



ADVENT GUIDE *2024*

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH LUFKIN

Advent Guide

The Advent hymn, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel is traditionally one of the first Advent hymns we sing each year. Some might say it's a bit dark, slow, and just gloomy and ancient! The final verse of the hymn, however, is ever so applicable to our day. "O come, Desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind; bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease; Fill the whole world with heavenly peace." One heart and mind in heavenly peace...oh what a thought and yet it seems but only a dream. I need the season of Advent. I long for the promise of hope, peace, joy, and love to consume and overwhelm me once more. If these words and this paragraph sound familiar it's because the words are identical to what I wrote last year for this guide and the year before and...I still need the season of Advent, perhaps more than ever.

Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "coming or arriving." Advent not only focuses on Jesus' birth - his first coming- but also on his second coming, which is yet to happen. Advent is a season of waiting, anticipating, expectation, and longing for Christ's return.

The church has celebrated the various traditions of Advent since the 6th century. Advent is a four-week celebration beginning on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and continuing until Christmas Day. In worship we will use an Advent Wreath with a new candle being lit each week in anticipation of lighting the Christ Candle on Christmas Eve.

We are thrilled to publish our 2024 FBC Lufkin Daily Advent Guide, our eighth consecutive year of providing this unique ministry! This guide is written by our own First Baptist members and illustrated by our children. The guide contains 25 short devotional thoughts and a scripture passage for each day. The four traditional themes of Advent will take you on a journey toward Christmas day.

It is my prayer that Advent 2024 will be a most holy and worshipful time for you and your family. Do not rush through the Advent season and miss out on the beauty and glory of these days. We wait. We hope. We worship.

A special word of thanks and deep appreciation to those who provided the timely and sincere devotions as well as the children who illustrated the Advent themes so beautifully.

- Pastor Mark

Hope

WEEK 1



Hope



Hailey Williams, 11 years old

Psalm 31:24 (NASB)

*Be strong and let your
heart take courage,
All you who hope in the
Lord.*

Hope

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1

As we step into Advent, there's something in us that stirs—a longing, a quiet hope. Psalm 31:24 calls to that place, reminding us to “be strong” and to “take courage” as we wait on God.

This is a time to lean into the hope that God offers, a hope that is deeper than optimism or wishful thinking. God's hope is sure, anchored in His character, and it meets us even in our moments of doubt and waiting. Imagine what it felt like for those who first heard God's promises of a Savior. They waited, sometimes wondering if God would truly fulfill His word. Yet, through all those generations of waiting, God was faithful, and in His perfect time, Jesus was born.

That same hope was alive for me. Hope isn't about wishing for something distant or unattainable; it's a solid trust that God is who He says He is—and that He will be with you in every step. Waiting and trusting felt strange, especially because I had been conditioned to rely only on myself. But God invited me to let my heart rest in Him. I found that it was okay to be unsure. God never expected me to have everything figured out; He simply wanted me to rely on Him one day at a time. My hope grew as I learned more about His love and faithfulness.

This Advent season, try to take a moment each day to talk to God about what's on your heart. Tell Him your worries, your hopes, your dreams. Know that He hears you and loves you.

-Evan McElroy

Evan is a senior at Lufkin High School, a fantastic competitive swimmer, and currently doing an internship with Lockheed Martin. Evan is so very faithful to our Youth Ministry and many areas of church ministry.

Hope

MONDAY, DECEMBER 2

For my birthday several years ago, my husband gave me a large, treasured nativity. When I opened the beautifully wrapped gift, I carefully removed each tissue-wrapped piece. Mary, Joseph, the shepherd, the three wise men and even some precious little sheep...it was all there except one. Baby Jesus was missing! What a disappointment. Later, thankfully, baby Jesus was found at the store where the gift was purchased. My nativity is complete!

As I think back on this gift that I delight in each year during the Christmas season, I can't help wondering how often Jesus is missing from our Christmases. He's lost somewhere beneath the gifts, the busyness, the merriment and bright lights, the candy canes and the ho ho ho of Santa in his bright red suit. This advent season may we consciously keep our hearts focused on Jesus, because when we miss Him, we miss the message of Christmas! It's the message of hope, hope found only in God's great love for us. The full expression of that love is the gift of his Son who came in the flesh as a tiny baby that first Christmas, and because of that love, we as believers will spend eternity in His presence. This is hope! This is the message of Christmas. Hope is a person, and His name is Jesus.

Romans 5:3-5 (NIV)

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

—Linda Coward

Linda and Mack Coward have been a part of FBC for only a few years, but they are longtime Lufkinites. Linda is a faithful member of the Wood Bible Study class and serves as an outreach leader and substitute teacher. The Cowards try to claim the back row in worship, center section, but sometimes miss out if Bible Study goes too long.

Jeremiah 29:11 (MSG)

I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out - plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for.

Hope

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3

In Jeremiah, the people of Israel are being warned of the consequences of their idolatry and their broken covenant with God. God is using Jeremiah to send a message of warning to change behavior, lest they be conquered and taken into exile. Jeremiah predicts Babylon will be the executor of God's justice, which does eventually come to fruition.

In Jeremiah's cautionary message there are several verses promising Israel that, despite their transgressions, God will not let their sins, or their captivity, be the last chapter of their story. In Jeremiah 29:11 a promise is made: "For I know the plans I have for you" declares the Lord. "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you HOPE and a future."

I have certainly been guilty of reading this passage and using it as a personal promise, made directly to me, outside of the context of its original writing. However, when I consider the context of the verse, it has a much different application to our lives today.

Hope is a word that has always felt "passive" to me. Because of this, I have preferred the word faith instead. In my mind's eye the word faith has a more engaging, active connotation (i.e., "live by faith" Galatians 2:20). A more thoughtful evaluation of these words leads me to believe that we have hope because of our faith. However, when putting myself in the situation of the Israelites, hope no longer feels passive.

The Israelites were certainly in despair. If I had been there, I doubt I could have found a single person under Babylonian captivity who thought this message from Jeremiah was a promise that life would be easy. There would have been a great sense of hope that there was something more for them on the other side of this suffering. I doubt their hope felt passive...

The context of this verse certainly gives me a new perspective on the Advent theme of HOPE. Viewed through the eyes of the Israelites, hope starts to become an active TRUST, or even an expectation, of God's goodness. It becomes a BELIEF that God will deliver on His promises. My prayer this Advent season is that we share this perspective with our families and our community.

More TRUST. More BELIEF. More HOPE. Merry Christmas.

-Kolby Buckner

Kolby Buckner is best known as Hank's dad and occasionally as Laura's husband. Kolby is a Physician's Assistant with Tall Pines Family Clinic and one of our new deacons.

Hope

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4

In December 2017, my sister parted my long, dark hair to begin braiding it, and found a bald spot the size of a quarter. To say I was surprised to see it would be an understatement. I had no idea it was there, but once the first spot was found, the next few came quickly and spread quickly. My dermatologist told me what it was - Alopecia Areata.

By May of 2019, my ponytail was the diameter of a pencil. It was apparent that I didn't have much hair, but I was holding on to it for dear life. I was so upset. I hated looking in the mirror. I didn't see myself looking back.

Finally, when the summer came I made the decision to take control back by shaving off what was left. My friends helped me throw a "party" with signs and cupcakes, and together we shaved it off. Almost immediately I felt this weight off my shoulders. I wasn't hiding anymore. I accepted what life had thrown at me, and I've never looked back. You'll see me singing in the choir with my hat on, and today, I'm happy as I am.

Although I count my problem as small, maybe that's how we are meant to tackle what the world throws at us. We take those things that feel like they're sent to us to crush our hope and allow the Lord to turn it into something that renews us. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 says, "though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever." During this time of Advent, hope is palpable. I challenge you to take that hope and carry it into the coming year. Allow the Lord to renew you, and although we face trials, we find hope in the fact that they won't last long. And we can always be prepared to answer the question, "how do you do it?" The answer is our Holy and Loving Father who is our source of comfort and hope.

1 Peter 3:15 (NLT)

Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.

-Alex Roybal-Cano

Alex inherited her Sanders family talents for all things music...especially her beautiful voice. She not only sings in the choir with husband Andrew but is part of our praise team. Alex teaches special needs students at Central.

Hebrews 10:23 (KJV)

*Let us hold fast the profession
of our faith without wavering;
for He is faithful that promised.*

Hope

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5

Biblical hope is the confident expectation of what God has promised.

One of Christianity's greatest hopes is that Jesus is raised from the dead, and through Him, we will also be raised. If He did not, then we have no hope, our preaching is empty and our faith is empty. We are false teachers; this world is all we have and we have nothing to look forward to when we die.

The burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the best documented events in history. The Bible teaches us these three truths about the resurrection. The tomb in which Jesus was buried was discovered empty by a group of women on the Sunday following the crucifixion. Jesus' disciples had real experiences with the One whom they believed was the risen Christ.

As a result of the preaching of the resurrection and the lessons taught by Jesus, these disciples founded the Christian church which grew exponentially throughout Judea, Samaria, and the whole world. Most of the men who were the original disciples were tortured and killed because they insisted on teaching Jesus. People will not be tortured for a lie; it would not be worth it.

What are the implications of the resurrection? Why does it matter? Does it have relevance in our lives? This event is the most important event in human history. It is the proof that the claims Jesus made about Himself are true. He claimed to be God. If He had remained in the tomb, dead, it would be foolish to believe this claim. Since He rose from the dead, it would be foolish not to believe His claim. He is God. The rising from the dead by Jesus provides the only hope for eternal life.

The Bible says that Christ's resurrection is the pattern that those who believe in Him will follow. We will be resurrected by God in resurrection bodies. We, as His adopted children, will one day experience, forever, the joy of living daily in His presence. What greater hope could we have?

-Janis Anthony

Janis is one of our newest members at FBC and new to Lufkin. Janis lives at Pinecrest and hangs out with our "FBC Pinecrest crew." Janis has such a great knowledge of scripture and previously served as a lay preacher.

Hope

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6

I usually think of hope in the context of faith and love - one of the trio of spiritual gifts we are all given. If you are like me, you probably better understand and pay more attention to faith and love. As Protestant Christians, we understand our salvation is by faith, and that faith is a gift from God. Faith is straightforward. And love? The two greatest commandments are to love God and love your neighbor as yourself. We "get" love.

But hope? Hope is like the middle, free-spirit child between faith and love, harder to describe or pin down. Hope is nebulous, aspirational, and in secular usage, prone to selfish desire or wishful thinking.

Yet here in Psalm 71, hope is given life, an identity, a name: God! YOU, Sovereign Lord, are and always have been my hope. And not only is God our hope, Psalm 71 expounds on what we hope FOR in God: He is our refuge, our rescuer and deliverer, our rock and fortress, our confidence, our helper and protector, righteous, mighty, our restorer and comforter, and the object of our praise. Wow!

This personification and glorification of hope makes the way we use the term in everyday language almost an embarrassment, really. Yes, we hope for small, even inconsequential things, and that's ok. But biblical hope is focused on the things of God. This advent season, may we recognize that Christ - God incarnate, the Word made flesh - is all of what the psalmist hoped for, and he is our blessed hope as well.

Psalm 71:5-6 (NIV)

*For you have been my hope,
Sovereign Lord, my confidence
since my youth. From birth I
have relied on you; you brought me
forth from my mother's
womb. I will ever praise you.*

-Sid Roberts

Physician. Cancer Advocate. Community leader. Husband and Dad. Sid loves his church and is very involved in all areas of worship and serves as a deacon as well.

Hebrews 11:1 (CEV)

Faith makes us sure of what we hope for and gives us proof of what we cannot see. It was their faith that made our ancestors pleasing to God.

Hope

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7

In this season of Advent, we are reminded of the hope that comes with the birth of Jesus Christ. As the apostle Paul wrote in Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Three years ago, this scripture took on a special meaning for our family when my wife, Beth, was diagnosed with leukemia. It was a difficult journey, one filled with fear and uncertainty. But through it all, we held onto the hope that comes from an abiding faith in God. This hope was bolstered by the love of family, friends, and neighbors. They selflessly rallied their support to not only lift us in prayer, but to strengthen our resolve and rely on the faith that continues to carry us through. Throughout this ordeal, our hope has never faltered. As we celebrate the coming of Christ, we give thanks for the hope that sustained us during Beth's fight. We give thanks for the strength and courage that carried her through, and for the multitudes who helped her endure and overcome this difficult diagnosis.

Hope has the power to sustain us through even the darkest and most difficult times. When we have hope, we have something to hold onto, something that keeps us going even when the odds seem insurmountable. Lastly, having and keeping hope is a choice, as is choosing doubt. The writer and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl once said, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." Even when we feel helpless and defeated, when all we love is in turmoil, we still have the power to choose Hope. May we allow that hope to fill our hearts and minds as we prepare for the arrival of our Savior.

-Byron Jones

Byron and Beth love Lufkin and quietly serve behind the scenes throughout the community. Byron is quite the artist and a proud dad of daughter, Elizabeth, and favorite son-in-law of Harry Stafford!

Peace

WEEK 2



Rosie McWilliams, 6 years old

Colossians 3:15 (NLT)

*And let the peace that comes
from Christ rule in your hearts.
For as members of one body
you are called to live in peace.
And always be thankful.*

Peace

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well, with my soul*

*Though Satan should buffet,
though trials should come
Let this blest assurance control
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate
And hath shed His own blood for my soul*

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought
My sin, not in part but the whole
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

This powerful hymn was written by Horatio Spafford in the aftermath of unthinkable tragedy. For those unfamiliar with his story, a ship bound for England carrying Spafford's wife, Anna, and their four daughters collided with another vessel while crossing the Atlantic in 1873. Anna survived the shipwreck and sent a telegram to Horatio upon her arrival in Wales that simply read "Saved alone."

I can't imagine the devastation of that kind of loss—the magnitude of grief and anger. My song at that moment may have read quite differently. Somehow though, despite his sorrow, Spafford's hymn doesn't dwell in despair. He boldly proclaims that his foundation in Christ is unshakeable even in the face of terrible circumstance. True peace.

Peace is hard to imagine in situations like this. Ultimately, I believe the journey to let peace rule in our hearts as Paul instructs requires intentionality, be it through prayer, forgiveness, rest, or acceptance, all the while recognizing that Christ has regarded our helpless estate and has made available to His peace. I'm confident that in spite of his assured eloquence, Spafford's hymn wasn't written overnight.

2024 has been a trying year for my family. Through loss and grief and questions we long for the peace of Christ to comfort and uplift. My prayer and belief is that God will honor our seeking such that through this journey He will teach us to say "It is well with my soul."

-Matt Baker

Matt is a girl dad times three... maybe four if you count his wife! Matt plays guitar and drums in our worship band, sings whenever asked, teaches Children's Sunday School, serves as a deacon, and works as a Pharmacy District Director for Brookshire Brothers.

Peace

MONDAY, DECEMBER 9

When I was asked to write a devotion on peace, I asked myself, which peace. Peace in the world, peace in my community, or peace within myself. I chose to address all three.

Peace in the world is something that I personally have no influence over. I try to stay informed, I vote, and I pray. Safety in Israel is a constant concern, but I do not worry. Even though there is war, death, and destruction, I believe that GOD is in control and GOD will take care of his chosen people.

Peace in my community is a little easier to think about. There will always be conflicts in my community. We are made up of multiple personalities, all the way from meek to domineering. I find that when the domineering personalities conflict, then peace is threatened. What I have learned with GOD's guidance, is to listen, smile and be kind when I disagree, ie disagree with love. I pray and remember that GOD is in control.

Peace within myself should be the easiest to control, but not always so. I have great days, good days and some bad days. I thank GOD for the great and good days. When I am having a bad day, I know that I need GOD's help and I pray specifics.

I am a widow, and I miss the other side of my complete self. Then I remember and am thankful for the wonderful memories and blessings that I have enjoyed all of my life. The loneliness is always there but fades with my thanksgiving, and I concentrate on the opportunities of the day.

I am making new memories now that include family, old friends, new friends and my church. When I was a very young, I memorized a Bible verse as GOD's telephone number, that I have never forgotten. Jeremiah 33:3 says "Call unto me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things that you do not know."

Peace within myself comes from faith, prayer, and trusting GOD who is always in control.

Isaiah 9:6-7 (KJV)

*For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given: and the
government shall be upon his
shoulder: and his name shall
be called Wonderful, Counselor,
The Mighty God, The
Everlasting Father, The Prince
of Peace.*

-Dean Hamilton

Dean lives at Pinecrest and is so faithful to her church. She plays the piano beautifully and always shares insightful words of wisdom in Bible Study on Sundays and Wednesdays.

John 14:27 (CEV)

"I give you peace, the kind of peace only I can give. It isn't like the peace this world can give. So don't be worried or afraid."

Peace

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10

Merriam-Webster defines peace as a state of tranquility or quiet. At the end of April my life was not tranquil or quiet. I was facing major surgery on April 29. As I look back I realize I was very naive about my upcoming surgery. I honestly believed that by the end of June my life would return to normal. Little did I know that it would be months, even up to a year before my body would recover.

God tells us not to worry about anything but to pray about everything. Sometimes that is easier said than done or at least it is for me. Thank goodness my church and other people prayed for me during this difficult time which gave me the peace I needed. We should tell him what we need and thank him for what he has done. I am extremely thankful that all my cancer is gone, and I required no chemo or radiation. That is peace in and of itself. His peace exceeds our understanding.

Even though we don't know why we have to go through times when our lives are not at peace, peace does come when we live in Christ Jesus. May peace be with each and every one of you during this holiday season.

-Jamie Zayler

Jamie, with her sweet and outgoing personality, will always bring you joy. Jamie loves life fully and serves her community and church so beautifully. Jamie and Steve have two children and two grandchildren.

Peace

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11

When I think of peace as a fruit of the spirit, I think of the old hymn, "It is Well With My Soul," especially the first line, "When peace like a river attendeth my way..." But as the following lyrics explain, we are not always walking with peace but at times are buffeted by sorrows and trials. We must remember that "it is well with my soul" and regain that peace.

I think I understand the concept of peace, but I am struggling with acting in peace.

When things go bad at work, and I'm not able to complete a task properly or in a timely manner, I become angry and frustrated with myself, my team, and/or the conditions. When I come home, I take it out on the cat, the dog, and my family. That is not peace.

If a terrible tragedy happens, such as the death of a family member, a child, or a friend, I am overcome with sadness, anguish, confusion, and loss. That is not peace.

If peace is a fruit of the spirit, I should be able to call on the Holy Spirit to find peace. But in those periods of anger, frustration, and anguish, I have to dig deeper and listen harder to hear Him. When I am able to cut through the distractions of my reactions to whatever has happened, the peace that I find through the Holy Spirit is calming and reassuring.

That peace is palpable. Others are often able to recognize it in you. So, with newfound peace, I am able to walk into the work situation with a clear head and calm spirit and help find a solution to the problem. With that peace, I am able to help my family and friends deal with the tragedy. At times, a peaceful spirit has not been easy for me to find, but the struggle to reclaim it has always been worth the effort.

-Jeff Johnson

Proverbs 16:7 (NLT)

When people's lives please the Lord, even their enemies are at peace with them.

Jeff and Judy retired in Judy's hometown after living in Mississippi where he served as a Research Professor at Mississippi State. Jeff and Judy are active in all areas of ministry at FBC, and Jeff serves as a Deacon and Trustee.

Romans 12:17-18 (NIV)

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Peace

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12

The Advent season is a time of preparation. Most of us are preparing menus, gifts, and travel plans for the holidays and forget to take the time to stop and experience true peace. In the hustle and bustle of the holiday we are faced with angry customers, disgruntled employees, finding the perfect gift and anxiety over having the perfect holiday.

What if we used this Advent season to take ten minutes a day to say thank you to God for what he has given us? We could pray for our enemies and those who may hurt our feelings. Let anger leave us and let God handle it. Experience a peace only He can give.

Many years ago when our daughters were young, if they argued, I made them sit at the bottom of our stairs and sing "Forgive me God for things I do that are not kind and good. Forgive me God and help me now to do the things I should." We all know that when there are arguments at home, there is not peace. This song helped us remember that God wants us to be kind and do what is right even in difficult situations. Through our forgiveness of others we experience a peace and calm only He can give. I notice this peace when looking at all the lights on a Christmas tree or being still and watching the fire burn in the fireplace. We let a lot of things distract us from having peace at Christmas, but my goal during Advent is to prepare my heart for God. The only way this is possible is to let go of our sin nature and seek His peace. I think we all need to sit on the bottom of the stairs at some point and ask for God's forgiveness. He will not only grant us forgiveness, but we will experience His peace, love, hope, and joy as well.

"God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing." - C. S. Lewis

-Suzanne Ratcliff

Suzanne serves at Hudson High School as Assessment and Accountability Coordinator. Scott and Suzanne teach Young Adult Bible Study and make as many trips as possible to see their daughters and grandkids!

Peace

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13

John 16:33 (MSG)

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

The term "Peace" brings to us visions of lily-filled valleys, summer nights along the water's edge and yes, dimmed lights on a winter's night around a manger with an angelic string orchestra playing in the background.

Or, could it be that "peace" came to us with a reckoning revelation? As Jesus refers to "having told us these things" in the couple of verses prior, He has clearly spoken to the nature and the place and the love of His Father while He is here on Earth. In this exchange with the disciples, Jesus point blank asks "Do you now believe?" (16:31).

Believing scripture is believing God. And believing God and having received Christ as the Savior that came that one winter's night is the opportunity to know Peace. Allow us to keep in mind the Jewish culture. The word that was used then is *Shalom*. Often *Shalom* is simplified only to Peace or Peace be with you - but through study - it's much more significant - *Shalom* goes far beyond "keeping the peace." *Shalom* is, in essence, how things are meant to be, a slice of heaven if you will.

In Christ, in relationship with Christ, God is ever present, ever faithful to provide a Peace that passes all understanding. We are promised in this verse and throughout scripture that trouble, tribulations, trials and even grief are and forever will be in our midst. Yet may we never forget that God is also in our midst; our slice of Heaven so that we may take "heart" and be encouraged that the battles of this world are already won. Why, because in Christ's victory over death, achieved by no other being or forces, He unarmed the evil one, allowing His promises to be experienced by believers everywhere. Even when we are hurting, when we feel alone, when the circumstances cannot be explained - there is PEACE for the one who calls him Savior, lives by the name Redeemed and recognizes the truth that living in Him, the Overcomer, we have access that even while shedding the tears, we get to claim the victory.

We each know our salvation story; some can recall the day and circumstances that led them to making the decision to accept Christ as Savior and seeking forgiveness for our sins. Many are asked the questions, "Do you believe in God?" or "Do you believe in Jesus?" However, this scripture leads us to ask: Do I, do you believe God? Do we believe in His Holy Word? Let us ponder this; is believing in God the same as believing God? By believing God, believing Jesus, His word gives us the authority within our circumstances to claim the Victory in Him and to live a life that is enriched with Peace. The journey He puts us on is one that WILL come to fruition for the sake of His Kingdom, giving us the ability to move unshaken through these days because our confidence is found in the One who has already called us each by name.

During this Advent Season my prayer is that in our hurt, in our unknown, in our darkest moments may we each experience and claim the Peace that passes all understanding. May Peace propel us to take on an unplanned encounter that requires the confidence of a believer. May Peace protect us from getting caught up in the "what if's" and "only if's" of the commercialism of Christmas. May Peace anchor us in the value that God placed on us from the beginning of time to the extent of sacrificing His beloved Son, Jesus, that we would come to know Him as Savior. In Christ, *Shalom*.

-Kimberly Abeldt

Kimberly is more than a little busy with her vocation in pharmacy and medical equipment. Kim and Jeff own Abeldts Pharmacy as well as a pharmacy in Tyler. Kim sings in the choir and has a heart for women's ministry.

Psalm 29:11 (KJV)

The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace.

Peace

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14

God taught me a profound lesson eleven years ago in a series of events that would completely reshape both my life and my thinking. While attending seminary following my call to ministry, I met a fellow student by the name of

Yin Wenjuan - but everyone knew her as Mango. We were classmates, and consequently our friendship developed into something more. Our first date was Valentine's Day 2013 and by that Halloween we were married. When you know, you know!

Here we were, two newlywed seminary students (read: we were poor as Job's turkey). Mango and I watched every penny and budgeted ruthlessly. We held our own for a while, but it was hard to overlook how our bank balance fell lower and lower each successive month. God had called us both to ministry, after all, and we were only attending seminary at his leading, so why did we have to struggle so? But God was at work behind the scenes.

I would finish my studies that December and sent out resume after resume to churches near and far seeking a minister, all to no avail. I responded to ads for non-ministry positions as well, but nothing came of those efforts. Things took a downward turn in late January when we opened up our bank statement to see we had much less to our names than we needed. What would we do? Where would we go? We were in dire straits! I don't recall a time we were more stressed, anxious, and uncertain.

We called out to God to help us, and he surely did.

I don't even recall how it came about now with the passage of time. An accounting firm in a nearby city contacted me for an interview, and I received a job offer the next day. I don't even recall sending them a resume. God was surely behind it, however. God had provided, and we thanked him for doing so! We were about to meet our needs, pay our bills, save a little, and move to better and safer housing. It was as if the burden we had been shouldering had been lifted off overnight.

This series of events is a constant reminder to me that God indeed cares for his people. It is a reminder that he alone is strong enough to deliver his people. He indeed blesses his people with peace. Hallelujah!

-Doug Durham

Doug and Mango are proud parents of Micah and Asa. The Durhams are both seminary graduates and sadly will soon be leaving Lufkin. Doug will be serving as a US Army chaplain and of course the family will transition with him.

Joy

WEEK 3



Declan Adams, 5 years old

Habakkuk 3:17-18 (MSG)

Though the cherry trees don't blossom and the strawberries don't ripen, Though the apples are worm-eaten and the wheat fields stunted, Though the sheep pens are sheepless and the cattle barns empty, I'm singing joyful praise to God. I'm turning cartwheels of joy to my Savior God. Counting on God's Rule to prevail. I take heart and gain strength. I run like a deer. I feel like I'm king of the mountain!

Joy

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15

The arrival of the Messiah as a baby was unexpected. The Jews were anticipating a military leader, a man of power, a conqueror. But it was not to be. The birth of Jesus was the beginning of much that was unexpected, and the beginning of much that produces joy.

Joy is the result of a confident trust in Jesus, a deepening certainty as we grow in relationship with Him. Joy may happen as the result of good things in our lives, but the deeper joys come as

a choice.

Habakkuk describes extremely difficult conditions in his world. Unexpectedly, he chooses joy in spite of the hard times, while the problems are still happening. How can he possibly respond with joy? His reason is that by counting on God's Rule to prevail, he takes heart and gains strength.

Sometimes God teaches us about joy as we watch others find joy through Him. I work at The Mosaic Center which is an education center where women learn job skills and study the Bible. Sometimes the ladies share the joy God has shown them, and it is our joy to see this happen. A grandmother told me that her grandson had written a list of 10 things he was thankful for. One was for food, another for a bed. The last one was about her: I'm thankful that you're starting to love God.

One morning a young mother came up to me with a glowing smile and said, "Even if I get nothing else out of being here, I am so thankful that this weekend I started to teach my daughters about Bible Study."

I have watched women live their testimony of trust in Him as they continue to work and to serve others with love and grace as they walk in the darkest of times. They say they know He will get them through even this season. In situations such as these, for a while, the only joy may be the hand-in-Hand trust in Him.

During Advent, let us seek God in the midst of our circumstances and find the quiet treasure of His joy.

-Joyce Sperry

Joyce and Mark would probably love to sit at the back of the sanctuary out of the spotlight, but faithfully they make their way to the fourth row from the front to sit next to her dad, Dr. Kistler. Joyce works at the Mosaic Center and drives our van to take Mosaic ladies to AC classes.

Joy

MONDAY, DECEMBER 16

As we navigate our journey on this earth, finding JOY can sometimes be difficult. Life is a roller coaster! We have hardships, successes, and ups and downs. However, if we continue to focus on the blessings the Lord has shown, have faith in His plans and continue to pursue Him in times of need and in times of doubt, the presence of JOY can always be found.

Psalm 119:110-112 (ESV)

The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts. Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.

-Callie Wallace

Callie has more passion for life than almost any woman in all of Angelina County! Callie and Jack are parents to twins, Caroline and Madison, and all the family love anything to do with outdoors and sports.

James 1:2-4 (NRSV)

My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

Joy

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17

James 1:2-4, this is one of my favorite verses because I believe it pertains to each and everyone of us on a daily basis. Consider it great joy my brothers when you face trials of many kinds. I need to remember this everyday of my working life, as a dentist and running a dental practice, there are many trials every single day. Staying on schedule, OSHA guidelines and that ever increasing

overhead can make days challenging. If it were not for the JOY in my heart because I am a child of Christ, some days would be outright miserable. However, because of the joy God has provided for me to carry in my heart, I am able to look past difficult trials and realize that God will provide me with all of the support that I need to get through difficult everyday trials.

This is important because "the testing of your faith develops perseverance," and how strong is our faith if it is never tested? It is easy to say you have faith when all is going well, your family is healthy, your job has never been better and you just got back from a two week vacation from your favorite beach destination. We know this is not everyday life for many, if not all of us. You get a diagnosis of cancer, laid off at work, strained relationships, or you could not hit a mandibular block if you had too (my dental friends will relate to this). But through these trials, if we have JOY in our heart that God has provided, we will know that these trials that we face will only strengthen our FAITH and we will persevere.

During this ADVENT season, remember that because of what Christ did for us, we should always have joy in our heart. There are always going to be trials in our lives, we are never going to get away from them. But if you have a joyful attitude in all of these trials, you will become stronger in faith and you will persevere. That next dental appointment might even be a little more joyful, but you might still need a little laughing gas.

-Richard Byler

Dr. Byler loves his church and serves in so many ways. You can see Richard running the camera on Sundays, serving as a deacon, and each Thursday morning praying in the prayer room at 6:00am. Richard and Liz have three grown sons and four grandchildren.

Joy

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18

Joy - When I think of joy, I think of children, grandchildren, holidays, baking something for someone or maybe sitting outside and reading a book. We all know that joy is not the same thing as happiness. Unfortunately, fun, comfortable, happy things are not present in our lives all of the time. We must live life abundantly in Jesus to accomplish joy in our life.

As we live our life, we must follow the race that we are given. It took me many years to figure out that God does not assign us all the same race, just the same ending prize. I grew up at First Baptist Church and had a great cloud of witnesses that influenced me, including my parents, Elizabeth Hearne and Glenden Sanders. With all of that said, it was in my later teen years that I discovered that I did not have to be a missionary in a foreign country to be a devoted follower of Christ. My race is different from yours and God leads each of us in our own race. Joy is found in every race if we look for it. At times this is not easy but is necessary to live an abundant life. As we persevere just as Jesus did in his journey, we are given courage and joy. Shining our light with joy should be our daily goal as we continue our race until the ultimate prize of heaven.

Hebrews 12:1-3 (NLT)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up.

-Deidre Oates

Deidre...Preschool Sunday School teacher. Choir member. Monday Offering Team. Bereavement Team. Second Sacks chairperson. Church servant, wife, mom, and Dede to Declan and Maeve.

Luke 2:10-11 (KJV)

*And the angel said unto them,
Fear not: for, behold, I bring you
good tidings of great joy,
which shall be to all people.
For unto you is born this day in the
city of David a Saviour, which is
Christ the Lord.*

Joy

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19

If you're anything like me, the Advent season brings a flood of nostalgia and Joy. The food, decorations, music, movies, family dinners, and traditions cause it to be ranked number one for my wife and me. My wife loves the Christmas holidays so much, that she tries to extend them for as long as

possible. This year I tried to convince her that October 12th was too early to put up the Christmas Tree. I lost.

Although it's our favorite time of the year, it's easy to get overwhelmed and even stressed thinking about everything that needs to be bought, planned, or hung. In these moments, I think back to Luke 2:10-11 that says, "For unto you is born this day... a Savior, which is Christ the Lord," and remember that the true reason for the Advent season is the coming of our Messiah. The Joy in our hearts does not depend on all other (albeit wonderful) earthly things. Our Joy is from knowing that Jesus is our Lord, and through his sacrifice, we are saved for all eternity.

I hope that this Advent season, in those stressful moments, we take a moment to truly realize how great our God is so that we can put into perspective the issues we encounter daily. I pray that we can use this knowledge to pour out our Joy onto everyone around us and walk in the truth of our Lord.

-Ryan Grantom

Ryan and Emily have been married for a little over a year. The Grantoms are active in the Young Adult Bible Study class and work with the Youth on Wednesday nights.

Joy

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20

If I had to guess, most people probably jump to the “have seen a great light” or “increased their joy” lines of these verses to find their comfort. Maybe I’m a weirdo, but for me, I first find comfort in the very first line, “The people walking in darkness.” It reminds and reassures me that throughout all of time, people have had to walk through sadness, chaos, disappointment, uncertainty, mundanity, and grief—or as the author calls it, darkness. I find comfort knowing that while our difficult situations, from personal to global, are bleak to us, they are not completely unique in time and history.

I follow an author online that chooses to live her life among those who are suffering. Her neighborhood is comprised of the addicted, the recently released from prison, the very low income, the immigrant, the unhoused, and families just trying to make it. Often overwhelmed by their situations, she uses “counterweights” to help her stay engaged. She is intentional about noticing the small moments of good, the victories throughout the day that “counter” all the sad she sees. Sometimes it’s the look of the clouds, an unexpected twist in a book, a warm greeting from a cashier, a child’s uninhibited giggle, a flower waving in the breeze. She calls them counterweights, but in our Advent season, maybe it’s fitting to just call them Joy.

I think joy is often thought of as a passive gift we receive from God—that if we believe, then we have joy—but to me, it’s quite the opposite. Joy requires work, it requires intention, it requires noticing. Joy is available to us all the time, but I think it requires quite a bit of effort on our end as well.

Recently, I was sitting at yet another soccer practice, knocking things off the to do list—adding items to my grocery pickup. I looked up for a moment and audibly gasped. The sunset had taken me by surprise. Growing up in the desert mountains, I’ve seen my fair share of impressive sunsets, but this Nacogdoches sky was unlike one I’d seen before. I stared for a good 5 minutes. When I was willing to look up, notice, and recognize the moment for what it was, there was joy waiting for me that I could have easily overlooked.

If the world feels particularly hard right now, you’re not alone now, nor in history. I encourage us to keep looking for these God-given moments of joy, as they are all integrally woven into the greater joy that we are currently waiting to celebrate. The joy that God came to earth, to not only walk alongside us in the darkness but to dawn a new light.

-Katelyn McWilliams

Katelyn is married to Walker and mom to Hazel Jane, Rosie, and Foster. Katelyn is a Baylor and Truett Seminary grad, an ordained minister, and leads our Graphics and Marketing at FBC.

Isaiah 9:2-3 (NIV)

*The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light; on those
living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned. You have
enlarged the nation and increased
their joy; they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest, as
warriors rejoice when dividing the
plunder.*

Luke 6: 22-23 (TLB)

What happiness is it when others hate you and exclude you and insult you and smear your name because you are mine! When that happens, rejoice! Yes, leap for joy! For you will have a great reward awaiting you in heaven. And you will be in good company-- the ancient prophets were treated that way too!

Joy

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21

When I think of joy my mind immediately goes to the moments spent with friends and family. The laughter, love, and care create a sense of warmth and happiness that nothing else can match. Whether it's a gathering, a conversation, or fun experience, these connections fulfill joy into my life.

Luke 6:22-23 states, "Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how

their ancestors treated the prophets." In the world we may face insults and other hardships, however, we can still find joy through our faith in Christ. Also, this verse explains that you are blessed when people hate, exclude, insult, or reject you because of your faith in Jesus. It encourages you to rejoice and be happy in those moments because your reward in heaven will be great. This joy comes from knowing that enduring such treatments for the sake of your faith aligns you with the prophets who faced similar challenges in the past. The passage emphasizes that enduring hardship for a good cause leads to a greater reward at the end.

Joy is what we are looking for each day, but sometimes when we have bad days, we can't seem to find it. When we walk with God, he helps fulfill that. When we have joy, we should share it with the people around us, because we don't know if they're having a bad day and are looking for the daily light of God. We should surround everyone with joy and how beautiful God's work is.

-Phoebe Cates

Phoebe is a Lukin High School freshman and dances with JV Drill. Phoebe has literally grown up at FBC and is active in the Youth Ministry...especially if it is loud and fun!

Love

WEEK 4

LOVE



JESUS
JACK
RAINES



Jack Raines, 5 years old

1 John 4: 9-10 (NLT)

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through Him. This is real love -- not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

Love

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22

Love. I googled the definition of love to see if there was anything that was related to the Bible, and I came up with this: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). That is one of the best verses in the Bible, and the one that I believe truly defines love. I believe that real love is God giving his one and only son to save us and give us eternal life. This is what true love is. Love represents the Lord's deep affection for us and the rest of the world.

God is love.

-Bryce Bramlett

Bryce is in 7th grade at Lufkin Middle School. Bryce loves all sports and really enjoys punishing Pastor Mark by always talking about the Texas Longhorns. Bryce is a great leader in our Youth Ministry.

Love

MONDAY, DECEMBER 23

Love is a word that is bantered about, often times daily, without us giving a passing thought of the depth of the word. "I'd love to do that," "I love that car," "I love that outfit," etc. When we put more thought and emphasis into the use of the word such as for a child or a spouse, it takes on a deeper meaning than as before. I think Christ, in fulfilling the Old Testament law, gave us a much deeper meaning of LOVE. We have to reach deep within ourselves to live up to Proverbs 10:12 which tells us "Hatred stirs up dissension, but LOVE covers all wrongs." JESUS said we must love one another. Since LOVE is mentioned 310-801 times in the Bible, depending on your translation, it verifies how important it is in our daily lives. It truly is the greatest of instructions that we as Christians have been given to live by. It might be one of the hardest to follow daily, but GOD has given us the ability to do just that.

Proverbs 10:12 (NIV)

*Hatred stirs up conflict,
but love covers over
all wrongs.*

-John Wood

Dr. Wood is Lufkin's beloved retired veterinarian. John and Ann love their church family and are so committed to their Bible Study class. Dr. Wood serves as a deacon and encourager to all.



CAROLS
CANDLES
& COMMUNION

Christmas Eve

12/24
5:30PM

Love

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24

One of the ways God designed each of us to be uniquely capable of praise is by gifting us his Holy Spirit. The spirit lives in us and produces God's fruit in us. It comes out as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. All of these qualities of God's fruit are choices God wants us to make, even if we fail to love or lose our faith.

What happens when we fall short? God loves us and knows that some days we miss the mark on singing of His love. Because of His love and faithfulness to us, no matter what, God is still with us. Paul wrote this in his letter to the Roman people after Jesus was resurrected and ascended to heaven: "Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39).

God loves you. God loves you. God loves you. There's nothing you can do that will ever change that!

Wow! God never gives up on us. That's how God's faithfulness is shown in our world. It's the very reason God sent his son Jesus to Earth – to show us who God is and to die for our sins so that we can have a relationship with God forever.

We can trust God to always be there for us. And because of his faithfulness, we can be faithful to others.

-Suzy Childers

Psalm 89:1 (NIV)

I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations.

Suzy radiates with life and always brightens up any room. Suzy is a talented – Suzy Lou Artist and has such a huge heart for missions and ministry. Suzy and Jeff are proud parents of two grown sons, and Suzy teaches Children's Sunday School.

Love

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25



Read it again. Read it out loud. Read it slowly. May the love of God revealed in the birth of Jesus our Savior consume you and yours this Christmas Day. FAITH. HOPE. LOVE...PEACE AND JOY, too. But the greatest of these is LOVE!

-Pastor Mark

As we say each year...Pastor Mark and Aurelia love FBC, love Lufkin, and love Baylor...maybe in that order. Pops...a new title of endearment, is the best name and adventure ever!



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