FBCOKC

2026 ADVENT

PREPARE HIM ROOM

A season of hope, peace, joy, and love



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Introduction

Church Family,

In a season of crowded calendars, Advent invites us to make space for the King. Every December, the world fills up. Calendars overflow, shopping lists grow, and the days race toward a finish line we call Christmas. Yet the song we sing each year offers a quiet instruction: "Let every heart prepare Him room." Advent is the church's annual reminder that Jesus' arrival isn't something to squeeze in. It is something to prepare for. This Advent book, "Prepare Him Room," is a group of devotions written by a few of our friends here at FBCOKC. They have given time for remembrance, reverence, and reflection, and it is designed to enhance the celebration of Jesus' birth as we think about making room for Jesus this Christmas season. Join me as we enjoy these devotionals……

Luke tells us that when Mary and Joseph reached Bethlehem, there was no place for them in the inn (Luke 2:7). The King of heaven entered the world in a manger with the animals, because the rooms that should have welcomed Him were already full. It is easy to shake our heads at that innkeeper. It is harder to admit how often our own hearts are the ones with a "No Vacancy" sign hanging out front.

Preparing room does not require a perfect heart or a perfect season. It requires small, deliberate choices to clear a space and invite Him in. Jesus came to a stable, and He still comes to ordinary, imperfect hearts.

We are invited to welcome Him as we are reminded of the Christmas song, "Let every heart prepare Him room - and Heaven and Nature Sing, and Heaven and Nature Sing. Let our hearts be His dwelling place. This year, as the days grow shorter and the lights grow brighter, ask yourself a simple question: Where is there room? Then open the door a little wider. Church family, let us clear away what does not belong, quiet what is loud within us, and teach us to wait with hope. Let every heart prepare Him room.

Faithfully,

Toni Adams
Minister to Senior Adults/Discipleship

Week 1 - Hope

Day 1: Pam Dunbar



Jesus, what can I . . . do for you?

Recalling a time when I had a plastic manger scene with Mary, Joseph and Jesus located in my front garden. Just upon happenstance, I walked outside to view my Christmas decor and lo and behold smoke was billowing out of Jesus and I said, "Holy smokes Baby Jesus, what can I do for you?"

After quickly unplugging the cord and averting a catastrophe, I needed to dispose of my manger scene. By the next Christmas season I had purchased a glorious new and larger set made of ceramic which I proudly display on my porch. I recall that incident each year when I lay Baby Jesus in his manger amongst the hay, encircled by others.

When we pray, our usual self gives thanks to what is important to us, we also ask for the things that are needed and wanted in our lives.
Let's turn this around and as a gift to Jesus this Advent Season, ask "Jesus, what can I . . . do for you?"

Pam is a lifetime member of First Baptist Church since 1959. With her family, she was introduced to the church shortly after she was born, and presented with a tiny pink New Testament Bible from Dr. Herschel Hobbs which she still has today. She learned to play the bells in grade school and still loves playing in the Handbell Choir. First Baptist Church is her foundation and her rock, she is truly blessed.

Day 2: Kathleen Kinkade

Hoping for Snacks



The Spanish word for hope is esperanza. It means hope, but it also means wait. I think it is easier to explain waiting than hoping. We wait for things all the time. We wait for water to boil, for traffic to move, for avocados to ripen. We wait because we know those things will happen. I know when I put water on to boil, it will eventually boil. When I am stuck at a red light, it will eventually turn green. When I buy avocados, I know I will eventually be able to enjoy them when they ripen (unless I forget about them and they go past that perfect point, but that only happens to me, right?). We wait, because we know from experience that things happen, or because someone we trust told us they would.

Most weeks we teach the Littles class. There is a schedule taped on the cabinet door to remind us what comes next. There's play time, cleanup, crafting, story time, snack and music. Every week, at least one child will ask when snack is. We tell them the schedule and say we have things to do while we wait for snack. For kids, snack is sometimes the highlight of Sunday morning. They wait and hope and guess what we might have. Will it be goldfish? Animal crackers? Donuts?? They wait because they know it will happen, even if they have no actual concept of time. We pray during snack, and remind them how easily we can talk to God, that He hears us.
Micah 7:7 But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior, my God will hear me.

Kathleen Dunaway Gonzalez Kinkade is a daughter, sister, mother, wife, cousin & aunt, and these roles have made her the woman she is. Teaching the Littles Sunday School class is her favorite part of the week. To be loved by Kathleen is to be accepted and supported and cared for.

Day 3: Sabrina Davis



"Let every heart prepare Him room."
Joy to the world! The Lord is come. Let earth receive her King! It's hard to imagine an Advent season without this glorious, uplifting text and tune, right? One of my favorite childhood memories of Christmastime was when my big brother and I would climb onto the "big bed" with our parents and sing Christmas carols. No worries or fears; just pure joy and delight. The season lends itself to excitement, hope, love and joy.

Sometimes, whether by our own choices or through no fault of our own, we struggle to find the hope and peace. We know that Jesus is the wonderful counselor, comforter, friend, savior, redeemer and song, but this world is not our home. In a song titled "Grateful" there's a line that says, "Whatever stone life may sling, we can moan or we can sing." The thing I love about Jesus is how he doesn't require the "or" in that thought. We're allowed to moan and sing to Him! Anne Lamott said, "I believe in crying. It saves your life. It bathes you, hydrates you and baptizes you. Crying is the way home." He knows our every thought, so we might as well speak, sing, whisper, cry, or moan to the one who created us.

"I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand on the earth." – Job 19:25
Tara-Leigh Cobble said, "This isn't just hopeful on Job's part, it's actually prophetic. It points not only to the first coming of Christ, which has already happened, but also to the second coming of Christ, which is yet to come. Even in his darkest moments Job was pointing out eternal truths about God." As we celebrate Jesus coming to us as Lord and King, we also worship Him as our Redeemer.

In “Hold Me Jesus”, Rich Mullins sings “You have been my King of glory. Won’t you be my Prince of Peace?” We see both the baby Jesus held in Mary’s arms, and the arms of Jesus outstretched on a cross for us. Let every heart prepare Him room.

Sabrina Davis and husband Lane are so thankful to be part of FBCOKC. Their son, Austin lives in Yukon. Sabrina has worked in various administrative roles during their time in Oklahoma City, but her favorite roles are wife and mother. Something you may not know about Sabrina is that she enjoys daily NYT puzzle challenges!

Day 4: Morgan Johnson

My Dad was stationed at Spangdahlem Air Force Base, Germany, for four years. While there, we lived in a village where we experienced the romanticism of German traditions and culture. Every year, my younger sister and I looked forward to celebrating St. Nicholas Day on December 6. I often reflect on the St. Nicholas lantern parades. Children decorate colorful, light-up, lanterns and follow St. Nicholas on horseback through their villages. After walking through the streets, we would gather at the fire station for hot chocolate and homemade sugared pretzels. Then we would return home and place our biggest boots on the table. We would wake up the next morning to those empty boots being filled with all sorts of little German goodies.



Despite the goodies, I remember feeling such a great amount of joy at this event. Smiles were on everyone's faces as we followed the wave of lanterns and sang songs (even though we did not know the words). It was a beautiful picture of community, both for the children and adults. The light we carried through the dark and cold streets of our German village has stayed with me. I would easily compare this feeling to the one we get during our candlelight services. Today, these moments remind me that we are each called to carry the light of Christ into the world. I am always reminded of the importance of having a child-like faith and that we are all God’s children in this season.

As it states in Mark 10: 14-15: “When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”.

My name is Morgan Johnson. I have been a member of the church for about a year now and have been attending since 2021, when I started coming with my husband (Ryan Johnson). In December 2023, Pastor Stewart performed our premarital counseling and married us. We now have two little dogs and a baby girl on the way! I enjoy spending time with my family and swimming! I grew up as a military child, moving every two to four years until I was thirteen.

Day 5: Justin Keiser

Following the Herd



Growing up on a farm raising cattle, I learned that animals don't always make the smartest decisions. Sometimes one starts heading somewhere it definitely shouldn't, and suddenly the rest are mindlessly following along. I always wonder if any of them stop to think about what they are doing, and then I realize I can be just as mindless without even realizing it!

As an elder millennial, I can sit down to browse social media and find myself still scrolling hours later. One swipe leads to another and before I know it, I'm reading about something I don't particularly care about in the first place, or I've gotten caught up in some big story everyone is angry about and now I'm angry about it too. It makes me reconsider how often I'm actually thinking for myself versus just following the herd.

Isaiah 53:6 says that "all we like sheep have gone astray." I guess people aren't so different from the animals I grew up working with! We get distracted, we follow each other (pun intended), we end up going in a direction we probably shouldn't. That's part of why I'm particularly thankful that He came to be our Good Shepherd, to seek us out and bring us back even though we constantly wander off- and his unrelenting search for me is where I rest my hope. I know I'm going to get distracted and wander off again, but I don't have to find my way back alone.

With all the noise and distractions around us, especially this time of year, maybe preparing Him room means taking a step back and asking ourselves who we're actually following, and why. There's always going to be another thing to get worked up about or another voice telling me what I should think- and I know I'm not going to get it right all the time. But in this season I'm trying to spend less time following the herd and more time following Him. The Advent season reminds me that Jesus came into this world for people just like me, and no matter how far I wander, I can always turn back to the One who came to bring me home.

Justin has served as Facilities Manager at First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City since September of 2022. Originally from Pennsylvania, Justin grew up working construction projects with his dad and helping on the family farm. He later earned a degree in Construction Technology from Penn State University. Justin brings a strong work ethic, problem-solving skills and practical experience to caring for the church campus and supporting ministry operations. Outside of work he is a proud father to his six-year-old son, Riley and enjoys spending time outdoors fishing and hiking.

Day 6: Cuyler "Leaves of Gold"

HOPE may be described as the flower of desire. It expects that the object shall be attained. It bars despondence and anticipates good. It shakes the mind from stagnations, and animates to encounter danger, and is the balm of life. Though at times it may be associated with doubt and solicitude, yet when hesitance is displaced, it swells into joy and ecstacy. Hope may be held to be universal and permanent. It is entwined with every other affection and passion. It always originates beneficial effects. It animates desire, and is a secure source of pleasure in the transports of joy. Joy triumphs in the success which hope presages will be permanent. It administers consolation in distress - quickens all our pursuits, and communicates to the mind the pleasure of anticipation. This influence, though mild, is nevertheless exhilarating and salutary. There is no happiness which hope cannot promise, no difficulty which it cannot surmount, no grief which it cannot mitigate. It is the wealth of the indigent, the health of the sick, the freedom of the captive, the rest of the toiler.



Day 7: David Koerner

We love a good superhero origin story, mostly because they all start in the exact same place: the dark. Think about Bruce Wayne or Peter Parker, their defining moments didn't happen when everything was going right; they happened in the rubble when it looked like the bad guys had already won.

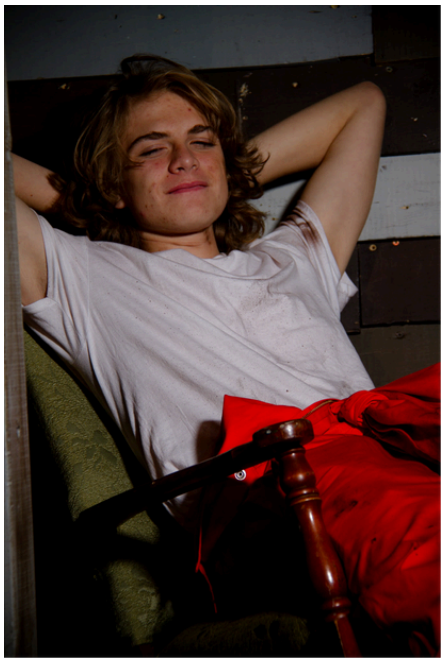
That's the exact backdrop of the Christmas story. Before the twinkling lights and peaceful carols, the first Christmas happened in a world that felt completely stuck in the shadows, under heavy oppression, quiet for four hundred years, and wondering if God had forgotten them. In the same way, biblical hope isn't just putting on a brave face or pretending the villain isn't there; it's the quiet, stubborn refusal to believe that the current chapter isn't the end of the story.

Even when the odds feel impossible, real Advent hope looks up, remembers who actually holds the power and trusts the old promise (Isaiah 9:2) that for those walking in deep darkness are never left there forever, a great light has finally dawned – rescue hasn't just been promised, He has already arrived in a manger.

David Koerner lives in OKC with his wife, Ariel, and their two dogs, Sugar and Winchester, and two cats, Marvell and Khan. He works in the mortgage department at BancFirst. He has been a member of First Baptist for 9 years.

Week 2 - Peace

Day 1: Asher Gates



Peace is weird. There's a lot of different things "peace" can mean. "Peace" can mean a lack of conflict, "piece" can be a part of something, but I think what I'm supposed to talk about is the feeling of peace. Even then, peace is still a complicated subject, because it doesn't make sense. There are times I've felt no peace whatsoever, even though everything in my life was going fine. There have been times when I shouldn't have felt calm at all but couldn't help just not feeling bothered by anything. For example, recently my dad was having some mental health issues, and things that should have had me stressing out, just weren't. I took all the proper precautions to make sure I was safe but I still felt like everything was going to be alright. I think peace is really more of a state of mind, the way you look at a problem, you could cause a fuss or you can try to approach it with dignity. There may be some peace that's God given, but I think it depends on the way you look at it. You could panic about everything or you can approach it with peace in you heart and on your mind, which can improve the outcome. Anyways, peace ✌️

Asher "Elizabeth" James Gates is a sophomore in highschool and a member of the FBCOKC youth group. He enjoys acting, climbing trees, and snuggling up under his "warmest warmest" blanket on cold nights. He resides at home with his step-father and younger sister and brother and his mother, who he has asked (for the second time now) to write his biography. A fun fact about Asher is that if his mom had her way, he would have been named Christmas.

Day 2: Becca Wilson



The Gift of Peace

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." — John 14:27

Advent is a season of waiting, hope, love, and peace. As we prepare our hearts to celebrate the birth of Jesus, we are reminded that He came into a broken world to bring us a peace that cannot be found anywhere else.

But sometimes, finding that peace is much easier said than done.

For me, peace has a very personal meaning. One of the greatest losses I have ever experienced was losing my son, Xavier, at 37 weeks of pregnancy. There are no words to adequately describe the heartbreak of losing a child, especially one you have carried, dreamed about, prayed for, and already loved so deeply. I had imagined holding him, watching him grow, and experiencing all the milestones that come with being his mother. In an instant, those dreams looked very different.

It was the hardest loss I have ever faced, and there were moments when I couldn't understand why God would allow something so painful to happen. There were questions, tears, and a kind of grief that never completely goes away.

But looking back, I can see something that I may not have always recognized in those moments: ***God never left me.***

Even in the hospital, in the silence, in the tears, and in the days when my heart felt broken beyond repair, the Lord was with me. He didn't promise that I would never experience pain, but He promised that I would never have to walk through it alone.

Over time, God began to show me His peace in ways I never expected. He blessed me with my son, Erik, and my daughter, Margaret. Through them, I have experienced so much joy, laughter, love, and reminders of God's goodness. They are not replacements for Xavier, because no child could ever replace another. Each of my children has a special place in my heart. But through Erik and Margaret, God has reminded me that even after heartbreak, there is still so much beauty in life.

And perhaps one of the greatest gifts of peace I have received is knowing that Xavier is not lost forever. My hope is in the promise of heaven. I find comfort in knowing that one day I will see my sweet boy again. Until then, I picture him surrounded by family who have gone before us, loved and held in the presence of our Savior. What a beautiful thought that is.

That is the peace of Christ. It doesn't erase the pain, and it doesn't mean we never miss the people we have lost. It means that grief does not get the final word. Jesus does.

As we celebrate Advent, I am reminded that the first Christmas wasn't a picture of a perfect, peaceful world. Jesus was born into a world filled with uncertainty, hardship, and sorrow. Yet He came to be our Prince of Peace.

The peace Jesus offers is not dependent on everything going right in our lives. It is not dependent on having all the answers or understanding why things happen. It is the quiet assurance that God is holding us, even when life feels like it is falling apart.

This Christmas season, I am especially thankful for that peace. I am thankful for the years I have had with Erik and Margaret, for the love I will always carry for Xavier, and for the promise that our story doesn't end here.

My prayer is that anyone walking through grief, loss, or a season of uncertainty will remember that God's presence is not measured by how easy our circumstances are. He is there in the heartbreak, in the waiting, and in the healing. His peace is available even when our hearts are hurting.

My name is Becca Wilson, I've been a member of this church for 11 years. My husband Wes and I have been married for 14 years and have two children, Erik is 10 and Margaret is 6. We also have a beaultiful angel baby Xavier who would have been 11. I have worked at Focused Adult for 3 and 1/2 years. I have been in church my whole life but this church has been the only one to feel like "Home". I thank the Lord that he brought the right people into my life at the right time. And I am thankful that my children will grow up surrounded by people that love them just as much as I do.

Day 3: Chance Johnson

Psalm 23: A Peace Worth Aspiring To

In my small group last year, we went through the exercise of telling each other our favorite bible passages and why they were important to us. Although a bit cliché, Psalm 23 has always been at the top of my list. It's an easy passage to love–full of edification, rich in idyllic imagery, and a natural rhythm that makes it unique even among the Psalms.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psalm 23).

Any time I hear it read aloud on Sunday morning, I feel a sort of envy for the peace of mind and spirit that David is describing–not a sinful or corrosive envy but more a hopeful longing for that kind of contentment in my own life. I wonder what it must be like to be anxious for nothing, to fear no evil, to see a table prepared before me in the presence of those who wish me ill. As I continue on this walk, I hope to grow my faith to a point where my inner spiritual life mirrors the peace described in Psalm 23, regardless of my circumstance. I do not want to envy David forever; I want to bear witness to the green pastures myself. I want the same for our church.

So during this advent season, I hope you all will join me in that journey. Fortunately, Paul gave us a pointed prescription on how to get there in Philippians 4:6-7, which Pastor Sarah taught on recently: "[D]o not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Chance Johnson is General Counsel for the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department. He and his wife, Kyndal, have attended FBC OKC together since 2023. In his spare time, Chance enjoys doing Crossfit and watching Thunder basketball.



Day 4: Henry Van Dyke "Leaves of Gold"

The Footpath to Peace

To be glad of life, because it gives you the chance to love and to work and to play and to look up at the stars; to be satisfied with your possessions, but not contented with yourself until you have made the best of them; to despise nothing in the world except falsehood and meanness, and to fear nothing except cowardice; to be governed by your admirations rather than by your disgusts; to covet nothing that is your neighbor's except his kindness of heart and gentleness of manners; to think seldom of your enemeies, often of your friends and every day of Christ; and to spend as much time as you can with body and with spirit, in God's out-of-doors – These are little guideposts on the footpath of peace.



Day 5: Cindi Lee

My last year of teaching, I had James 1:2 tattooed on my arm as a reminder to find joy in the midst of trials. It has always been one of my favorite verses.

A lady I listen to during my devotional time ends each of her talks with the words, "He's where the joy is." I love that reminder. In my opinion, peace comes from finding joy even in the trials and trusting God to handle the things we cannot. We all face trials and storms, but we also have Jesus, who can calm those storms and bring us joy in the middle of them.

I'm Lucinda "Cindi" Lee. I'm relatively new to FBC, having moved to the City from Norman. I share my home with my two dogs, Amelia and Karma. My testimony involves a dog, so they hold a very special place in my heart. I truly believe they are gifts from the Lord.

Day 6: Rilda Smith

Finding Peace in the Season of Waiting

"*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, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace*," Isaiah 9:6 KJV. If we are honest, the weeks leading up to Christmas usually feel anything BUT peaceful!! We sing "Silent Night" with the line "sleep in Heavenly peace", but our calendars tell a very different story. Between crowded stores, internet shipping deadlines, endless to-do lists, family and friend expectations and the pain of missing loved ones, Advent can often feel less like a time of preparation and more like a race to December 25th. While we say we long for peace, we typically treat it like a misplaced but coveted possession we hope to stumble upon once we have crossed everything off our list, rather than something we can cultivate.



However, peace CAN be cultivated, but it requires space to be recognized. Peace isn't simply the absence of all the events on our calendars, it is the presence of a Person. When feeling overwhelmed by a lack of peace this season, we can be intentional in doing things to cultivate peace. Simple things such as lighting an Advent candle, spending a few minutes meditating on a passage of scripture or sitting in silence for a few minutes can each help move us toward the stillness, wholeness and completeness of true Peace/Shalom.

Rilda grew up in Kenya and Tanzania and lives in Shawnee. She has been a member of FBCOKC for one year. She is a Licensed Marital and Family Therapist who also loves to cook/bake, read and do counted cross stitch. She also used to own a house painting business and later a custom picture framing shop (which also sold house paint and artist materials)

Day 7: Grant Kinser

During the season of Advent, we are given the opportunity to Wait. Waiting is a unique and interesting experience because, in it's nature, Waiting is in competition with itself – Waiting is in some sense the presence of absence. The absence of whatever is Waited for often becomes filled with an imagined future or outcome. These imaginary fulfillments have incredible truth telling ability as they can reveal what it is that is most important to the person waiting. The opportunity for the Christian is to align their imagined future with the God who also Waits with us, and in doing so allow ourselves to be filled with hope.



Grant has been a member at FBCOKC since he and his family joined in 2020. Grant is married to his wife of 20 years, Desiree and they have three children – Lucy, Sam and Daphne. Grant currently serves in the church as a Deacon and spends his free time outdoors either cycling, running or enjoying nature.

Week 3 - Joy

Day 1: Lauren Capraro

Slow Down and Make Room



Over the past few years, I've noticed I get caught up in feelings of urgency. It can feel like my days are filled to the brim with things competing for my attention - work tasks, kid's needs, family logistics - the list can feel endless. And social media just makes things worse. Have you seen the videos of influencers telling you to "literally run to Target" to get their newest product drop? This world is designed to keep us going 100mph. The thing is, if we allow the frantic things of this world to fill our capacity, does Jesus even have any room?

We are imperfect people, that much is certain. We're never going to get it right, the same as all Christians who came before us. However, there is some good news: Jesus IS perfect. He's patient and steady when we are not. When things are spiraling around us, He is unshakable.

Paul wrote about Jesus' perfect patience in 1 Timothy 1:16: "But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." It's comforting knowing I am held by a patient Savior, especially when I often flounder in my own impatience.

He also displayed a calm, reassuring spirit during the storm in Luke 8. The disciples urgently woke Jesus shouting 'Master, Master, we're going to drown!', and I can absolutely identify with the disciples in this passage. I feel my own spirit urgently crying out with fear of drowning at times. Do you remember what happened next, though? Jesus simply got up and calmed the storm and questioned why they were afraid to begin with.

During this busy holiday season, whether it's jam-packed days or weathering the storm (or both), make sure Jesus has room.

Lauren Capraro is a small-town Oklahoma native, but relocated to OKC in 2013. She has been attending FBC OKC for the past 12 years with her husband, CJ, and is the proud mom to Ezra and Walter. She works as the website manager for a federal suicide prevention organization. In her spare time she enjoys sewing, playing piano, taking photographs, and going on walks with her family.

Day 2: Natalee Unruh



Luke 2:10
But the angel said to them "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people"

I think it's easy to look around the world today and despair of joy. Tragedy is everywhere, we are surrounded by brokenness. This, however, is not new. This is why we can be joyful! God saw this broken, tragic world and our flawed race, and still deemed us loveable and worth saving. He sent a wee little babe down to bring joy to this world.

One of my favorite traditions in our family is reading through A Christmas Carol in December alongside our Advent. A man seemingly beyond redemption finds joy after witnessing the love shown among his fellow men despite hardship and tragedy, especially at Christmas time.

It is difficult to speak of joy without associating it with happiness, but the two are not equal; joy comes from a deeper place. The joy we feel at Christmas is supernatural. It may not be brought about by touring the world with spirits on Christmas Eve (although, sign me up!) BUT it is for the world. Our Savior has come!

Natalee Unruh has been attending FBCOKC for a little over 15 years. She is married to Chad and Mama to Asher (15), Mollie (5), and Otto (2). She enjoys singing, reading, knitting, lifting weights and paying tetris. Something you may not know about Natalee is that she has a Pez collection consisting of a few hundred dispensers.

Joy of the Lord
by Rend Collective

Though the tears may fall, my song will rise
My song will rise to You
Though my heart may fail, my song will rise
My song will rise to You
While there's breath in my lungs
I will praise you, Lord

In the dead of night, I'll lift my eyes
I'll lift my eyes to You
Though the waters rise, I'll lift my eyes
I'll lift my eyes to You
While there's hope in this heart
I will praise you, Lord

The joy of the Lord is my strength
The joy of the Lord is my strength
In the darkness, I'll dance
In the shadows, I'll sing
The joy of the Lord is my strength

Day 3: Gary Stephenson

Joy, a feeling that most of us take for granted until we experience one of life's dark seasons. During a dark season we cannot see any Joy in our lives because we are trying so hard to get past the difficulty we are dealing with. By God's Grace once we are past a dark season we can look back and see small moments of Joy even during the difficulties we were dealing with. From one of my favorite songs there is a line that I think of when I am dealing with one of life's dark seasons. "There in the darkest night of the soul, there in the sweetest songs of victory, Your Grace finds me, yes Your Grace finds me". As another Christmas approaches, we need to remember the hope that Jesus gives to all who believe in Him and call on Him as our Lord and Savior. Let others see the Joy that Jesus' love brings to our lives by our everyday actions, especially during this Christmas season.

Gary and his wife, Trisha, have belonged to First Baptist Church since 1972 and celebrated their 61st wedding anniversary this past April. They have six granddaughters, one grandson, six great-granddaughters, and one great-grandson. Less widely known are Gary's softball achievements: he earned All-American honors in men's fastpitch in 1971 and 1974, and his team won an ISC World Championship in 1978. In 2005, his team won the Senior Players Association Slow-pitch National Championships, and he was named to the All-American team.





Day 4: Carol Moorad

As I mused over 'joy' I had a flashback to an iconic TV character who spent an entire episode singing "I've got that joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart…" As she sang she was beset by one irritation after another and the enthusiasm of her singing was dimished bit by bit. That's life, isn't it? We want to remember God's goodness and faithfulness but all the while life is splashing mud at us! Whatever life throws at me, I'm **determined** to hold onto the **joy** of my undeserved salvations and the **joy** of knowing God isn't surprised when I mess up and still loves me anyway. How do I spell relief? **J-O-Y**

Carol is a retired teacher. Her life revolves around her husband, Richard, two lovely daughters, one excellent son-in-law, two precious doggies, and wonderful family and friends. Carol is thankful for a love God who redeemed her.

Day 5: Alexandra Malony



The reaction on someone's face when I give them a present.

Seeing family that we haven't seen in a while.

Hugging my mom when she comes home from a trip.

These are three of the first things that come to mind when I think of joy. What these have in common is that it's not just you who is happy, it's more than one person, and that is what joy means to me. It's more than happiness; its happiness shared with another person. When you share it with another human being it is more profound because human connections are so important.

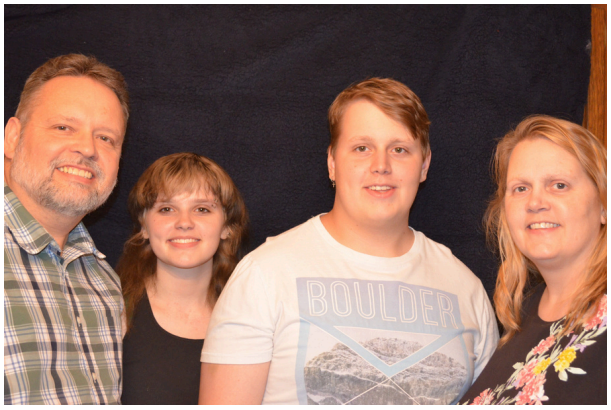
When you have a friend, someone can pick you up when you fall. When you're sad, a companion is comforting in a way that is indescribable. Making friends, catching up with family, creating memories with other people are some of the most joyful things in life because experiences with other people are more meaningful. No matter what situation you are in, a bond with another person brings joy. There is a part of us that can only be satisfied by human connection. It is the way God made us.

God made us relational because He wanted us to have a relationship with Him and with each other. Our love for Him and for each other makes Him joyful too because that is what He wanted. He also wants us to be joyful. Our relationship with God is the deepest connection we will ever have, so it is also the most joyful one we can have if we make Him our first center of our life.

"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fulness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Psalm 16:11

Alexandra is 11 years-old and has spent her entire life in this church. She is a sensitive, caring middle sister who loves dance, helping, math, and anything purple.

Day 6: Sheri Cook



My name is Sheri Cook, I work at St. Anthony's hospital. Jarrett and I joined FBCOKC shortly after we married in July 2000. We have two children that grew up in the church, Kenneth James (KJ) and Elizabeth (Libby or Dusty). When I think of joy, I think of contentment. My daughter has said "Comparison is the thief of joy ", as I think back on my life I think that is true. The more I live and enjoy taking care of others, the more joy it brings to my life. When I dwell on things , I find myself feeling like I'm lacking and I can get depressed. So anytime I feel that way, it is time for me to put more of myself into others and spend some time with God.

Day 7: Kyndal Jones -Johnson

Saving PDFs, Not Lives

As a Production Manager, the holiday season is the busiest time of the year. I am the engine moving the show forward. It's my job to make sure every department and performers needs have been addressed. I keep a positive mindset in rehearsals that last well into the night to keep the company's spirits high. There are many problems to solve, and I usually forego my own needs for the show to succeed. However, opening night watching the performers' faces beam in the lights and feeling the electric buzz of the audience makes it all worth it.

Once we close the show and Christmas is here, I am exhausted and already preparing for our next performance. There is little to no time to resonate on the reason for the season. I never noticed this until last year. I was baptized in November and looking forward to the Advent services and fellowship during this sacred time. I missed out on all of it, and I will again this year and years to come because of my work.

When Toni presented me with this opportunity, she mentioned the theme was "Prepare Him Room", a theme to challenge writers and readers to intentionally make space in their schedules and hearts for Christ during the season. As I have prepared this journal, I have had time to reflect on how I will be choosing joy in this season. I say choosing because joy is choice. Happiness is circumstantial, but joy can be found in a multitude of circumstances and share space with a host of other emotions.

James 4:8 tells us that to draw near to God, and he will draw near to us. Regardless of my work this advent season, I am going to take time to draw near to God. If that means finding a quiet moment in the theater or closing my door, taking a few deep breaths, and handing over my worries to the Lord, I will make time. I will remind myself that I am saving PDFs and not lives. Work is important, but it should not come at the expense of our spiritual health.



Choosing to lean into the Lord provides me a quiet strength to help me persevere. A reminder that I have a God who will hold me in my toughest moments and will rejoice with me in my victories. A choice which brings a quiet moment of relief and joy.

In a season that can stir many different emotions, and the outside world skews our priorities, I challenge you to take a moment and lean into the Lord. Let Him remind you that you are loved and held. Choose Him and you will find joy.

Kyndal Jones-Johnson is a Company Manager/Production Stage Manager at Oklahoma City University. She has an affinity for all animals and is novice bird watcher. Kyndal is married to Chance Johnson who is her perfect match! They have two cats, Loki and Chester, who are absolutely spoiled!

Where Shepherds Lately Knelt
Text by Jaroslav J. Vajda

Where shepherds lately knelt
and kept the angel's word,
I come in half belief,
a pilgrim strangely stirred,
but there is room and welcome there for me,
but there is room and welcome there for me.

In that unlikely place
I find him as they said:
sweet newborn babe, how frail!
and in a manger bed,
a still, small voice to cry one day for me,
a still, small voice to cry one day for me.

How should I not have known
Isaiah would be there,
his prophecies fulfilled?
With pounding heart I stare:
a child, a son, the Prince of Peace for me,
a child, a son, the Prince of Peace for me.

Can I, will I forget
how love was born, and burned
its way into my heart
unasked, unforced, unearned,
to die, to live, and not alone for me,
to die, to live, and not alone for me?

Week 4 - Love

Day 1: Mick McCarthy

Love in the Crossfire
Practicing Advent in Hard Circumstances



As an attorney, people rarely call me when life is going well. They come see me when a business partnership has fractured, when an agreement is breached, when a will or trust is contested, or when a marriage is on the rocks. My job is to give wise counsel to my clients when they face hard circumstances. My time-tested advice deals with how they communicate while I represent them.

When emotions run high and litigation looms, every instinct tells us to strike back, score points, or match an opponent's hostility. Against all that, I ask them before they send an email, make a phone call, or speak across a table: If it isn't in 1 Corinthians 13 don't do it.

"*Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,...*" (verse 4). In a dispute, patience means refusing to fire off an angry reply just to vent. Civility strips away sarcasm and condescension. Let me fight for you on the merits of your case, aiming to move it forward expeditiously and not bogged down by personal grievances causing unnecessary multiplication of the proceedings. Letting go of pride keeps you focused on resolving the issue rather than proving your superiority.

"*does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,...*" (verse 5). Basic courtesy disarms hostility, even when an adversary is malevolent. Resisting provocation and dropping the mental ledger of every slight prevents bitterness from dictating your thoughts and words.

"*does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;...*" (verse 6). Don't celebrate when an opponent stumbles or suffers misfortune, even in the middle of a tough battle. Anchor your words in honesty and integrity, trusting truth and righteousness to stand.

"*bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things....*" (verse 7). Operating in love means guarding discretion, not giving in to cynicism, and holding onto hope for justice to prevail. Even when a battle drags on, love gives you the steadiness to endure without losing your character in Christ.

Advent reminds us that Christ endured hard circumstances. He entered a broken, contentious world not with condemnation, but with sacrificial love. As we prepare our hearts this season, we are called to carry that same light into our hardest conflicts; speaking with grace, standing firm in truth, and letting love govern every word, even in the middle of a battle. Disputes eventually conclude and arguments fade away, but "Love never fails;..." (verse 8).

Mitchell "Mick" McCarthy is a practicing attorney and engineer. He is a registered patent attorney. He started four years of law school at the age of thirty-five. His practice spans a wide variety of areas including Intellectual Property Law, Business Law, Civil Litigation, Criminal Law, Estate Planning, and Family Law.

Day 2: Gina Payne

Though Tina (*I know her personally-not-lol*) was singing about a different kind of love, her question pops to mind: What's love got to do with it?

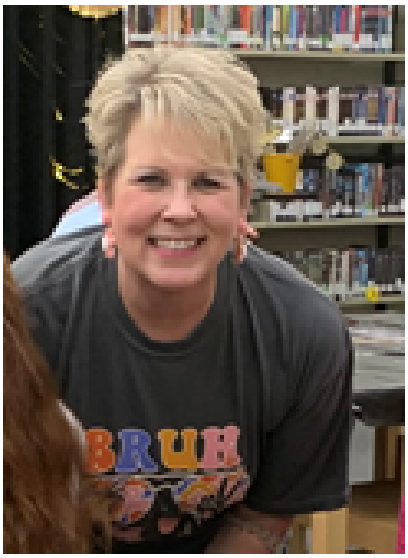
I think Jesus might have replied, "Everything, it has everything to do with it." And, "it" is the good life, one with eyes open, wide.

In fact, when the Corinthians were arguing over status, Paul advised, "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal," 1 Corinthians 13:1.

My mind became just that, noisy and clanging, with little room for much more. After years of an unhealthy loop of negativity and depression, I definitely related to "I like cats, coffee, and about three people" (a popular t-shirt saying).

I wanted change but couldn't seem to get unstuck. I was not totally void of a spiritual life, but I was in my box sealed tightly shut, giving most of myself to my teaching job. Just before I retired, I had three cases of hives that I learned could mean stress, allergies, or autoimmune. Ding, ding, ding, after further tests, the answer - lupus - which explained so much after I knew its symptoms. It was the diagnosis that led me to an acquaintance-now-friend who has been instrumental in my upturn. I have no doubt that God placed her in my life. He also led me to FBC, OKC, where I've been able to exhale via the kindness and authenticity of the people I've met. I'm thankful. Kylene, I'm so glad you invited me. I've become unglued (in the best possible way). My box is open, and I'm finding room for much more: prayer, Bible study, exercise, community, helping, giving... the good life based on love.

There's much more to the story, but I'll leave it for now.



Gina grew up in a small town north of Birmingham, Alabama. She's married to David Payne (not the weatherman) and has one son, Andrew, who lives with his wife, Hannah, in Gilbert, Arizona. She taught high school English for most of her career. She enjoys writing, thrifting/antiquing, crafting, mountains, and cool weather.



Day 3: Susan Stephenson

Two things can be true at the same time, especially in the emotional realm. One can be both startled and trusting; confused and open-minded; uncertain and hopeful. A young woman from a tiny village received a message unlike any other: “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” Then Luke reports that this greeting troubled her, as she had no idea who her guest might be, nor what he meant by the words. As the conversation progressed, she gained more information, yet the implications of the message dawned gradually. Her guest urged her not to be afraid, then told her that she—a virgin—would bear a son. Gabriel gave overwhelming details: the name she should give the son, the title he would bear, and the throne he would inherit. All of these words were incomprehensible to a common peasant girl, whose sole qualification for this role was her pure, complete faith and trust in the Most High.

From the beginning of her simple life, she had learned the tenets of her faith. She had a family who practiced their Jewish faith in daily life, including the recitation of the Shema. Mary’s family adhered to the attendant instructions that teaching faith from one generation to the next was a mandate for every day of their lives in a Jewish home.

So, startling and confusing as Gabriel’s message was, Mary found it possible to feel her uncertainty as an innocent young woman, while at the same time leaning into her faith in the God of creation, covenant, and miracles. The closer to the moment of His promised arrival she came, the more the fear succumbed to trust; the confusion to faith; and the feelings of unpreparedness to the certainty of God’s plan.

We know in hindsight that God’s plan all along was to send his son Jesus because of His deep and abiding love—love that sacrificed self so that we might have freedom from sin’s condemnation and the free gift of relationship with God through Christ.
Again, two things are true at the same time: we are unworthy of God’s love, but He gives it all the more freely, bestowing upon us an unbreakable relationship whose origin and destination is love.

Susan Stephenson has recently entered retirement with dreams of filling a small yard with flowers, shrubs, and trees. In the dormant months, she hopes to improve her sewing skills to make quilts and gifts. Susan continues to enjoy singing in the choir and serving in Care for OKC on Mondays. She recently adopted a five year old miniature Poodle mix named Bella, who single-handedly fills the home with sound and chaos.

"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, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

Isaiah 9:6



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the FBCOKC Ministers and Staff



FBCOKC Ministers and Staff

Sarah Stewart, Pastor

Brad Stewart, Missions Minister

Toni Adams, Minister for Senior Adults & Discipleship

Ariel Koerner, Minister for Young Families

Steven McConnell, Minister of Music

Don Clothier, Pianist

Justin Keiser, Facilities Manager

Erika Miller, Administrative Assistant

Christmas Events

December 13th

Sounds of the Season

10:30am

December 24th

Taste of Christmas 5pm

Christmas Eve Service 6pm

(Children's Live Nativity)

