

Your ministers have been discussing what life is going to look like post-pandemic. We started dreaming of what our world, our church, our lives would look like if we chose to be led by love. Inspired by excerpts from WH Auden's For the Time Being, the theme of "Love Unleashed" became the focus for this year's book of Advent devotions. Besides the beautiful original artwork created by Katie Hastings and Alton Lacey, photo's from the internet are included to bring a visual source for contemplation for each devotion submitted. Who knew that an image of the game Trionimos would exemplify Love Unleashed?

A few details about this devotion booklet. The entries are undated. It begins with the first Sunday of Advent, followed by devotions for each day of the week. Since Christmas is late this year, the book would work for most years.

The resources on the final pages include scripture readings for each day of Advent. There is also space to reflect on the year 2020 and anticipate the year 2021. Your reflections on this unique year will be keepsake for the future.

We pray you will not only be blessed, but inspired by the words of your fellow KBC friends.

Auden—Excerpted from poem:

For the Time Being

Hear, child, what I am sent to tell:

Love wills your dream to happen, so

Love's will on earth may be, through you,

No longer a pretend but true.

Love's will requires your own, that in

The flesh whose love you do not know,

Love's knowledge into flesh may grow.

Today the Unknown seeks the known;

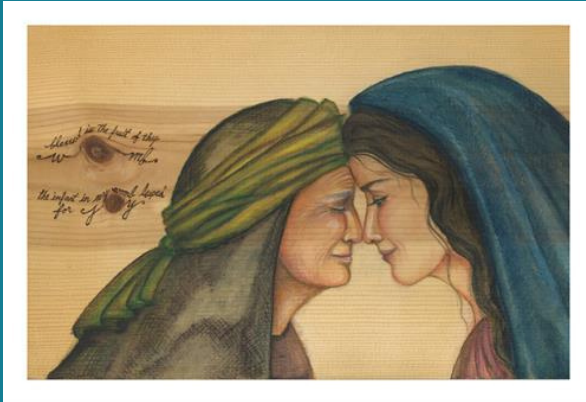
What I am willed to ask, your own

Will has to answer; child, it lies

Within your power of choosing to

Conceive the Child who chooses you.

HOPE



Maysoun Y. Seman has been named People's Choice Winner with her mixed media artwork titled "Mary and Elizabeth - The Visitation" in the Seventh Juried Catholic Arts Exhibition, part of a multimedia show of religious-themed art at The Saint Vincent Gallery at Saint Vincent College.

Seman draws her artistic inspiration from her family's journey to the United States in 1981 following the persecution and violence of the Iran-Iraq War. Executed in watercolor on wood, "Mary and Elizabeth - The Visitation" explores the relationship of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, during the Visitation scene of Luke 1:39-56. Traditionally, Elizabeth is considered Mary's cousin, but in the Chaldean Rite, she is considered Mary's aunt. As a child, Seman's family Rosary was recited in their native tongue of Aramaic, with the second joyful Mystery specifically identifying Elizabeth as Saint Anne's sister. Seman's artwork reflects the deep closeness shared between Mary and Elizabeth.

www.stvincent.edu/community-events/newsroom/2018/12/04/gallery-announces-peoples-choice-winner-in-juried-catholic-arts-competition



Alton Lacey, Artist

The feathers in this work of art includes kingfisher, jungle cock, turkey, wood duck, and rooster. Chrismons in gold join the silhouettes of the birds. to complete the shape of the heart. With the exception of the heart, the Chrismons are those that also appear in the sky, the angel, dove, and star.

Alton had been thinking about Emily Dickinson's line "Hope is the thing with feathers". The theme of Love Unleashed suggested to Alton "love is the thing with feathers".



"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all-

Emily Dickinson



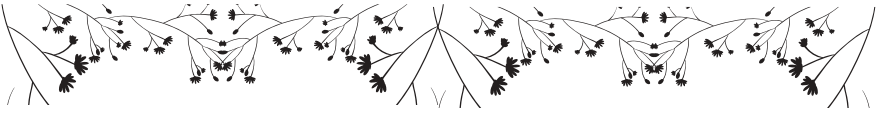
Jody Clegg

As a seminary student, I'd often realize that I hadn't remembered a passage correctly particularly the more familiar it was to me. However, I didn't usually feel as if I hadn't even heard the passage at all before such humiliating moments-at least I didn't until one morning during Advent, as I sat in a weekly chapel service. The reading was from Luke's account of John the Baptist. I almost wasn't listening, because I was so convinced I knew what the passage said. I was wrong. I heard: "the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness."

(Luke 3:2b) I always thought each Gospel said John the Baptist spoke *from* the wilderness. Perhaps this difference matters only to nerdy seminary students, but I now had a new image of John the Baptist's wilderness life. He wasn't the hectoring misfit with a strange wardrobe and eccentric diet who always rains on our premature Christmas parade. The passage told me God spoke to him *in* the wilderness. If that's the case, the wilderness is no longer a place of desolation.

It's a place where God still speaks to us. I will never be romantic about wilderness, particularly since my idea of camping is a night at Motel 6. I've known emotional and spiritual wildernesses, too, and I won't wax about how God uses them to refine me or you. We may leave a wilderness with scars that always leave a mark or memories of a despair that we can never reframe. I won't lessen this fact, either: all of us will spend some time in a wilderness. If we didn't know that last Advent, we do now. It's a place between a promise given and a promise fulfilled. It's the place of uncertainty or anxiety or cancelled plans or dashed hopes where we never expected to go. However we got there, the desolation feels the same. We don't know what will happen to us or what we'll see on the other side. We only know we're not there yet. Into this wilderness for Israel, God still spoke- and into our wilderness, God still speaks. Perhaps we can only hear some words from God when we're in the wilderness, when rival hopes and fake versions of good news have failed us, when there is nothing in ourselves to give or from the world we can take that will turn the situation around. In this wilderness, we hear God saying this is not our new permanent address, but neither is it merely a place we'll eventually leave. Even now, we have a future and a hope.





In the meantime, we have work to do: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." (Luke 3: 4-6)

We don't need to pretend the wilderness really isn't that difficult or rough for us. Yet, the wilderness can also be a place where we come to know what Wendell Berry describes as coming "into the peace of wild things, who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief." This poem's narrator goes on to say: "And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free." Maybe this Advent, you'll know something like this peace in the wilderness, where God's presence comes to you not only in words of hope you can only hear in the wilderness' silence. Perhaps you also get a glimpse of light waiting to break through, and it's a ray of hope not even the wilderness can overcome.



View from City of Petra by Betty McCoy





Jim Layman

Love Came Down

God so loved the world that He gave His Son and that Son dwelt among us. God, prior to this Advent or descent into our world, loved but never had it been expressed so fully and intimately than when Jesus came down and incarnated Himself within our world and our lives. My understanding and consequent perception of how, God who is love, has brought that love to us in an up close and personal way has changed somewhat for me during this age of Covid and unrest. An influence was Richard Rohr's, *The Universal Christ*. He shares how God imbeds Himself in creation and in our very lives through Jesus. Somehow that closeness and availability of love and its power changed somewhat for me when my thinking went from how the kingdom of God is within and the Holy Spirit indwells us to thinking about the personal Jesus living within us. That presence began to feel more intimate. This view has helped me to realize that I don't have to bring Him down to be with me. We need not pray for "God to be with us". He already is! It just requires our awareness. Rohr states, "we spend so much time trying to "get up there", we miss that God's big leap in Jesus was to come "down here". He also states that "so much of our worship and religious effort is the spiritual equivalent of trying to go up what has become the down escalator". Like so many of you, my thoughts have focused on how in the world we can heal this fractured nation and surmount the differences. I gained some refreshing hope when I read a book from a political writer on that very theme. His suggestion was to begin with Jesus and then to Love your neighbor (the one whose ideas differ). Congressman Carl Lewis is an example of someone who did just that and as a consequence made us better as a nation. Love came down and that indwelling Love sets us free. During this Advent, I challenge you and myself to live out that love in a way that brings about healing and change for the good!

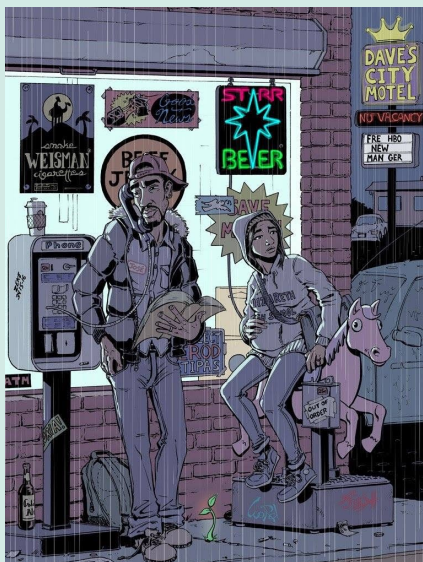
Linda Liebman

I'm a child of the 60s. Therefore, I grew up with John F. Kennedy's rallying cry of "Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country." To me this motto sounded a lot like the golden rule, "Ask not what others can do for you, but ask what you can do for others." This has always sounded to me like a mandate for hands-on ministries, reaching out to others who have great needs with practical action. At this time of advent 2020, I think about the Hospitality Houses that KBC has been sponsoring for the last two years. This ministry has reached out to strangers who have been in need of shelter and support due to a medical issues in their family. Issues that required greater treatment than what their communities could provide. These are people who need help, strangers who have never been here before and may not have finances to pay for a place to stay as they receive treatment. They are apprehensive, anxious, and unsure of what will happen. Their main reason for coming is hope for a future void of the health issues of their child. Hoping their child will be born again.

Unlike the young weary couple looking for lodging in the night, and hearing, "No room", KBC says, "Welcome, we have a room for you- not just a room, but a house!" The technology of now with air travel, cell phones to stay in touch, miraculous medical advances, are all very different from the world of Mary and Joseph, but the need for a place to stay, and compassionate, caring people is an, "always" and KBC's Hospitality House is fulfilling that need.

Praying that a new quality of life will await them, not only for their child but for their family. Isn't this what Mary and Joseph looked forward to when they traveled to Bethlehem? The birth of hope when everything seems to be falling apart.

I'm so proud of KBC for starting this ministry and all the others that we support.





Ray Killebrew

"A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham." Matthew 1:1-17

While serving as an intelligence officer during the 1950's in the US Army in Washington, DC, my older brother – Lt. Colonel (ret.) Roland L. Killebrew -- used his spare evening hours researching our family's American heritage. A librarian at the National Archives in Washington, DC was of great help to him. The suggestion was that he should start with the known family facts and work back to the unknown. In addition, the librarian gave my brother information pertaining to the various types of records on file and where those files were in the archives. That was the start of a family booklet entitled – "Nine Generations of Killebrew Families in America"—published in the 1960's. I assisted my brother by editing his research notes combined with family stories. He thanked me for my assistance in the preface page of his booklet. For me -- editing his research and writing was both fun and enlightening. "No need for the thanks and recognition," I told him. "You have hooked me on family genealogy!"

Matthew's record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ covers fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem -- a total of forty-two generations. I must wonder if Matthew was assisted as he gathered the genealogy of Jesus along with the amazing stories of his birth and ministry. I suspect he was. However, there is no mention of assisted research or writing. Look at the first chapter of Matthew as you observe this Advent Season and think about the overwhelming historical and spiritual significance verses 1 thru 17 play into the birth of the Christ Child. While you are at it, turn to Luke 3:23-37 for Luke's genealogical take on Jesus' lineage and birth. No problem? We genealogists are used to different family lineage perspectives. The important point for we who are followers of Jesus is the promise of salvation thru Jesus' birth and ministry ... leading to the cross.



My Prayer: Lord, I am so thankful to be a member of your family ... your world. Thanks for the invitation. Amen

Matt Vandagriff

W. H. Auden For the Time Being-Excerpt

Hear, child, what I am sent to tell:
Love wills your dream to happen, so
Love's will on earth may be, through you,
No longer a pretend but true.
Love's will requires your own, that in
The flesh whose love you do not know,
Love's knowledge into flesh may grow.

The first line of this Auden poem struck me, not because they are particularly poignant, prophetic or profound. I was struck because in those words I heard a perpetual reminder, "Hear, child, what I am sent to tell..." As someone who uses a lot of words through preaching and teaching it's an important reminder in this season of Advent that I, like all of us, have been "sent to tell." Your sending might look different than mine, but we have all been sent. We are all participating in a line of prophets, messengers of God, who have been sent not just to do things, but also to tell things. To tell things that have been rooted deeply in our souls through other saints who have told us things along the way. To tell things that are true, holy, and enlivened by God's love. The things that we will tell will have lasting impact if they are told within the reality of the Advent season. Advent is the beginning again of telling one another a story that has been told to us. That story must be told repeatedly in order for our souls to be shaped by the love that is portrayed in this season with the birth of a child. As you walk these days in the journey to the Christmas season, take a moment and ask God, "What do you want me to say?"



PEACE

The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.
The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.
Isaiah 11:6-9

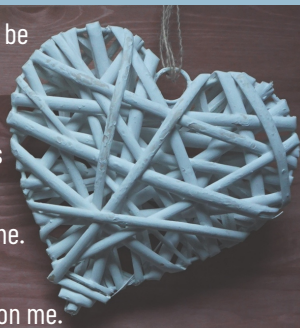


Von Hulin

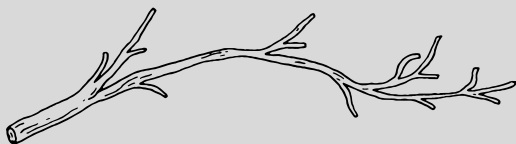
When I was thinking about something that defines "Love Unleashed" for me I pretty quickly thought of my two older sisters, Dona and Dana. As many of you know I am number 6 of 7 kids. Dona and Dana are numbers 2 and 3. Because of this, they have both been my back up moms for as long as I can remember. They both have supported me and been my biggest cheerleaders over the years whether it was graduations, job changes, promotions, moves across the country or other opportunities. They were both supportive and encouraging when I told them I had been asked to serve as a deacon and then again to chair a pastor search committee. This may not seem like a big deal to some but for both of them these were not in their general comfort zone as our churches are very different. Despite this, they were there for me. Cards and phone calls never miss a birthday or holiday. Sharing ridiculous stories, priceless road trips together and a lot of eating (early and often) are just a few things that connect us. We have also cried through diagnoses, accidents, loss of loved ones, break-ins, job losses, a wild fire and a pandemic.

You know how back in the old days when kids used to be able to ride in the front seat of the car and the driver had to hit the brakes rather unexpectedly? And do you remember your mom's right arm rocketing across the front seat to block you from going through the windshield? I'm 55 years old and they still do this to me.

Each time this happens, I grin and am reminded how grateful I am that they continue to unleash their love on me.



HOME



Sarah Kaplan

Good King Wenceslas

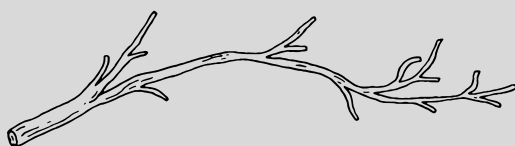
Sire, the night is darker now, And the wind blows stronger
Fails my heart, I know not how I can go no longer
Mark my footsteps, my good page, Tread thou in them boldly
Thou shalt find the winter's rage, Freeze thy blood less coldly
In his master's steps he trod, Where the snow lay dinted
Heat was in the very sod, Which the Saint had printed
Therefore, Christian men, be sure, Wealth or rank possessing
Ye who now will bless the poor, Shall yourselves find blessing



What does it mean to care for someone? To really look beyond yourself, your own needs and not only acknowledge those who are struggling, but to actively pursue changing their situation. In one of my favorite Christmas stories, King Wenceslas looked out from his warm castle after feasting and saw a man struggling to gather firewood. He was moved to action after conferring with his young page that this man, was indeed his neighbor and was quite without means.

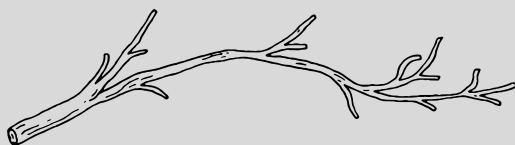
Like this story we have all looked out from our own dwellings to ponder how our homebound friends can sustain normal relationships. We've only been put into this new normal for a comparatively short time and many of us feel inadequate on how to successfully navigate this challenging time with such a void of community. As in the story, the young page does not want to leave the warmth of the castle to help Wenceslas take the man food, drink and fuel for his fire. He laments at the difficulty of the task, especially as they will be forced to trudge through the deep snow drifts.





Many of us falter at taking that first step because we worry that it won't be the right one. How can we provide for this person? Will we say or do the wrong thing? How can we bring some figurative and literal warmth to the people in our community who live so close, yet feel far away due to the pandemic?

His young page had no inclination to move into action. Many of us have also felt frozen in how to express our love to one another during these strange times. The magic of this story, as we see time and time again, is setting the example for those around us. Wenceslas' practical approach and wisdom of "follow in my footsteps" is something we can all aspire too. Can we pull ourselves out of our "new normal" to find ways to show people they still belong to us, to this church family, to our community? King Wenceslas forging ahead in the deep drifts of uncharted territory, slowly, but methodically laying the path for those who would come after.



Hal Morse

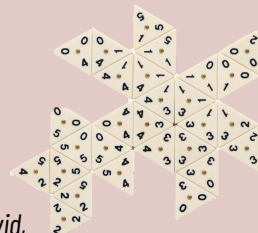
"Suffering. Character. Endurance. Hope."

I therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy spirit which has been given to you. The word "suffering" actually means to be intensely, deeply involved in something. Anything. Not just pain or hardship or difficulty. Sometimes it is just our day-to-day living that draws us in to a deeper level of living, experiencing, thinking and feeling. Life can make great demands on our heart, mind and soul. Building endurance, character and finally hope in the face of the most difficult moments takes one thing—"the love of God poured into our hearts." Here, again, love is the key to it all. It is because of love that we often suffer in the first place. Because of love we are able to endure. Because of love we are able to find new strength and purpose. Because of love we are bold enough to hope. Because of love we are not disappointed. We don't always get what we want. We don't always want what we get. It is grace in our lives that love can bring what we need. Our faithfulness allows hope to be real; not wishes or wants, but hope; a hope that comes from love. A love in the relationship in our life that sustains us at the most needful moments.



Betty McCoy

The Inns (Los Posadas)



And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. (Luke 2:4-6)

After Joseph and Mary traveled from their home to Bethlehem, they had a medical emergency and needed to find a place of privacy for Mary and the new baby to be secluded for a several days.

A couple of years ago, Caroline Penberthy and I visited facilities who offered long-term stay for families with medical needs after the Ministry Council approached us with the task of reaching out to hospitals and organization. We needed to see what the process would be to make it known to area medical facilities that we had available lodging, and the families would be welcome to stay for long-term medical care, as needed, in St. Louis. I had concerns! Who would these unknown families be, living in our midst (right next door!) for days, weeks, or months? How do we welcome them without being intrusive? Would they welcome us? How do we get this information out to the church family? Would the houses meet the needs of those with special needs? Would the preparation of the houses be ready for incoming families (oh, the hours of work that went into this effort by Bill Starkey and Steve Ruth, along with others and the generous donations given to make these inns a home away from home)? God is an amazing God who initiated this ministry in our church knowing as he knows all things that KBC would be willing to put it into action. God is always at work around us. We just need to find where we fit into his work!

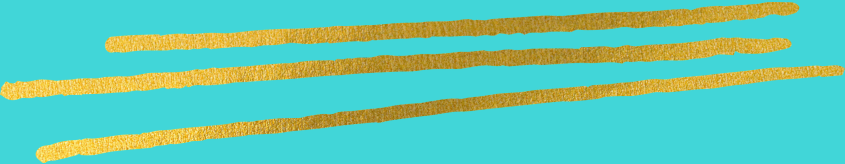
The families who have stayed in the KBC hospitality houses have been a blessing to me. My joy has been seeing smiles on the faces of Iswell and Nikeshia as they learn to play Triominos, laughing as I use a translator app with the mom from St. Lucia as she shared recipes with me, trips to Magic House and the zoo with the Huskins. And, adding to all these special new relationships is, also, the shared time with the cleaning crew between families.

May the Joy of Advent be a blessing to you in 2020!

Mary Hastings

God's Love Unleashed-Covenant Relationships

My Sunday school class has spent last 6 months studying David Gushee and Glen Stassen's book: "Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context". Drs. Gushee and Stassen (and our own Jordan Mason) use the words of Jesus, spoken during the Sermon on the Mount, to examine the foundation of Christian ethics. It's "the reason for the season" if you will-encapsulating the message sent by God, through Jesus Christ. There is so much to be gleaned from this book but I'd have to say that a central truth for me has been that Jesus came to restore, redefine, and to remind us that we are called into a covenant relationship with God and with one another. It sounds particularly simple written this way, doesn't it? But the hatred, division, and oppression surrounding us today is a reminder of the work we have left to do. Work to restore relationships within our personal lives, church, community, nation, and world.



What are some of the marks of a Christ centered covenant community?

- It has a foundation of trust built by a commitment to truth (spoken and lived), integrity, and transparency.
- The fundamentals of Christian living, discipleship and repentance are apparent.
- It is a community that knows we journey together as Christ's disciples and is open to conversations that confront and convict us of our sins against one another and God. Those conversations lead to repentance and change.
- The people of the community invite and welcome ALL of God's people and ALL of who each of us are into the community. This invitation restores to community the parts of ourselves and others that keep us on the margins.

Christ Centered Covenant Communities...

- are steadfast in their commitment to offer forgiveness, healing, and aid to one another.
- are courageous. They stand against the powerful and dominant and stand with the poor, oppressed, and shunned. They participate, with God, in delivering covenant restoring justice.
- see with compassion. The people of the community enter into the lives of those in need (not stand afar in judgement), which helps them understand the actions required to transform lives and society.
- act with responsibility and recognition of appropriate boundaries. There are times when we must “shake the dust from our feet” and turn away.

God's love was unleashed with the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus gave us some pretty clear guidelines about how we are expected to spread that love, let our answer be the same as Mary's... “I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” Luke 1:38



Mary Southerd

Kyle Damron

One of my favorite hymns to sing during the Advent season is not one that typically comes to others' minds. Yet, it is a hymn that I find to be very appropriate for the season. It is Charles Wesley's "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling." The first two stanzas of "Love Divine" is one of the best examples of good theology composed in the form of a hymn:

Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heaven to earth come down,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown,
Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit into every troubled breast,
Let us all in thee inherit, let us find the promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning, Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its beginning, set our hearts at liberty.

Wesley does in his hymn what Auden does in his poem by reminding the singer/reader of two essential truths. First of all, Love is God, and God is Love. Secondly, Love has come to us on this earth so that we may know Love—God, and our hearts may be unbounded from both the chains of sin and our vain, restless love for sin, and, instead, may be loosed (unleashed!) to love as God loves—compassionately, purely, and boundlessly.

David Brooks, in his "Road to Character," states that for many people, "religious and non-religious, love provides a glimpse of some realm beyond the edge of what we know. It also in a more practical sense enlarges the heart...[Love] somehow makes the heart more open and more free...the more you love, the more you can love." Wesley would respond to Brooks and say, "Amen. Love divine is unbounded." Auden would respond, "Amen. Love's will on earth may be, through you, no longer pretend but true...Love's knowledge into flesh may grow."

My dream for 2021 is that our hearts, as followers of Jesus—Love in flesh, would enlarge so that our love for all people would be more than ever before. If 2020 has taught us anything, it has taught us that there is still room for growth.

JOY

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

Luke 1:39-45



Taylor Mason

Although this section of the poem represents the angel speaking to Mary before giving birth to Jesus, I first read it from the perspective of the Holy Spirit talking to me. I felt as though the Spirit was informing me that "Love's will on earth may be, through you, no longer a pretend but true." but in a world filled with division and hatred, this can be a difficult path to follow. At first, following the opposite of "Love's will" seems fun and often justified. Hate's will can seem to come out of righteous anger, but unrestrained anger can lead to all consuming hatred. Once hatred takes seed in our hearts, then it begins to grow like an invasive vine that slowly sucks the life out of us. At first, leaning into our hatred seems freeing. It can even fill us with temporary satisfaction. But over time we are consumed and our entire being is rooted in this visceral sense of hatred distorting our ability to see other people as ourselves. As Christians we are called to live differently. Jesus embodied the will of Love on earth throughout his life. He cared for the least of these within his community and showed how we are to care for one another in the world. When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus replied, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might," and "thy neighbor as thyself." Of course the age old question to Jesus' statement is, "Who is our neighbor?" Only once the neighbor is defined does our moral obligation become clear. Howard Thurman, a 20th century theologian and mystic answered it this way, "In a memorable story Jesus defined the neighbor by telling of the Good Samaritan. With sure artistry and great power he depicted what happened when a man responds directly to human need across the barriers of class, race, and condition. Every man is potentially every other man's neighbor. Neighborliness is nonspatial: it is qualitative. A man must love his neighbor directly, clearly, permitting no barriers between." When we follow in the footsteps of Jesus, and remember that every person is our neighbor, and the hatred of others has no place in the kingdom of God. Love is the only way to make change and transformation in our world. But if we are honest, we often don't like that plan. We like the plan that allows us to hate our neighbors, when it seems warranted. It is easy and indulgent to hate others when they share a political statement online that we disagree with, or even believe is morally wrong. But this is not how we have been called to live. Instead, the spirit of

God is asking of us to bring "Love's knowledge into flesh." When we, as Christians, push back against the worldly tendency to hate one another, and embrace an ethic of love, this is when the world can change. When Jesus' love-ethic is lived out, nations are saved from civil wars. When Jesus' love-ethic is lived out, racist people begin to see others as equals. When Jesus' love ethic is lived out, we are able to sit at a table and share coffee with that one relative we always disagree with politically. During advent we are reminded of the coming of Jesus' birth. We anticipate his coming because Jesus' life transformed the world. He cared for everyone through love and as Christians the only way for us to change the world is to walk alongside Jesus. And when we do this, Love's will on earth will no longer be pretend but true.



Las Sagrada Familia, Barcelona, Spain



Caroline Penberthy

The theme and mission of the Hospitality House Ministry is captured in the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28 "Come unto Me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." Often when families come to our Hospitality House they have been handling medical problems for a long time and are weary, discouraged, hoping for a final solution. Past efforts have not been successful and they must try new sometimes long, painful and difficult procedures. We reach out to them, in the name of Christ, to share our warm and welcoming homes. This Christmas 2020, it will be two years that we have been able to offer our place of shelter. We have served 50 persons from 5 states and 6 different countries. We serve five different hospitals that have treated: scoliosis, a heart transplant, a club foot, bone marrow transplants, hip replacements, and cared for several preemies. It has been like Christmas in many cases as we see the delight of families, finally, experiencing hope, healing and restoration for their loved ones. Despite the fact that she was shut out of her homeland due to Covid, I was able to share a new skill with one of the moms. As we sat in the Prayer Garden she learned how to crochet. It was like Christmas for both of us because we could see the light in her eyes as she caught on so quickly and began crocheting on her own. She began making gifts for her family at home, looking ahead to when she could give these gifts to her loved ones. It was a joyful occasion of the Christmas spirit in Hot July!!!!

Kathy Bernhard

LOVE UNLEASHED

...a challenge to think who inspired
us and filled us with God's love

WHO

Grandmothers, Girl Scout leaders,
Sunday School teachers

WHAT

Unconditional acceptance, High
expectations, Bible truths and
promises of God's love

WHERE

Breakfast table, Camp-outs and flag
ceremonies, preschool rooms and
e-mail chains

WHEN

Yesteryears, Christmas caroling
season, Palm Sunday processions
with waving palm fronds

WHY

Faith in God's love, Hope for brighter
futures, Love for the youngest at
heart



Bryan Troop

Advent has a way of focusing me on the meaning of religion in our personal lives. Each of the actors in the story of Advent had choices to make, which reflected their individual basic concepts of life. This is what we call religion. Matthew was probably written to the Jewish Christians of his day. He goes to great lengths throughout his gospel to show how Jesus fulfilled historical expectations. He began with the genealogy of Joseph, the legal father of Jesus, but famously omits several distant relatives. However, he is careful to include women such as Tamar,



Rahab, and Ruth. Tamar became pregnant after seducing her father in law. Rahab was a known prostitute. Ruth survived starvation by seducing Boaz. Matthew does not mention Bathsheba's name, the mother of Solomon, but alluded to her as the wife of David "that had been the wife of Uriah". These stories were well known, and somewhat embarrassing. Why mention these particular women in the genealogy of Jesus? Matthew introduces this genealogy before introducing the problem of the pregnancy of Mary, which somehow had occurred before her marriage to Joseph. The explanation of premarital pregnancy was done in

Matthew's and Luke's gospels by ascribing it to the "Holy Spirit". (The pregnancy wasn't early, the marriage was just late.) Some of us, probably many of us Christians, suspect that God uses ordinary people and ordinary circumstances to advance her goals. What if Mary had become pregnant after a seduction, or even after a rape, as some theologians have posited? After all, Sepphoris, a Roman stronghold, was only a few miles northwest of Nazareth. The word we translate as "virgin", from the Greek parthenos, can mean young unmarried woman. In Matthew's gospel, he may be preparing his readers for the embarrassment that the leader of the Church was born under unconventional circumstances. In this episode, unlike the gospel of Mark, Matthew made a choice to not exclude the potentially embarrassing story. But he did provide some background: The line of David has had procreative embarrassments before. The line of David would also survive this potential pregnancy scandal. The choices of Joseph and Mary are well known. They both welcomed Jesus into their family and chose to raise the child as best they could. Think through the choices of other actors in the birth narratives. Most of the people mentioned are good people: Elizabeth, Zacharias, the wise men, the shepherds. They acted on their knowledge and faith. Others, Herod, Archelaus, and various soldiers also acted, but on their misplaced faith. Their faith was all about faith in power structures. These people, good and bad, acted on their religious beliefs. Many of you may know that I am skeptical of "miracles" that claim that an action occurred that is not apparently possible in nature. There are several miracles in this story and none of them depend on coming up with supernatural actions. 1. At least part of the Christmas miracle is that our Savior originated from humble means. Mary and Joseph were apparently poor. Yet the Jesus was born to them. 2. Many people made great choices along the way. 3. Faith in God has nothing to do with faith in human power structures. Our past history is replete with examples of those who were of low value to society but had outstanding contributions to its advancement. I think that that is at least part of Matthew's gospel lesson. An unmarried, poor, pregnant teenager is not a low value person, but someone who potentially can contribute to saving the world. We should support her choices. Our choices always reflect our basic concepts of life. Our religion.

Jennifer Pirrie

When I think of our country possibly (and probably) having a Covid Christmas, it makes me sad, but I know I have to be realistic about it. We can still decorate our homes, both inside



still have Christmas trees, decorating them with our favorite ornaments and traditions. We can still bake cookies and give them to friends (although bakery cookies may be more popular this year and very yummy!) and send and receive Christmas cards (one of my favorite things about the holidays). This year, those cards may be more appreciated than ever. Certainly the message inside some of the cards will be more meaningful than ever...that God is with us in every situation, even during a world-wide pandemic.

Also, that he sent his only son to our world to make a wonderful, loving difference that we still feel and believe in today, especially at Christmas. This is the knowledge that I hope we have passed on to our guests at our hospitality houses all summer long, and that we will pass on to them at Christmas and beyond.



Black Madonna Shrine in Pacific, MO--by Donna Watts

Marthael Troester

Christmas 2020

After W. H. Auden

Chorus

Outside it's dark with a blanket of snow.
Isolated at home, nowhere to go
With time on my hands and no supervision,
News, social media, and rumination,
So much discord, disorder, division.
I feel like a hostage for the duration.
Outside it's dark with a blanket of snow.
Tropical storms in the South and Southeast,
Fires in the West, protest in the streets,
All cast a pall over Yuletide. At least
Most wear a mask and socially distance,
Though some people feel a lot of resistance.
Outside it's dark with a blanket of snow.
Strange to think about holidays now.
People struggling just to know how
To meet their family's physical needs.
We've all hunkered down in a bunker mentality.
What kind of Christmas can this possibly be
With all the traditions we may have to forego.
Outside it's dark with a blanket of snow.

Narrator

We didn't allow the news to intrude
While we wrapped the presents we ordered
online.
We sang carols with Kyle on YouTube,
And together read Luke's Christmas story.
We fixed more food than enough.
Without house guests we're over-stuffed.
The Christmas Spirit just wasn't the same.
Was it Christmas time only in name?

Time to box the nativity:

Holy Family, sheep, and donkey,
Shepherds with crooks, gifts with Wisemen,
Put up the Christ Child until Christmas again.
I have my makeshift desk to set up
To work at home till the office opens.
Recalcitrant children will get up
To sleepily face going to school again.
I grab a cup of coffee, sit and see
One more thing not where it should be.
Baby Jesus on the floor forgotten.
Christ is not put away, but with us still.
"God with us," Immanuel
Through this uncertain time.
Body and Blood, Bread and Wine,
Where two or three are gathered
I promise I will be there.
All the discord and division,
All pandemics and disasters,
All the trouble we envision.
The Christ Child, our salvation,
From before time and creation.

Chorus

He is the Way

Follow Him into a "far country."

He lived a full human life, died to save us, and
Brings us back home to His Father's house.

He is the Truth

Seek Him where Truth carries you.

He always stands in the midst of anxiety,
Chaos, and uncertainty where we need
Confidence and hope.

He is Life

Love Him with your whole self.

He is the Bridegroom at the wedding feast.
He waits for us with joy. He is Living Love.

LOVE

1 John 4:7-12; 16; 19-21

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

19 We love because he first loved us. 20 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.



Artist Katie Hastings--paper quilling



Donna Watts

Remembering the first stirrings of falling in love will turn many misty eyed recalling those feelings that made it feel like your heart would burst open. Yet, the older I get, the reality of what Love Unleashed actually looks like brings images like the one above to mind. It is similar to the picture I snapped within a couple of weeks of my dad's passing. He could hardly get out of bed, but he was on his knees rubbing a cramp out of my mom's leg.

Love Unleashed is putting the needs of another above your own.

Love Unleashed is being aware and alert to what is going on around you, seeing ways you can bring love and care to any situation.

Love Unleashed requires humility.

Love Unleashed is a choice.

Love Unleashed flows from the presence of God in your flesh.

Love Unleashed lets God be God.

Love Unleashed is required to make the Kingdom of God a reality.

Love Unleashed is "all in".

Love Unleashed begins on our knees.

Nikki Orfang

After traveling for 38 hours with 3 little kids and super anxious parents we arrived at the White House and were welcomed with open arms by Caroline. The home was toasty warm and stocked with snacks and treats that the kiddies dug straight into.

We only managed to attend one service before covid hit and was looking so forward to getting to know the kirkwood Baptist church community! This however did not stop the kindness , we had fresh bread delivered, cookies and meals. Constant messages of encouragement to help us through surgery with our little guy. Taylor Mason came to visit and was constantly making sure everything was working at the home.

Being away from home, in and out of hospital and locked down was not easy but the love and care we felt from everyone was heart warming and helped beyond what anyone could ever imagine. Fresh flowers left at our door to let us know someone was thinking of us brought constant tears to my eyes.

We had to change our travel plans until the restrictions were lifted, and so the heat of summer came along (with no summer clothing items) Katherine and Sarah gave us some lovely items to get us through. Katie and her mom shopped for us and delivered yummy food! Even the Easter bunny came to visit the boys .. the list of kindness just goes on and on

We will be forever grateful and thankful for the generosity all of you have shown us.

Have a blessed Christmas

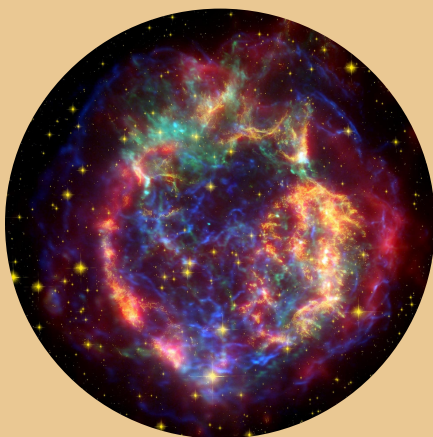
All our love the Orfang family



Allison Felter

Light and Life

When God was creating the earth and adding definition to the darkness, the first order of business was to introduce light. Light not only separates darkness, but it is an essential building block for all life on earth. Without light, we die.



Genesis 1:3

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

When God was announcing Emmanuel to the world and activating His plan to counter sin and darkness, He did so by a gleaming light in the sky.

Matthew 2:9-10

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

And when God was providing a path of reconciliation back to Him, He did so through the Light of the World.

John 8:12

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."

This Advent season as we wait, be encouraged by and claim God's amazing gift of light and life in the person of Jesus Christ. Light is the first element God spoke into being, pointing to the ultimate Light to come. What a good and miraculous God we celebrate!



Sarah Kaplan

First footfalls into the deep snow can be hard. We are constantly knocked off balance by the unsure footing, perhaps even stepping on an unseen stone or twig lying beneath. Our leg muscles strain as they push the heavy barrier away. But we keep walking, determined to reach our destination. For some of us at the end our path is the promise of being reunited with beloved friends and family. We continue to take these little big steps, unsure of how we'll get there, but certain that along the journey there will still be ways to express love, concern and friendship. We are now being called upon to forge that unseen path for each other and with each other. And in so doing, we will communicate two messages of love. The first is for those who are unsure of how to press forward in these strange and unprecedented times. We are all pathfinders now, and our doing will be an encouragement to continue to create those new trails to each other. The second message is that these new paths of connections may be steeped in missteps, but for those who are on the receiving end of them, the simple acknowledgement that they are not alone, that they are seen will mean everything. It will be the food, drink and warmth for their souls and a promising respite for all of us in this winter of isolation.

Donna Watts

This fountain was at the retreat center where I went to participate in a Transforming Community. Over the two year experience, I watched it being built. When it was completed I was mesmerized. The water overflowing the jars and filling the basins was a reminder of both Jesus' first miracle of turning the jars of water into wine, and of the story of the anointing of Jesus. Both stories speak of extravagance. When love is unleashed in our hearts and souls, we are filled to overflowing. The love of God cannot be contained. It spills out all over! The image is also a reminder of God's abundant provision. We don't need to live like we won't have enough. The jars aren't just full, they are filled to overflowing.

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.

He maketh me lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; **my cup runneth over.**

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalms 23



Daily Scripture Readings

Sunday, November 29, 2020: First Sunday of Advent: Daniel 6:6-27

Monday, November 30, 2020: Psalm 79

Tuesday, December 1, 2020: Micah 4:1-13

Wednesday, December 2, 2020: Luke 21:34-38

Thursday, December 3, 2020: Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

Friday, December 4, 2020: Jeremiah 1:4-10

Saturday, December 5, 2020: Mark 11:27-33

Sunday, December 6, 2020: Second Sunday of Advent: Joel 2:12-13

Monday, December 7, 2020: Psalm 27

Tuesday, December 8, 2020: Isaiah 4:2-6

Wednesday, December 9, 2020: Luke 1:5-17

Thursday, December 10, 2020: Psalm 126

Friday, December 11, 2020: Habakkuk 2:1-3:19:2-6

Saturday, December 12, 2020: Philippians 3:7-16

Sunday, December 13, 2020: Third Sunday of Advent: Isaiah 61:1-11

Monday, December 14, 2020: Psalm 125

Tuesday, December 15, 2020: 2 Kings 2:9-22

Wednesday, December 16, 2020: Mark 9:9-13

Thursday, December 17, 2020: Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

Friday, December 18, 2020: 2 Samuel 6:1-19

Saturday, December 19, 2020: John 7:40-52

Sunday, December 20, 2020: Fourth Sunday of Advent: Luke 1:26-56

Monday, December 21, 2020: Hebrews 9:1-14

Tuesday, December 22, 2020: 1 Samuel 1:19-28

Wednesday, December 23, 2020: Mark 11:1-11

Thursday, December 24, 2020: Isaiah 7:13-17

Friday, December 25, 2020: Luke 2:1-20

[illegible]

[illegible]