Grover Middle School. She lives with her parents Karen and Jeff and her sister Rachel. Sarah actively participates in church events, including chancel drama, the Christmas pageant, and singing in choir.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 16, 2020*

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## **Psalms 51–54**

***O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.  
For you have no delight in sacrifice;  
if I were to give a burnt offering,  
you would not be pleased.  
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart,  
O God, you will not despise (Psalm 51:15–17 NRSV).***

Often when I hear or read the Psalms, I default to a historical contextualization and as a result they feel distant to me. They're songs of battles against ancient enemies, prayers of supplication to an impersonal God. I don't know who Does the Edomite (Psalm 52) is, so what does this have to do with me?

Looking at Psalms 51–54, the psalmist takes us on a wild ride. In just four prayers the author 1) begs for pardon, 2) curses the deceitful, 3) denounces the godless, and 4) prays for victory.

But if I read Psalms 51–54 another way—not as four separate prayers, but as one big continuous one—then the sins of Psalms 52 and 53 could be my own. The dialogue becomes monologue and it's like I'm challenging my own deceitfulness and godlessness. (Ask yourself: “When have I been boastful? Or treacherous? When have I plotted someone else's physical or emotional destruction?”)

Then the cleansing pardon of Psalm 51 can become the victory of Psalm 54...but only **if** I take steps to recognize the lies I tell to myself, to others, to God, and move to correct myself; only if I recognize the harm my actions have done to others, and make good; only if I offer God my broken spirit, with a contrite heart.

*God, help us fix our broken spirits, so we might declare your praise through good works. Amen.*

### **Tim Flood**

Tim and his wife, Kate Torrey, have been part of the Nassau community since moving to the area in early 2018. They're excitedly preparing their home and hearts for the arrival of a new member, expected next January. Tim is the son of a Catholic and a Lutheran, and Presbyterianism is still a little new to him – he finds the organ music comforting and he's glad to not have to kneel, but he often mixes up debts and trespasses.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 17, 2020*

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## Hebrews 1:1–4

***Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs (Hebrews 1:1–4 NRSV).***

According to my study Bible, the Letter to the Hebrews is not so much a letter, but a sermon. So, let's go back and read those opening verses again aloud.

The editors of my Bible tell me that these verses abound with elaborate rhetorical devices that animate this text, which celebrates the Christian confession that Jesus is the eternal Son of God. To hear the text in all of its artistic glory would no doubt be arresting. The music of the preacher's wording helps our language match the extraordinary truth of his confession. Unfortunately, we lose the exquisite poetic sound effects in translation. Even so, the content of the preacher's confession is no less stunning without its gilding.

We read and proclaim confessions of our faith so often that we likely have the creeds and passages of scripture memorized. They have become second nature, maybe even mundane. It is easy to read these opening lines of Hebrews hastily—we've certainly heard this news before. But this confession is meant to stop us in our tracks, to ignite celebration in our hearts, to astound us with the truth of the Gospel, that Jesus Christ, "the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being," joined our human race and offers us direct access to God.

Read these verses aloud again. And in light of Advent, let your mind's eye imagine the sky illuminated by the star, hear angels' song accompanying each verse, and be humbled by the smell of frankincense and myrrh wafting forth from the foot of the manger.

*Lord of All Creation, be in our hearts as we hear and read and confess the good news of who you are and how you love us. May words that proclaim your Gospel never become ordinary in our hearts and minds. Stop us in our tracks, O Lord, each time we encounter your Word lived and proclaimed, that we might never miss an opportunity to celebrate your goodness and experience your presence. Amen.*

### **Jade Hage**

Jade has attended Nassau Church for four years and a member for two years. Hailing from Monterey, California, Jade moved to Princeton to teach high school English. Jade is also a student at Princeton Seminary where she is in her first year as an MDiv student. When we gather in person, you can find her in the choir loft singing with the soprano section on Sunday mornings.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 18, 2020*

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## 2 Samuel 6:12–19

***As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart (2 Samuel 6:16 NRSV).***

I write this the day before our national election. So many questions arise from these passages given the vitriol of this campaign and the pandemic—I cannot help but wonder, will I respond like Michal if my candidate loses?

In my seventy-one years of life, have I ever had so many questions swirling and colliding in my thoughts, my feelings and emotions, and my wishes and prayers? Is one side right and the other side wrong? Yes, I am right-handed, but doesn't my left hand serve a purpose as well. Are jealousy, spitefulness, and hatred stronger than understanding, compassion, and love? Will women and men ever be seen as equals in our country and throughout the world? Will there come a time when the color of a person's skin becomes meaningless, and will a one-year old child pick the black doll as often as the white doll when given a choice? Someday, will there come again a time when couples like my mother (a Republican) and my father (a Democrat) will be willing to marry? Will there be a time when we accept all human beings regardless of the individual's sex, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, or physical appearance?

These passages speak to me of the power of being on the “right” side, and I am fearful that I am becoming like Michal, and unable to see “the other side's” point of view. Did the tears that filled my eyes when I learned my first grandchild had arrived into this world yesterday express sheer joy or trepidation?

*Dear Jesus, help me to accept all people as your beloved creations. Encourage me to “reach across the aisle” and seek a more thorough understanding of the needs, feelings, and beliefs of others. Please help me to support, guide and love all of your children, especially little two-day-old Piper, who has embraced my heart. Amen.*

### **Penn Bowditch**

Penn grew up in Connecticut, and retired after a 49-year career in education on Friday, November 13<sup>th</sup> (tells you something about both education and his career). He has three thirty-something aged children, an amazing wife of almost 45 years, and plays a form of golf that few golfers would recognize or try to emulate. He was blessed with his first grandchild on October 30<sup>th</sup>.



# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 19, 2020*

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## **Psalms 61–63**

***For God alone my soul waits in silence,  
for my hope is from him.  
He alone is my rock and my salvation,  
my fortress; I shall not be shaken (Psalm 62:4–6 NRSV).***

“For God alone my soul waits in silence,” says the psalmist. Frankly, that doesn’t sound very festive! Aren’t we supposed to make a joyful noise to the Lord? Isn’t Christmas supposed to be the most wonderful time of the year? Waiting in silence sounds more like a spiritual “time out” just when the celebration should be gearing up.

And yet... maybe we all need a little silence. Christmas can be noisy and exhausting, replete with decorations, gift wrapping and meal preparation, with long lines at the post office and at Target. All the jangling, secular holiday trappings distract us. And although this year is unusual, planning the children’s pageant, Christmas concert and all the church services can also devolve into “to do” lists.

Silence and stillness may be just what we need as we prepare to renew our sense of wonder and thanksgiving at Christ’s birth. As we count down the final days of Advent, God calls us to pause, to rest, and to listen for God speaking. As the prophet Elijah learned, sometimes God speaks most powerfully not through wind, earthquakes or fire, but through “the sound of sheer silence” (1 Kings 19:12). How will you find serenity and silence in these final days as Christmas approaches? How will you make space to hear God’s voice?

*God of our salvation, in this busy season, still our hearts. Grant us quiet so that we can truly anticipate and appreciate the meaning of Christ’s birth. Amen.*

### **Michele Minter**

Michele is a member of the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church, a Princeton University staff member, and a passionate ballroom dancer. She has two adult children and lives with her husband Jeff in Plainsboro, NJ.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 20, 2020*

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## **Psalm 89:1–4, 19–26**

***I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever;  
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all  
generations.  
I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;  
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens (Psalm 89:1–2 NRSV).***

This is my first Advent season without at least one of my parents alive. My parents taught my siblings and me their faith that was taught to them. We share that faith, grounded in service, with our children who have started to teach their children about steadfast love established forever.

Together this fall as the COVID surge built toward its winter crest of heartbreaking illness and death while a bizarre nationwide election spotlighted our sadly divided nation, our Nassau Church family did a deep dive into the Psalms.

Our Psalms education-for-all-ages leader, Professor Brent Strawn, poignantly urged us to stay in the void of bad memory as expressed by lamenting Psalms because that is where we encounter God. Professor Strawn credits Patrick Miller, author of *The Lord of the Psalms*, as a strong teacher and career mentor who influenced him. Miller, who passed away in May, provided insight through his own notes on the faithful trail markers found in Psalms that he had discovered through his childhood learning that continued for a lifetime. It also occurs to me that his sons are experiencing their first Christmas without a parent.

In his beautiful book about the Psalms, Miller proclaims the Lord's steadfast love clearly. Writes Miller, "The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the Yea and Amen to all that the Psalms tell us of the person of God in and with us, seen and seeing, named and naming, speaking and listening, here and there, now and forever."

*Gracious God, we give thanks for your steadfast love in our lives and the lives of our families who have lived before us and will follow us to proclaim your love that lasts forever and ever. We praise you as we entrust our anger with you and give thanks for transforming our lives and for teaching us to love kindness as we walk humbly with you. Amen.*

### **Marshall McKnight**

Marshall celebrates the Lord's steadfast love as he is honored to serve Nassau Presbyterian Church as a deacon, a member of the Adult Education Committee and a member of the Mass Incarceration Task Force. He works for the State of New Jersey.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 21, 2020*

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## Luke 1:46b–55

***And Mary said,  
“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name” (Luke 1:46–48 NRSV).***

Mary’s Magnificat reminds me of when I learned about psalms, specifically psalms of thanks. Mary says, “*my spirit rejoices in God my savior.*” So, I see this prayer kind of like a psalm. The prayer Mary writes was right after she found out that she was going to have a child, the Messiah, Jesus. This passage shows me how mighty and great God is. Mary describes God as “*the Mighty One*”.

I can tell Mary is so joyful as she writes this prayer in song. If you write something in song you must be very happy—especially since Mary is 12 at the time, and, trust me, I know a lot of 12-year-olds and none of them write songs. I can see that God is just because he feeds the hungry and leaves the rich empty. Mary went from being scared of the angel to the most joyful person. Mary rejoices in happiness and thanks, not fear and worry. Mary knows that God is on her side. The prayer magnifies all synonyms of thanks and happiness. This prayer makes me happy and trust in God. Overall, this prayer is beautiful and brings joy to the world.

*Dear Lord, let us see the Magnificat as a symbol of your greatness and your good deeds. Let the disbelievers read Mary’s prayer and believe in you, Christ. Show the weak how they can be strong and let the world live in peace. In your Son’s name. Amen.*

### **Hosford Roberts**

Hosford is a seventh grader at Grover Middle School. He enjoys playing baseball, riding bikes, playing with his siblings and friends, and drinking hot chocolate. Hosford is a huge Atlanta Braves fan and loves his dog Hank too.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 22, 2020*

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## **Luke 1:46b–55**

***...he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed:  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name (Luke 1:48–49 NRSV).***

The Magnificat text, in its entirety, is one of my favorite passages. I realized long ago that my favorites have musical connections. When I read this, I hear Bach. No one ever wrote more joyous music than Bach, particularly in D major with trumpets.

When I read the text, I see that the first four verses express personal gratitude and joy, and the remainder are a general song of praise. I will meditate on the personal part, in which Mary expressed her joy at bearing a child.

I have had some difficulty with the personal part, as a childless woman, but the Mighty One has surely done great things for me. I had a troubled childhood with a wonderful father whose addiction to alcohol and prescription drugs created a painful wall between us. Through God's grace, our relationship was healed and became something I will always treasure. Then, I had my own struggles with alcoholism. Through God's grace, I have experienced the joys of recovery for almost forty years. My husband killed himself in depression following a stroke, and I felt abandoned by him and by God. Through God's grace, I have survived, grown, and found love again. "...the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name."

*Dear God, help me to live each day in gratitude. Let me sing your praise upon waking and upon sleeping. Help me to be of service so that my life may reflect your mercy and glory. May my soul magnify your name. Amen.*

### **Frances Slade**

A native of Atlanta, Georgia, Frances has lived in New Jersey since 1977. She is the founder and Artistic Director emeritus of Princeton Pro Musica. She is an enthusiastic participant in contra dancing and English country dancing. In recent years, she has channeled her music-making into playing the piano. She joined Nassau Church in 2007.

*December 23, 2020*

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## 1 Samuel 2:1–10

***Hannah prayed and said,  
“My heart exults in the LORD;  
My strength is exalted in my God.”  
My mouth derides my enemies,  
because I rejoice in my victory.***

***Talk no more so very proudly,  
let not arrogance come from your mouth;  
for the LORD is a God of knowledge,  
and by him actions are weighed (1 Samuel 2:1, 3 NRSV).***

Hannah had reason to rejoice. She was previously unable to bear a child. In an era when a man could take multiple wives, her husband's other spouse produced offspring and then taunted the infertile Hannah who wept bitterly, praying to God for a son. Witnessing her fervor, an uncomprehending priest thought her drunk. Nevertheless, she persisted. God answered her fierce appeal, and her son Samuel was born. Dedicating Samuel to God's service, Hannah pours forth gratitude: “*My heart exults in my God.*” But rejoicing also includes a sense of getting even or at least of satisfaction in seeing opponents brought low. “*My mouth derides my enemies,*” she declares. Throughout her song, she names surprising reversals by which God's purpose is worked out: the weapons of the mighty broken, the feeble becoming strong, the poor raised from the dust, and the rich brought low. Hannah's God is the Lord who comes especially to those who are barren, poor, and dispossessed. To be sure, God's promise of liberation is for all people, but it is good news first for those regarded as weak or marginal or oppressed. Perhaps we who enjoy privilege—whether bestowed by gender, income, education, ancestry, or race—will understand God's promise to the extent that we learn humility, to the degree that we “*talk no more so very proudly, ...[nor] let arrogance come from ...[our] mouths.*” Perhaps we best observe Advent when we wait in silent awe for the One whom we could never have imagined.

*O Lord of all our days, we thank you for the promise of Advent which perpetually renews us with joy, comfort, and challenge beyond our dreams. In the name of the Child born in Bethlehem. Amen.*

### **Jim Moorhead**

Jim is an ordained Presbyterian minister who taught at Princeton Seminary for several decades before retiring in 2017. His area of expertise is the history of American Christianity, and he currently serves as senior editor of the *Journal of Presbyterian History*. He and his family have been part of the Nassau Church family since 1984.



*December 24, 2020*

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## Isaiah 9:2–7

***The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light.***

***For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders.***

***His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace (Isaiah:9:2, 6, 7 NRSV).***

In the chapters of Isaiah preceding this text, the context of *the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light* is given. King Rezin and King Pekah of Israel were set to attack Jerusalem, but Isaiah advised King Ahaz that the Lord would protect Jerusalem. Ahaz refused the advice and sought the help of Tiglath-pileser of Syria to protect Jerusalem. This king did defeat Israel, but Jerusalem became a vassal of Assyria because of the commitment Ahaz had made to Tiglath instead of to the promise of Yahweh. It was a dark time for Jerusalem, but finally, *The people who walked in darkness will see a great light*. A son has been given to them. *His authority shall grow continually and there shall be endless peace*. They were accorded this promise, *The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this*.

In the news today, the reactions against policies that mandate control of the corona virus are reported. Leaders who would try to question the deadliness of the virus call on their supporters to ignore the precautions advised by scientists. They initiate war against reason and malingering with delay. It is a dark time for America, but finally, *we people who walk in darkness will see a great light*. A son has been given to us, *and there shall be endless peace*. *The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this*. Let us trust in this zeal to guide us to conquer this scourge so we can walk in the light.

*Dear God, we thank you for your endless blessings, even in these troubled times. We beseech you for your help to conquer not only disease, but also perilous policies. We pledge to continue compassion for all. We look forward to walking in the light. Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. We magnify your name. Amen.*

### **Cecelia Hodges**

Cecelia is a transplanted New Yorker whose West Indian parents raised her in the faith. She has been a member of the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church since the 70s, serving as elder, as founding director of the Witherspoon Verse Speaking Choir, and on many committees. She is a retired professor from Rutgers and Princeton Universities and, as an avocation, has presented a one-woman show of poetry and prose abroad and throughout the states. These presentations are

## DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

founded on her Ph.D. research. She has served on many community committees and she attempts to continue support of them.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 25, 2020*

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## John 1:1–14

***The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.***

***The Word became flesh  
and made his home among us.  
We have seen his glory,  
glory like that of a father's only son,  
full of grace and truth (John 1:5, 14 CEB).***

Again a darkness, every hundred years:  
we are coronavirus-masked, breathless  
and in quarantine. God's people pixelated  
and disembodied, muted by circumstance.  
We have lost more than two of our senses.  
What did poets of other centuries do  
amid chasms of darkness and sorrow?  
Shakespeare, the bard of Avon,  
lost his only son, Hamnet—twin brother  
of Judith— to bubonic plague. Tragicomedy  
excavates the ache of absence and longing.  
In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* a sister,  
mourning her dead twin brother, finds  
him alive on the twelfth night of Christmas.  
Like Shakespeare, many have hearts  
bruised by absence—those we once loved  
faded into a country of shadowed memory.  
All that is left is an urn with ashes.

In this and every century God's Advent promise  
is cosmic light, as if all constellations were  
a single beam: the star we know each  
Christmas arrived to dissipate the darkness.  
Heaven's luminosity streams with a fierce  
purity to banish disease and decay.  
Our star leads to the cradle and the Child,  
who holds God's poetry, the Word in Flesh.  
The Child's hands, folded, tiny,  
peaceful, like delicate cowrie shells.  
Come all, huddle around the cradle, protect

## DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

the Child; let the luster of his Love crowd  
out every inch of darkness and gloom.

*Dearest Lord, thank you on this Christmas Day for sending your only Son as a babe to be the  
Light of the World. The Christ Child gives us hope that we will conquer the pandemic, heal the  
sick, feed the hungry, and soothe the broken-hearted. Hallelujah, Amen!*

### **Roz Anderson Flood**

Roz sings in the Adult Choir and serves on the Worship and Arts Committee. She loves poetry,  
reads, writes and teaches it. She was recently elected to the board of Copper Canyon Press.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 26, 2020*

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## Jeremiah 26:1–9, 12–15

***The priests, the prophets, and all the people heard Jeremiah declare these words in the LORD's temple. And when Jeremiah finished saying everything the LORD told him to say, the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him and said, "You must die!" (Jeremiah 26:7–8 CEB).***

Christmas is perhaps our most treasured holiday. Radio stations switched to all holiday music and stores were glittering with decorations by mid-November. Millions gathered online and in church buildings for Christmas Eve worship services. Yet, what are the priests and the prophets and all the people saying today?

Jeremiah, one of the major prophets, dedicated his life to turning the people back to God during a period of great social and political conflict. Sound familiar? Now look around...radio stations immediately resumed their regular programming and businesses are back to usual today. What about you? Did you already unplug your lights and haul your tree to the curb, or will on the weekend?

What if I told you that the Twelve Days of Christmas are just beginning? More than the familiar carol, this period runs from December 25<sup>th</sup> until January 6<sup>th</sup>, Epiphany when Christians mark the Magi's visit to Jesus.

When possible, my spouse and I love to spend New Year's with my in-laws in Mexico. Although I've always known about Epiphany, the idea of celebrating the Twelve Days of Christmas became more real for me the first time that we walked past airport employees eagerly removing garland in the USA to boulevards filled with poinsettias, bustling plazas still adorned with lights, and even mall photo booths with the Three Kings in Mexico. Families gather to enjoy "Rosca de Reyes" (Three Kings bread, which somewhat resembles Mardi Gras King Cake), and schools resume after children wake up to find gifts delivered by the Three Kings on Epiphany.

What if all Christians lingered in the Twelve Days of Christmas? Like new parents, I suggest that we need a transitional period to adjust to all of the physical and emotional changes brought on by Jesus' arrival into our lives and our world. Exhausted and overwhelmed, yet bursting with a love you didn't even know was possible, and forming a critical bond that will sustain you through life's challenges.

*O, precious newborn Jesus, how greatly we anticipated you and how much we celebrated your arrival on Christmas Day! Now, please stay in our hearts. Give us the strength and the courage to heed your powerful cry. Help us to resist our tendencies to so quickly criticize, ridicule, and even abandon your love and the prophetic voices in our world. Amen.*

## DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

### **Brandy Alexander**

Brandy is a member of the Adult Education Committee and a licensed social worker privileged to serve the Latinx immigrant community in New Brunswick. She and her husband Francisco Pelaez-Diaz began attending Nassau Church in 2012. Together with their young children Oliver and Max, they continue to worship regularly and build the beloved community with our faith partners at Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church, Westminster Presbyterian Church in Trenton, and Princeton Theological Seminary.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 27, 2020*

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## Psalm 148

***Young men and women alike,  
old and young together!  
Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven (Psalm 148:12–13 NRSV).***

As the Psalms continually remind us, we were created to praise and glorify God. Psalm 148 unfurls a whole cosmology of praise, from angels in heaven down to things that creep on the ground. The order of creation in Genesis is echoed here as the psalmist urges all God's creation to praise the Lord of heaven and earth. I am reminded that Jesus said if the crowds were silent the very stones would praise him.

Of course, we humans find it easier to offer praises when things are going well. In this plague year we have much to lament. Although I have not suffered from the effects of the pandemic personally, I still catch myself grumbling about loss of contact and community, political polarization, or some other gripe de jour. During our recent communal toe-dip into the deep waters of the Psalms I was reminded that the proper response to good fortune or bad is the same: praise the Lord! Some days I really need to remember *who* I am and *why* I am.

One of our strengths as a church family is that we are made of *young men and women alike, old and young together*. I am grateful for the work of our staff and congregation to maintain and strengthen our bonds of affection over the seasons of Advent and Epiphany, and to direct our communal praise to the Lord at a time when we cannot gather in person. Thanks be to God, from whom all blessings flow!

*Dearest Lord, who has made us and loves us and continues to sustain us, please accept our humble praise. We are wayward creatures and forgetful, slow to offer praise and quick to find fault. When we forget, please inspire us anew to raise our grateful praise to you, Lord, for our lives, for this beautiful world, and most of all for your care and love for us, made manifest in your son Jesus Christ. Amen.*

### **John Parker**

John has served in various ministries and leadership roles at Nassau Presbyterian Church over the years. He is thankful for the continuing witness of Nassau to the Word of God, for his church family, and especially for the students of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade Zoom church school, who keep him on his toes and help him to better understand our shared faith.



# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 28, 2020*

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## **Matthew 2:13–18**

***Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” Then 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” (Matthew 2:13–15 NRSV).***

How would it feel to be told to leave your house to go to a new country to protect your newborn child? Even though protecting your baby is your number one priority, I’d be upset. “But God, all my stuff is here! I can’t pack this crib into my car! What about my wedding china? Can’t I just move to the next neighborhood over?”

A lot was being asked of Joseph: acceptance of a child of the Holy Spirit by his future wife *and then* having to move to Egypt? Especially after meeting wise men and shepherds who came to praise Jesus, why is this exalted one being told to move? This child is to be praised!

But without thought or question, Joseph and his family go to Egypt until Herod’s death, forging into new territory without hesitation or complaint. May we all have such faith that we are willing to follow God’s voice, directing us how we can best be used.

*Heavenly Father, keep our hearts open for direction and guidance from you, especially when we are unbelieving of what path you are sending us on and unwilling to listen. Amen.*

### **Kate Torrey**

With her husband, Tim Flood, Kate misses seeing your faces from the balcony every Sunday, but Zoom coffee hours have been a lovely temporary substitute. As new homeowners and soon-to-be new parents, they are looking forward to the excitement 2021 will bring.

*December 29, 2020*

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## Isaiah 49:1–15

***Seem they will come from afar—some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Aswan (Isaiah 49:12 NIV).***

In this passage Isaiah is predicting the restoration of Israel, but he is emphasizing that God's blessings are not intended exclusively for the Israelites. He predicts that people will come from the north and the west. Those are directions.

Then he adds that people will come from Aswan. That's a place.

Aswan is located on the Nile River and today is part of Egypt. The occupants, however, are not traditional Egyptians. They are Nubians, a tribe of black Africans who have their own distinct language and a very rich culture. That was also true of their ancestors in biblical times.

I believe Isaiah was trying to make a specific point when he included Aswan in this particular passage: God's love is universal.

As children of God, our love should also be universal.

*Father, we know you have commanded us to love others as much as we love ourselves. Help us to extend that love to people who are different from us as well as to people who are similar to us. Help us to do whatever we can to help others live more abundant, rewarding lives. Amen.*

### **Jay Dunn**

Jay is a semi-retired sports writer. During the baseball season he publishes a weekly column in *The Trentonian*.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 30, 2020*

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## Psalm 108

***My heart is unwavering, God.***

***I will sing and make music—yes, with my whole being! (Psalm 108:1 CEB).***

This verse reminds me of Matthew 22:37: *He replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.”* I wonder if in Psalm 108 the psalmist is praising God for helping them when they needed it because they loved God with their whole being. The psalmist is now saying that they will be faithful to God because God helped them. Reading these two passages together shows us how other parts of Scripture can help us read the Psalms. Also, the psalmist shows us how Scripture can shape our lives, even when it takes some thinking to realize that God was speaking to us through Scripture.

*God, help us to remember to follow your commandments and be faithful to you. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.*

### **Nico Barreto**

Nico is 10 and in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. He enjoys participating in the chancel drama every summer. He likes chinchillas and believes in unicorns. He spends most of his free time reading.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*December 31, 2020*

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## John 8:12–19

***When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”***

***The Pharisees challenged him, “Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid” (John 8:12–13 NIV).***

This is one of my favorite verses and it makes me recall my encounters with the many people that seem to pass judgment on things big and small using their very limited perception of reality and without any apparent modicum of wisdom. It is a human predicament to think that one knows it all as one is unable to grasp that there is something beyond comprehension. It is also a human predicament to walk in the so-called darkness and operate through life from the vantage point of ego and limited understanding.

From the vantage point of humanity, walking in darkness has many pitfalls and humans cause other humans much pain and suffering. To alleviate our self-inflicted pain and suffering, Jesus gave us a gift and his gift is in his being as the light of the world. His promise to us is that if we follow this light, we will never walk in darkness. Jesus appears to us as his own witness as he is the light of the world and does not need corroboration, or proving who he is since he stands with God who sent him to lift humanity from the darkness into the light of truth.

It does pain me to no end to live amongst others who dwell in darkness. It does pain me even more to bear witness to all the string of miserable events that has befallen on the human race because of those in control who dwell in darkness. There is really only one thing that can save humanity and that is to realize that Jesus is the light to follow as only he can save us from more misery as we move from the darkness to the light.

*Jesus, I pray to you that you lift the veil of ignorance that is clouding people’s vision so that they can move from the darkness into the light so that humanity’s pain and suffering is lifted. Jesus, I also pray to you to help me see the light so that when I need it the most, I am able to trust into a higher purpose in order to withstand my own trials and tribulations. Amen.*

### **Lina Genovesi**

Lina has been a member of Nassau Church since April 2019. She is an intellectual property attorney with a law firm in Greenwich, Connecticut. She spends her free time working on her memoir of growing up in Beirut, Lebanon.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*January 1, 2021*

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## **Ecclesiastes 3:1–13**

***I know that there's nothing better for them but to enjoy themselves and do what's good while they live. Moreover, this is the gift of God: that all people should eat, drink, and enjoy the results of their hard work (Ecclesiastes 3:12–13 CEB).***

My husband and I recently celebrated our fifteenth wedding anniversary with a sushi supper for two.

As Errol unpacked the take-out, he asked, “What are the kids having?”

I shrugged, “I don’t know. Frozen pizza?”

He winced. “That’s not going to go over well.”

Of course, he was right. Our brood soon swarmed the table, begging for bites.

While these verses from Ecclesiastes seem to give us a free pass for indulgences and our recent holiday gorging, I fancied the concept of enjoyment as a divine gift stemming from labor. We’re suddenly in the fable, *The Little Red Hen*: you don’t get a slice of warm bread if you didn’t put in the work.

No one earns God’s love or works for God’s grace, and our kids are learning this. Yet, the lesson of hard work is a valuable one. Perhaps they will learn it soon. Maybe in the new year, they’ll work to save up and buy their own sushi.

*Dear God, Thank you for minds and bodies that can work and play. Amen.*

### **Anne Thomsen Lord**

Anne is a deacon, ruling elder, and mother of four. She works early in the morning as a lifeguard at the Princeton YMCA, but has a lot of fun there too.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*January 2, 2021*

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## **Psalms 117–118**

***I was pushed hard, so that I was falling  
but the LORD helped me (Psalm 118:13 NRSV).***

I remember slowly waking up on the Sunday prior to the election. In those moments between sleep and wakefulness, when the mind races without any logic or perspective, I found myself panicking about the imminent vote, the Supreme Court, and the pandemic. I sensed for the first time in my life, if only for a few moments, what real depression must feel like. For those of you who deal with depression on a serious and sustained level, my heart goes out to you.

I realized, at that moment, I needed something more than my own emotional resources, support from family and friends, and what any medication could provide. I needed to rely on my faith more than ever before. At 72, I've finally come to appreciate that there are times when faith and prayer are the only balms that can make the wounded whole.

The closing words of Dave's sermon brought me comfort and encouragement: "Jesus, I know who you are and I am begging you to do something about all this. Strengthen and inspire me to do my part...because, if steadfast love and faithfulness is who you are, then it has to be who I am."

*Steadfast love and faithfulness* appear in Psalm 118 and Psalm 86, the text for the sermon. The footnotes on Psalm 118 in my Bible describe it as a "thanksgiving for deliverance in battle," which aptly describes the challenges we face today: a battle for our democracy, our rule of law, and our lives. We need all the help we can get in dealing with these existential challenges but I am most sustained by the faith we share. For, in the end, each of us can say with the psalmist, *I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me.*

*Enduring Lord, these are hard times, but we have seen hard times before and you have always been there for us. Help us to stay positive, to find ways to be connected, and to focus, in this new year, on the spirit of our recent Christmas celebration. Amen.*

### **Tom Charles**

Tom, along with his wife Lynn, is a long-time Nassau member having a relatively easy, but still challenging, time during these hard days: being retired, having Marisa (who remotely continues her NGO work in Burma/Myanmar) staying with us since March, appreciating the quarantine discipline by Natalie (on the staff of a retirement community) and her husband Paolo, and relishing live-streamed worship and hymn sings.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*January 3, 2021*

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## **John 1:(1–9), 10–18**

***The Word became flesh  
and made his home among us (John 1: 14a CEB).***

This text from John is included in the lectionary readings for worship on the second Sunday after Christmas as well as verses 1–14 for Christmas Day for all three years. At Nassau we hear it as the concluding text for the Lessons and Carols Service on Christmas Eve.

This year I am stuck on *Word*. In the Greek text, it is *logos*, which means much more than a spoken or printed word. It is word, spirit, and mind. I'm no linguist, but from my limited study of other languages, I know that learning vocabulary is one thing, but learning the language involves much more. Learning to read your own language is rote until something clicks and the words come alive with meaning, a meaning specific to your culture and context. Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator popular a few decades ago, spoke of learning to read the world, along with learning to read the words.

As we begin this new year and slowly make our way out of a pandemic crisis, how will we read the world as we follow the Word made flesh? These 18 verses are John's nativity story, but the rest of his Gospel, along with the other three Gospels, needs to be our focus, our words, spirit and mind, our ministry as he taught and showed us.

*God, Word become flesh, we asked for the courage and strength to open our spirits and minds to follow your path as people of your way. In your name, we pray. Amen.*

### **Carol Wehrheim**

Carol is Clerk of Session, but cherishes most her opportunity to tell the words, the stories of the Bible to all generations, hoping that the message translates to the worlds of the listeners.



# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*January 4, 2021*

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## **Psalms 120–123**

*The Lord will protect you from all evil;  
God will protect your very life.  
The Lord will protect you on your journeys—  
whether going or coming—  
from now until forever from now (Psalm 121:7–8 CEB).*

God is your warrior. He fights for your body in the day and in the night. He is your shield that protects you from the danger. His shield spreads throughout the world. He will never forget you. He reminds you every day that you are safe, and he will protect you. And that makes me feel safe and happy.

*Dear God, you are my protector. Amen.*

### **Pryor Roberts**

Pryor is a fourth grader at Village Elementary School. He enjoys playing baseball with his brother, Go Fish with his sister, painting with his mama, and woodworking with his dad. He loves nature and all of God's creatures.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*January 5, 2021*

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## **Luke 6:27–31**

***But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you (Luke 6:27–28 NRSV).***

The message of “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” in Luke 6, verse 31 is one of the most simple, yet challenging, requests the Lord makes of us. It makes sense in theory, we are all children of God and thus all want similar things; love, respect, kindness, compassion, the list can go on! Why, then, is it so hard to live by these words? I think the answer to this question can be found in the verses leading to this Golden Rule. When someone curses me, mistreats me, or hates me, my initial response is not to love them, do good things to them, and bless and pray for them. I have trained myself to think of myself without thinking of them. What is the motivation for the action? How can I show kindness and love against adversity? These questions seem especially applicable in the social climate we live in, whether it be oppositions in thought regarding politics, the current health crisis, or even aspects of people that can never be changed. In this season leading to the epiphany, it is important to remember the light the magi followed to find the Christ child. We too need to be a light to others – preaching the gospel at all times. When necessary, using words.

*Dear God, please give us the wisdom and strength to live by your tenets, even when they are challenging. Empower us to truly embody the words attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love.” Allow us to be beacons of light to others, just as the star lit the darkness and revealed the path to the magi. Amen.*

### **Robert Duffy**

Robert has participated in the life of Nassau Church for years now, despite it feeling like it was only a couple months since first stepping between those iconic, ionic columns. He has continued being an active “cyber-participant” in Breaking Bread, which he finds grounds him and allows him to explore his faith during this time of solitude. He is a dermatology resident at Cooper University Hospital and finds joy in his calling to heal others.

# DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

*January 6, 2021*

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## Isaiah 60:1–6

***Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.  
For darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the LORD will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you (Isaiah 60:1–2 NRSV).***

These words speak such hope and joy. My most favorite way to hear them is in an alto aria in Händel's Messiah. The music feels like a glorious hug for the soul followed by the choir veritably dancing its response. The music suddenly changes as the bass broods about a darkness that will cover the earth and its people. And yet, the sun audibly comes out of the darkness at, "but the Lord will arise upon you." These words of joy for Israel feel like a balm in this year of so much "thick darkness."

Please enjoy these recordings from Händel's Messiah.

[No. 9: O Thou That Tellest Good Tidings to Zion](#)

[No. 10: For Behold, Darkness Shall Cover the Earth & No. 11: The People That Walked in Darkness](#)

*Dear God, especially in this time of darkness of winter and of an ongoing pandemic, we look to the light of your son Jesus. We are grateful that his light shines through even our darkest darkness. Help us to seek the light when we forget its presence, and see the light when it appears dim and distant. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

### **Christianne Bessièrès Lane**

Christianne is a mom, wife, and musician. She, with her flutist husband John, has been a member of Nassau since 2003, and sang in the choir for several years before the gifts of her two children. She looks forward to the day when we can arise and sing our praises to God together in the sanctuary.