

# Do Not Fear: A Project of Holy Dialogues



Do Not Fear

Advent & Christmas Devotionals  
by LGBTQI+ Christians & their friends.

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Advent & Christmas  
Devotionals by  
LGBTQI+ Christians  
& their friends.

Do Not Fear is based on the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, 2021-2022

With contributions by:

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## **How to use Do Not Fear**

### **by Rev. Kim Purl**

The word Advent means “coming.” In the weeks before Christmas many Christians prepare their souls for what it means for Jesus to come into our world by following Advent readings, or an Advent calendar. When we remember the first coming of infant Jesus Messiah, God sent angelic messengers with overwhelming news to old Zechariah, unwed Mary and Joseph, and to scrappy shepherds to “do not fear” God’s fulfillment of Messiah coming to live among us. When we intentionally engage in Advent, we reconnect with the story of Jesus coming into our lives to “do not fear” his gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love.

The season of Advent begins the 4th Sunday before Christmas. In the year 2021, it will begin on Sunday, November 28th and end on Christmas Eve. This devotional guide will continue through the twelve days of Christmas, ending January 6th, the day of Epiphany, celebrated as the day the wisemen found the infant Jesus Messiah. The scripture readings of this devotional guide are the daily reading from the Revised Common Lectionary Year C.

Do Not Fear devotionals are written by LGBTQI+ Christians and their friends. Contributors write from a wide array of Christian conviction and belief at the intersection of faith and LGBTQI+, writing from their own beliefs and doctrines without harm to another. This is the heart of holy dialogue, and we believe there is room for all at the feet of Jesus.

Suggestions for how to use the devotional guide are up to you. Each day offers several scriptures. Begin with prayer, read one passage or all of them, followed by a devotional.

Join the Holy Dialogues Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/holydialogues>) as we dialogue together during Advent and Christmas.

We look forward to meeting you!

Do Not Fear: Advent and Christmas Devotionals  
by LGBTQI+ Christians and their friends  
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# Contents

## **Week 1: Hope**

**November 28-December 4, 2021**

**Contributor: Rev Marian Edmonds-Allen**

### 1st Sunday in Advent

Sunday, November 28, 2021

Psalm 25:1-10; Jeremiah 33:14-16; Luke 21:25-36;

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

### Monday, November 29, 2021

Psalm 90; Numbers 17:1-11; 2 Peter 3:1-18

### Tuesday, November 30, 2021

Psalm 90; 2 Samuel 7:18-29; Revelation 22:12-16

### Wednesday, December 1, 2021

Psalm 90; Isaiah 1:24-31; Luke 11:29-32

### Thursday, December 2, 2021

Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:5-12; Philippians 1:12-18a

### Friday, December 3, 2021

Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:13-18; Philippians 1:18b-26

### Saturday, December 4, 2021

Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 4:1-6; Luke 9:1-6

## **Week 2: Faith**

**December 5-December 11, 2021**

**Contributor: Jeremy Emmert**

### 2nd Sunday in Advent

Sunday, December 5, 2021

Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 3:1-6; Philippians 3:1-11

### Monday, December 6, 2021

Psalm 126; Isaiah 40:1-11; Romans 8:22-25

### Tuesday, December 7, 2021

Psalm 126; Isaiah 19:18-25; 2 Peter 1:2-15

### Wednesday, December 8, 2021

Psalm 126; Isaiah 35:3-7; Luke 7:18-30

### Thursday, December 9, 2021

Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 6:1-8; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

### Friday, December 10, 2021

Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 8:4-12; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15

### Saturday, December 11, 2021

Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 9:8-15; Luke 1:57-66

**Week 3: Joy****December 12-December 18, 2021****Contributor: Rev Kim Purl****3rd Sunday in Advent**

Sunday, December 12, 2021

Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-6; Luke 3:7-18;

Philippians 4:4-7

**Monday, December 13, 2021**

Isaiah 11:1-9; Numbers 16:1-19; Hebrews 13:7-17

**Tuesday, December 14, 2021**

Isaiah 11:1-9; Numbers 16:20-35; Acts 28:23-31

**Wednesday, December 15, 2021**

Isaiah 11:1-9; Micah 4:8-13; Luke 7:31-35

**Thursday, December 16, 2021**

Psalm 80:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 10:10-18

**Friday, December 17, 2021**

Psalm 80:1-7; Isaiah 42:10-18; Hebrews 10:32-39

**Saturday, December 18, 2021**

Psalm 80:1-7; Isaiah 66:7-11; Luke 13:31-35

**Week 4: Peace****December 19-December 25, 2021****Contributor: Marie Nganga****4th Sunday in Advent**

Sunday, December 19, 2021

Psalm 80:1-7; Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:39-55; Hebrews 10:5-10

**Monday, December 20, 2021**

Psalm 113; Genesis 25:19-28; Colossians 1:15-20

**Tuesday, December 21, 2021**

Psalm 113; Genesis 30:1-24; Romans 8:18-30

**Wednesday, December 22, 2021**

Luke 1:46b-55; Micah 4:1-5; Ephesians 2:11-22

**Thursday, December 23, 2021**

Luke 1:46b-55; Micah 4:6-8; 2 Peter 1:16-21

**Christmas Eve Friday, December 24 2021**

Psalm 96; Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-20

**1st Day of Christmas, Saturday, December 25, 2021**

Psalm 97; Luke 2:1-20; Titus 3:4-7

**Week 5: God With Us****December 26, 2021-January 1, 2022****Contributor: Donna Techau**2nd Day of Christmas, Sunday, December 26, 2021

Psalm 148; Luke 2:41-52; Colossians 3:12-17

3rd Day of Christmas, Monday, December 27, 2021

Psalm 148; Proverbs 8:32-36; John 21:19b-24

4th Day of Christmas, Tuesday, December 28, 2021

Psalm 148; Isaiah 54:1-13; Revelation 21:1-7

5th Day of Christmas, Wednesday, December 29, 2021

Psalm 147:12-20; 1 Chronicles 28:1-10; 1 Corinthians 3:10-17

6th Day of Christmas, Thursday, December 30, 2021

Psalm 147:12-20; 2 Chronicles 1:7-13; Mark 13:32-37

7th Day of Christmas, Friday, December 31, 2021

Psalm 147:12-20; 1 Kings 3:5-14; John 8:12-19

8th Day of Christmas/New Year's Day

Saturday, January 1, 2022: Psalm 8: Ecclesiastes 3:1-13;

Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 21:1-6

**Week 6: God With Us****January 2-January 6, 2022****Contributor: Lauren Horneff**9th Day of Christmas, Sunday, January 2, 2022Psalm 147:12-20; Jeremiah 31:7-14; John 1:1-18;  
Ephesians 1:3-1410th Day of Christmas, Monday, January 3, 2022

Psalm 72; Job 42:10-17; Luke 8:16-21

11th Day of Christmas, Tuesday, January 4, 2022

Psalm 72; Isaiah 6:1-5; Acts 7:44-53

12th Day of Christmas, Wednesday, January 5, 2022

Psalm 72; Jeremiah 31:7-14; John 1:10-18

Epiphany of our Lord

Thursday, January 6, 2022

Psalm 72:1-14; Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12;

Ephesians 3:1-12

**Do Not Fear**  
**Week 1: Hope**

**1st Sunday of Advent**  
**November 28-December 4, 2021**

**Week 1: Hope**  
**November 28-December 4, 2021**  
**Contributor: Rev. Marian Edmonds-Allen**

1st Sunday of Advent

Sunday, November 28, 2021

Psalm 25:1-10; Jeremiah 33:14-16; Luke 21:25-36;

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Monday, November 29, 2021

Psalm 90; Numbers 17:1-11; 2 Peter 3:1-18

Tuesday, November 30, 2021

Psalm 90; 2 Samuel 7:18-29; Revelation 22:12-16

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

Psalm 90; Isaiah 1:24-31; Luke 11:29-32

Thursday, December 2, 2021

Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:5-12; Philippians 1:12-18a

Friday, December 3, 2021

Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:13-18; Philippians 1:18b-26

Saturday, December 4, 2021

Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 4:1-6; Luke 9:1-6

Rev. Marian is the Executive Director of Parity (parity.nyc) and has worked at the intersection of faith and LGBT for over a decade.

She attended Western Theological Seminary and Eden Theological Seminary, and is currently working on a Doctor of Ministry degree at Eden with a focus on healing the faith and LGBT divide.

Marian is married to Tori and has a busy household filled with four kids and many animals friends - including Bubba (pictured below) who is cute but loud during zoom calls.





## 1st Sunday of Advent, November 28, 2021

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**Contributor: Rev Marian Edmonds-Allen**  
**Do Not Fear: Hope**

**Psalm 25:1-10; Jeremiah 33:14-16; Luke 21:25-36; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13**

A meditation on Psalm 25:1-10

I spent a glorious month in Israel and Palestine, and one day, while I hiked with our group of seminary students, our professor pointed out some sheep picking their way along a mountainside. “See those paths?” I couldn’t see them at first, but then, finally I could: very thin lines in the midst of the small trees and shrubs. I watched the sheep, seemingly walking haphazardly, but now, I realized, were walking along those narrow paths on the hillside. Not in a straight line, either, but in curious, convoluted paths.

“Those are called ‘paths of righteousness’ - ever heard of those?” I had, and what I saw, those sheep walking carefully on the mountainside, was not what I imagined.

Our Scripture for today, this Psalm, attributed to David, tells a story of someone in deep pain and with worry for the future. Yet within that pain, the Psalmist - let’s call him David - places his very soul in God’s hands, asking for instruction, for teaching in truth. David remembers his sins - oh, does he remember them! - and he also remembers God’s promises: mercy (forgiveness) and steadfast (unwavering) love.

When I read this psalm I imagine David, a shepherd as a child, and then a King, and another kind of shepherd as an adult. In both times of his life he experienced pain, worry - and also his own unwavering trust in the God who always promised to forgive and love him, no matter what.

I’m no shepherd, and certainly not a king, yet I, too, have deep pain and worry that follows my days. Like David in this psalm, my pain and worry sometimes seem overwhelming, yet I have his example of what to do: place my soul in God’s hands, and be enveloped by forgiveness and unwavering love.

And then, when it is time to rise from my knees and encounter my day, I think back to the hills where David roamed as a youth, tending his sheep, caring for his people. I think about the paths God has placed before me: hard to see at first, yet unmistakable once I notice them.

Prayer: Holy Lord of unwavering love and forgiveness, may our paths through each day and through the new season of Advent be your paths. Make our way the way of humility as we watch for your teaching, and keep our souls nestled in your loving hands today and every day. In the name of Jesus, God with us, amen.

**Monday, November 29, 2021**

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**Contributor: Rev Marian Edmonds-Allen**  
**Do Not Fear: Hope**

**Psalm 90; Numbers 17:1-11; 2 Peter 3:1-18**

A meditation on 2 Peter 3:1-18

Have you ever seen the protestors at pride parades or other LGBT events? Usually they are standing on a street corner with hand painted signs that warn of impending doom for anyone LGBT. One I saw had on one side: "God hates f\*gs!" And on the reverse: "Jesus is coming! Repent!"

I wonder what it is like to feel so strongly about repentance that you hold a sign - or perhaps write a letter - warning that Jesus is coming! The author of today's scripture writes: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed." I wonder if, instead of thinking of that day with dread, what would happen if instead we thought about it with hope? What about instead of fear, perhaps the day of the Lord is a day of love? After all, we are told, perfect love (God's love) casts out fear.

The author continues: "...beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation." Being found at peace... because God is a God of love, and a God of our salvation. On this second day of Advent, we know that the Lord is coming as He always does, in a manger, surrounded by donkeys and hay and angels and wise men...not what anyone expected, but what everyone needed.

One day I decided to chat with a protestor holding a sign. I stood next to him for a while, watching the crowds walk by. Finally he turned to me in my rainbow clergy stole and shouted, "What do YOU want?" "Oh, hi," I replied - I'm a pastor and I love God, just like you do. I just thought I'd stand next to you for a while, if that's okay. My name is Marian." He spun on his heel and strode away to another street corner. "His name is Jed." I looked over my shoulder to see someone else with a sign. "Oh, well, I'm Marian. It's nice to meet you. Mind if I stand here?" Not at all, she replied. It's a free country after all. She paused. "And besides, I don't know if you know this, but I don't believe this stuff. I'm paid to stand here with this sign, just like Jed. I used to love doing this, but I don't anymore. I think God doesn't hate anybody."

"Me, either." I replied. And we stood there together for a while.

Prayer: Lord God of beginnings and endings, may we be filled with peace as we await your coming. May Advent be a reminder that you are a God of surprises, often, and our God of love, always.

**Tuesday, November 30, 2021**

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**Contributor: Rev Marian Edmonds-Allen**  
**Do Not Fear: Hope**

**Psalm 90; 2 Samuel 7:18-29; Revelation 22:12-16**

A meditation on 2 Samuel 7:18-29

In our home, with two LGBT moms and two transgender kids - plus two more kids who are enthusiastic allies - we love watching a show called *Legendary*. You may have heard of it - it is a show based on “houses” that compete with each other in a form of highly stylized dance called vogue. Vogue evolved out of the ballroom dancing scene of 1980’s Harlem - if you have heard Madonna’s song of the same name, that is what she is singing about. Vogue was also featured in the award winning (and tragic) film *Paris is Burning*, stories of young LGBT people, most often BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) transgender young people, who live their lives with fierce dignity despite the very real challenges they face for their very survival.

On *Legendary*, these young people are organized into “houses” with their own style that can be very different, yet every house has a parent figure, and every house is a family.

When I think about David’s prayer, our scripture for today, I think about David’s conversation with God: Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and said, “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?”

David was favored by God all his life and his house was similarly blessed by God. Even after David sinned - and sinned in some terrible ways - God still loved him.

“...may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you; for you, O Lord God, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever.” David’s “house” is mentioned 26 times in the Old Testament, and most often refers not to a physical place but instead refers to David’s family, his genealogical line. In the New Testament, the first book of the canon, Matthew, in the first chapter, first verse: “This is the genealogy[a] of Jesus the Messiah the son of David...” Jesus was the son of Mary and of Joseph, literally, but also David’s “son” because Jesus is descended directly from David - Jesus is part of David’s lineage, part of David’s house.

LGBT people can have a complicated relationship with family. A recurring story in the show *Legendary* is of fierce love and pride from some parents, along with stories of searing rejection from others. Yet all belong together in the family they have made in their chosen House - whether Belenciaga, Nina Oricci, Luxe, Chanel, and Miyake-Mugler or another.

Even those of us not talented enough to be in a vogue house have chosen family - a house that loves us with fierce and protective love. LGBT folks have for generations found their people, loved and cared for them, and been cared for in return. Some critics see this fact as disrespecting birth families, of disrespecting families in general. I believe it is exactly the opposite - like the homeless youth I have long worked with, that also organize into families, human beings are programmed to love and care for each other in groups. From youth experiencing homelessness, to vogue houses, to LGBT people with fierce allies and LGBT siblings, to David, thousands of years ago - chosen families are blessings. Each and every person has a place in one or many more, and always, if they choose a place in God’s family, alongside Jesus. That’s an invitation for each of us, the House of the Lord is our house.

Prayer: “And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant; now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you; for you, O Lord God, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever.”

**Wednesday, December 1, 2021**

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**Contributor: Rev Marian Edmonds-Allen**  
**Do Not Fear: Hope**

**Psalm 90; Isaiah 1:24-31; Luke 11:29-32**

A meditation on Luke 11:29-32: The Sign of Jonah

Who doesn't know the story of Jonah and the whale? From the Veggie Tales movie (with the hit song "In the Belly of the Whale" by The Newsboys featuring Steve Taylor) to ubiquitous children's books, the story is vivid to this day. Jonah was running away from his call to share the good news of God's love to all of Nineveh - but God was intent on giving all the citizens of Nineveh (including the animals!) a chance to repent and to save their lives. Jonah grudgingly complied - even though he was convinced that all of Nineveh should be destroyed - and the entire community was saved.

It wasn't until I learned Hebrew, the language Jonah was originally written in, that I picked up on the hilarious details in the story. The entire book is actually meant to be performed as a play - a farce - and a truly funny one at that. The celebration at the end of my years of Hebrew class was a field trip to see Jonah performed by a theater company. In a performance that was pantomimed, all of us in the audience got the hilarity of Jonah's stubbornness and God's humorous response. At one point, Jonah sits and pouts and complains to God that he could at least have a small bush or tree for shade - and so, God provides Jonah with a castor oil plant...and yes, that castor oil, the original laxative! But despite his many faults, Jonah was the person through whom all of Ninevah - and the animals, too! - was saved.

Jonah thought that the people of Ninevah were outside of God's saving love and grace - in his opinion, these were people who should be condemned, and in his mind, God was making a mistake. But the author of the Jonah story knew that God's love isn't constrained by the opinions of narrow-minded people, and this author wanted to be very sure we would remember how hard it is for God to teach some people... remember the whale? How much more then, will the message of Jesus save all of us, for all time, than the message of Jonah to the Ninevites?

I think of that whale when I encounter someone who is very sure that I am destined for hell because I am bisexual and gender non-binary. I chuckle a bit to myself, thinking of the whale vomiting Jonah up on a beach, and giving him a castor oil plant for shade. God's love isn't constrained by anyone, it is for me, and it is for you. It's even for all of Ninevah (including the animals!) and for grumpy Jonah, too.

The fear that can come from the fear of God's judgement is nothing compared with the saving love that Jesus has for each of us, for all of us. If the world condemns us, and it may, God will always bring news of saving grace meant for you, for me - for today and for time eternal. You, exactly you, are beloved by God. Praise be.

Prayer: Holy God, may your abundant love continue to surprise us. May we always watch for what you are doing in the world. Give us courage to join you in showing and sharing love to those around us, and give us a hope that permeates our very selves, each and every day.

**Thursday, December 2, 2021**

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**Contributor: Rev Marian Edmonds-Allen**  
**Do Not Fear: Hope**

**Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:5-12; Philippians 1:12-18a**

A meditation on Philippians 1:12-18

In one of our readings today we find that Paul is imprisoned, yet Paul, despite the horror of prison, finds reason to rejoice.

Paul's single-minded purpose and relentless optimism reminds me of the opposite, from yesterday, the fabled and famous Jonah, who tried everything to escape sharing God's love, and grumbled every step of the way. Perhaps there is a correlation, between wanting to share the love of God with all people, rather than trying to keep it to yourself, or to condemn those people you dislike, rather than optimistically offering them love and kinship?

LGBT people are too often told the lie that God doesn't love them. We know better - God loves LGBT people with a fierce love that shrugs aside those who wish to condemn us or try to keep God's love only for themselves. What we can do in return is to share God's love right back with them, regardless of their attitudes and their actions, confident that we are called to live in hope, not fear, and at all times to rejoice in the saving love that is ours - not ours to hoard, but ours to share.

During dark times that seem even more divided than before, I find reason to rejoice in the surprising friends and allies I find - people who have not yet met an LGBT person, perhaps, or an LGBT person of faith, yet who pause and open their hearts and minds for what God

As my friend Sr. Luisa Derouen recounted her thoughts, after meeting a transgender person for the first time: "I didn't understand. How could I? But first and most important, was love. Understanding would come later." Sr. Luisa started secretly meeting with transgender people and their families, using the pseudonym, Sister Monica. She felt called to be with them, despite prevailing attitudes that made public ministry impossible at that time:

"Most transgender persons with any affiliation to organized religion have been told that to proceed with transition would be a serious sin. My primary message to them has been that when we are moving toward truth in our lives, God is with us and not against us. Truth never leads us away from God."

The prison of societal misunderstanding tries, yet fails, to obscure the truth we know: that God created us, we are born miracles: As the Psalmist said: "You formed my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." (Psalm 139:13-14a)

A few years ago Sr. Luisa decided to "come out" publicly about her transgender ministry. If you look her up you will see the amazing things she has done in over 21 years (and counting) of spiritual companionship to hundreds of transgender people, Catholics and non-Catholics alike. And it all started, not with understanding, but by being open to what love might do. How much will you do, if your heart is fully open to the sometimes radical, usually surprising, and always life-saving love of God?

Prayer: Holy God, thank you for your servants who offer love without waiting for understanding. Teach us to follow their example and to live lives filled with hope and love - more than enough to share.

**Friday, December 3, 2021**

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**Contributor: Rev Marian Edmonds-Allen**  
**Do Not Fear: Hope**

**Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:13-18; Philippians 1:18b-26**

A meditation on Philippians 1:18-26

“Living is Christ, and dying is gain.” I have thought about that verse ever since I learned it as a child. It has helped me get through some of the toughest times, times when I was ready to give up. It gives me comfort, knowing that whatever waits after death, it is with God, and it is “gain.” But living, says Paul, is Christ! Living is filled with purposeful love, it is filled with forgiveness, it is filled with seeing all of humanity, all of creation, as beloved and kin to us.

Of course that is the ideal, and not what we see in the world. Too often the world isn’t filled with love and forgiveness. We live in a world in desperate need of the saving love of Jesus.

For a decade now I have worked to prevent LGBT youth suicide and homelessness. There are times of year when it can be harder to be a LGBT youth, and Christmas is one of those times. Some families aren’t able to cope with the stress of not understanding their LGBT child, or the thought of hosting family members for holiday celebrations that might disapprove of the LGBT child in the family. And so, during a time when many celebrate family and faith, some LGBT youth are kicked out of the family home, and some of those youth contemplate suicide, or worse.

It’s ironic, don’t you think? The time of year that should be most filled with love and forgiveness can be the time of year when fear takes hold and lives are shattered.

It’s better now than it has been. Instead of calls asking me for help for a youth that has been kicked out, or is in the emergency room, I more often get calls from parents saying their child just came out, and they want to know how they can best support them. “Tell them you love them,” I say. “Start there. And then let’s talk about support and resources. But first, tell them you love them, no matter what.”

LGBT people often have to take the first step of being open to the love of their parents after experiencing great pain. The mom of a young gay son told me yesterday: “I don’t know what I would do if my son hadn’t forgiven me for the years of rejection we showed him. I realize now that he is such a gift to me, a miracle – God’s gift of showing me what real love is like.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, we can remember the promise that all are forgiven, all are loved - and that we are not to fear, we are to have hope. And first, to be open to love.

Prayer: Holy God, may we live each day, each moment, aware that our lives are rooted in Christ Jesus.

**Saturday, December 4, 2021**

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**Contributor: Rev Marian Edmonds-Allen**  
**Do Not Fear: Hope**

**Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 4:1-6; Luke 9:1-6**

A meditation on Luke 9:1-6

(Jesus) said to them, “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

What would you do, if you were given this job today, if Jesus said to you: Don’t take a thing, just go! Proclaim the love of God, and heal!

I have friends who embed with youth and adults experiencing homelessness. They can’t bring their cell phone. They can’t bring money. Some try to bring a backpack with...stuff..but they will find that whatever they have, they will quickly give away. My friends aren’t there to proclaim God’s love, though many follow Jesus themselves. They don’t have the skills to heal, but they do have one thing: they have lots of love to share.

By the third day, each of my friends report that their understanding of the world has changed. What they used to care deeply about - their car, perhaps, or maybe having their breakfast or latte made in a certain way - those are things that no longer hold power over them. They also find that their worries change, or even go away, because people experiencing homelessness care about each other, and care for each other.

Why worry, when you know you will eat, even if you aren’t sure what you will eat, or when? Why worry about shelter? It will come, in one form or another. God will provide - through good hearted people, most often.

I’ve learned through spending time with youth experiencing homelessness that they organize themselves into street families. Usually 8-12 youth will come together and care for each other, find some shelter, and have one or parent figures that provides direction and security. All of these are youth, and all don’t have what you and I think of as a home, but really, they do have a home, with each other – but they don’t have a house, or some other shelter that the government calls “fit for human habitation.” Instead, they may have an abandoned railroad car, or some tents, or an empty building, or a tunnel under a city street.

Each youth has a job. Some *busk* – do something to earn money on the street. Others travel to food pantries or look for clothing or other supplies. What they find they bring back to share. Some of the most generous people, youth or adults that I have ever met, are people without a house, but who instead have eyes to see that possessions – like love - aren’t for hoarding – they are for sharing.

Advent is the time when we can ponder our lives as we prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus into the world as a baby, in a barn, not in a comfortable house, but in a squat, with a street family.

Prayer: Holy God, the abundant love that Jesus brings is ours - wherever we find ourselves - in a house, in a barn, in a camp. May we always be mindful that it is not our possessions or our achievements that make us worthy of your love: it is the saving love of Jesus.

**Do Not Fear**  
**Week 2: Faith**

**2nd Sunday of Advent**  
**December 5-December 11, 2021**



**Week 2: Faith**  
**December 5-December 11, 2021**  
**Contributor: Jeremy Emmert**

2nd Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 5, 2021

Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 3:1-6; Philippians 3:1-11

Monday, December 6, 2021

Psalm 126; Isaiah 40:1-11; Romans 8:22-25

Tuesday, December 7, 2021

Psalm 126; Isaiah 19:18-25; 2 Peter 1:2-15

Wednesday, December 8, 2021

Psalm 126; Isaiah 35:3-7; Luke 7:18-30

Thursday, December 9, 2021

Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 6:1-8; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Friday, December 10, 2021

Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 8:4-12; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15

Saturday, December 11, 2021

Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 9:8-15; Luke 1:57-66

“I grew up on a farm in rural Indiana. I went to Purdue University and then on to Regent University in Virginia Beach for law school. I started practicing law first for a small firm in Indianapolis and then eventually served 10 years in the Air Force.

The Air Force gave me the chance to live in several parts of the country, however, it was during that time that the conflict between my sexual orientation and faith became too much, so I thought I had to choose one or the other.

I walked away from a relationship with Jesus. I made that decision in isolation without the benefit of the counsel of others.

In a way that only God could, that false dichotomy came to a resolution in October, 2013 when I firmly reconnected with God.



## 2nd Sunday in Advent, December 5, 2021

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**Contributor: Jeremy Emmert**  
**Do Not Fear: Faith**

**Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 3:1-6; Philippians 3:1-11**

Fearless Service

*"...we can serve God without fear..." Luke 1:74*

Christmas movies are back.

Love them or hate them; you can't escape them. Valentine Davies, the film writer for *Miracle on 34th Street* said, "Oh, Christmas isn't just a day, it's a frame of mind."

It's a frame of mind officially celebrated in over 160 countries. It is a frame of mind that has the power to reduce fear and anxiety, if only for a season. Life in God can turn the magic of a season into a permanent rhythm of life. A paradigm for handling all of life's decisions be they large or small.

A plethora of choices can quickly become paralyzing indecision. Sound decision-making is easily stunted by fear. While our emotions are subject to innumerable earthly constraints, our spirits are free to serve God without fear.

Fearless service means stepping out in good faith.

We are not responsible for knowing every possible consequence of the decisions we make. That sort of omniscience is God's lane. Our lane is our motive. Our lane is pride management. If we actively manage our motives and our pride, then we should tap into the confidence to make decisions in the stickiest of situations. If our motives and pride are in check, then we should take great liberty to serve God without constant second-guessing and doubt.

God's lane is working with humans who have right motives but incomplete information. If only we could learn to treat each other with the same frame of mind. Perhaps that was the frame of mind Mr. Davies attributed to Christmas – a season of seeing people's good intentions despite our imperfect actions.

*"Commit your actions to the Lord, and you plans will succeed"*  
*Proverbs 16:3.*

**Monday, December 6, 2021**

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**Contributor: Jeremy Emmert**  
**Do Not Fear: Faith**

**Psalm 126; Isaiah 40:1-11; Romans 8:22-25**

Don't Be Afraid to Play

*"Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy." Psalm 126:2*

In a flash of white fur, Phoebe, the 9-month-old pitbull and cane corso mix, made a mad dash across the house. She zipped through the living room and raced across the kitchen on her way to leap a solid 1-foot into the air, through the dog door - only to have to immediately apply the pawed breaks in order to avoid tumbling down the deck stairs. The top of 25-foot stairs is a mere 5 feet from the well-worn dog door.

Where I saw danger, she saw play. Where I found cause for fear, she found cause for fun.

Safety first! Use your time wisely. Make a to-do-list. What is your 6-month plan, 1-year plan, 10-year plan? How will you organize your closet, your desk, your kitchen? Pause here.

What comes to mind for you as you think about the goals for an efficient and effective earthly existence? Everything listed so far is just fine. What comes to your mind is probably fine. But is our list of routine questions potentially incomplete?

In addition to the questions, we often ask ourselves and others can we start adding more measures? What fills your mouth with laughter? What songs of joy do you sing? How do you have fun? How do you play? How do you keep your perspective on life fresh, like a child or a puppy?

Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

**Tuesday, December 7, 2021**

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**Contributor: Jeremy Emmert**  
**Do Not Fear: Faith**

**Psalm 126; Isaiah 19:18-25; 2 Peter 1:2-15**

Fearless Reminding

*“In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the heart of Egypt, and a monument to the Lord at its border. It will be a sign and a witness to the Lord Almighty in the land of Egypt.” Isaiah 19:19-20*

I tried an experiment.

I approached a friend, and with little context asked, “What is an object you have kept because it has meaning to you?” He immediately grabbed the chain around his neck and explained the significance. I learned something important about my friend that day.

I keep a paper weight with an image of a bee hovering around a colorful flower. My grandmother had a large collection of paper weights. I remember the day, over 30 years ago when she asked us grandchildren to pick out which paperweight, we liked best. She received all our submissions and placed a sticker with our names at the bottom of each selected. When we visited her for the holidays, we would go to where she kept the paperweights and turn them over reminding ourselves of who selected which ones. She always reminded us that one day we could take it home with us. As a kid, I didn’t fully understand that “one day” meant when she left the earth.

At the time I selected my paperweight, email wasn’t even a thing yet. I now live in an age when paperweights are probably obsolete as an office tool. Yet, for what this paper weight has lost in office significance it has gained in moral significance. It is a reminder of the kind of love that casts out fear, a grandmother’s love.

As you move things around to prepare for the Christmas decorations keep your eyes open for these types of reminders. As you visit the homes of friends and family ask them about the objects that have meaning to them. Spiritual reminders are all around us. We just need to take the time to recognize them.

**Wednesday, December 8, 2021**

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**Contributor: Jeremy Emmert**  
**Do Not Fear: Faith**

**Psalm 126; Isaiah 35:3-7; Luke 7:18-30**

Do Not Fear Words

*“This is the one about whom it is written: I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way before you.” Luke 7:27*

When I visited my grandparent’s farmhouse, in the summer months, my grandmother would always walk me through her flower garden. She would identify each plant and the name of the person who gave her which plant.

For my grandmother, plants were not just bought at a Home Depot or the local nursery, plants were dug out of neighbors’ gardens and shared. Cuttings of plants were shared at the church potluck. Fall bulbs were dug up and distributed as we gathered to harvest corn and soybean crop.

In the garden, my grandmother would often say, “Jeremy do not forget that sticks and stones may break your bones, but words can never hurt you.”

Some would say my grandmother was naïve about words.

Of course, words can and do hurt. But I choose the higher path my grandmother chartered out for me. Words only have as much power as we give them. In our present day, the scourge of political correctness gives power to words that they don’t inherently have. This type of darkness is as old as time.

John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for the Lord and his words were not welcomed. Jesus’ words were greeted with the same suspicions by the same political, religious, and cultural elite establishment. While words can both burn and build bridges, the words themselves have only the meaning we give them. We need to cultivate a culture that assumes positive intent even when word choice seems odd, unfamiliar, or archaic. This is particularly true as we try and build bridges across deep lines of division.

Philosopher and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl said, “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing; the last of human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” Let us choose not to let mere words offend us.

**Thursday, December 9, 2021**

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**Contributor: Jeremy Emmert**  
**Do Not Fear: Faith**

**Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 6:1-8; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15**

Fearless Curiosity

*“Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come!” Amos 6:1*

In his 1598 play, *Every Man in His Humour*, the British playwright Ben Johnson is said to have coined the earliest known reference to what would eventually become the common phrase, “Curiosity killed the cat.”

I guess that means for at least 423 years now we have been a touch misled about the utility of curiosity.

I don't fear curiosity, I fear not being curious enough.

In this world we aren't going to agree with each other on many important things. This reality is negatively amplified by politicians and their allies in the corporate media that thrive and profit on conflict, both real and manufactured. The problem seems to be growing. The problem feels intractable. But it isn't. The antidote is curiosity. We must never be complacent with our curiosity towards our fellow image bearers of God.

Perhaps 400 years ago, curiosity did kill the cat, but in our age genuine curiosity may be our best weapon to heal a needless divide. We may not understand another person's point of view, but we can be curious about what makes each other tick. We don't have to change our minds about what we believe, but we can listen with an ear that recognizes each of us bears the imprint of the Creator of the universe. And this fact alone, should drive a curiosity that opens doors and softens hearts as we strive to push back on those who profit from division.

**Friday, December 10, 2021**

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**Contributor: Jeremy Emmert**  
**Do Not Fear: Faith**

**Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 8:4-12; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15**

Don't be afraid to cultivate something

*“When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?” Amos 8:5*

When I was young, kids at school would always ask me, “When your dad is done planting his crop in the spring, what does he do until it is time to harvest?” “He takes care of the farm,” I responded not understanding why that would even be a question. “But they are just plants. What does he do with all that time, just watch them grow?”

Do you know a plant person? I have heard it said that you can take the boy off the farm but you can't take the farm out of the boy. I brought my plant affection from rural Montgomery County, Indiana to downtown Washington D.C. These two places are very different in every sense of that word, but I still encounter the same line of questions from over 30 years ago living in the city that I did on the farm. “What do you mean you can't come out this weekend because you are taking care of plants? How long could that possibly take, a couple of hours?”

Humans were hand crafted to cultivate – not only the land but the soul. Etched in our DNA is a desire to explore things deeply. We live in a loud and busy society. Any gardener knows that busyness is the enemy of the kind of careful cultivation that produces a beautiful harvest. What applies to the soils of the land also applies to the soils of our hearts. So, in every season, let's slow down and cultivate the things that matter – healthy hobbies, good relationships or whatever gives your soul life. And as Amos exhorts, let's use our gifts for good not just personal gain.

**Saturday, December 11, 2021**

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**Contributor: Jeremy Emmert**  
**Do Not Fear: Faith**

**Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 9:8-15; Luke 1:57-66**

Fearless Composure

*“Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.” Isaiah 12:2*

In June of 1984, Gillette released an antiperspirant commercial that popularized the phrase, “Never let them see you sweat.” What was once a catchy phrase meant to sell deodorant has become a moral truth our present age seems to be forgetting.

Composure is underrated in our age of glorified outrage. Outrage is born out of an emotional response. Composure is a conscience choice we make despite what our emotions feel or don't feel. Composure can help keep irrational fears in check. The prophet Isaiah didn't say that he didn't feel afraid. The prophet's words are couched in terms of a conscience choice. He chose trust in God. He chose not to live in fear whatever his emotions were are were not.

We must push back upon the world's culture that implies outrage is a viable path to get the results we believe are necessary for positive change. What was true for Isaiah over 2,700 years ago is true today. What was true for a deodorant commercial 37 years ago is true today. We have a choice in what we do with fear. We have a choice about what to do with our emotions. A healthy dose of fearless composure might be just the silver bullet you didn't know you needed.



**Do Not Fear**  
**Week 3: Joy**

**3rd Sunday of Advent**  
**December 12-December 18, 2021**

**Week 3: Joy**  
**December 12-December 18, 2021**  
**Contributor: Rev. Kim Purl**

3rd Sunday in Advent

Sunday, December 12, 2021

Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-6; Luke 3:7-18;  
 Philippians 4:4-7

Monday, December 13, 2021

Isaiah 11:1-9; Numbers 16:1-19; Hebrews 13:7-17

Tuesday, December 14, 2021

Isaiah 11:1-9; Numbers 16:20-35; Acts 28:23-31

Wednesday, December 15, 2021

Isaiah 11:1-9; Micah 4:8-13; Luke 7:31-35

Thursday, December 16, 2021

Psalm 80:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 10:10-18

Friday, December 17, 2021

Psalm 80:1-7; Isaiah 42:10-18; Hebrews 10:32-39

Saturday, December 18, 2021

Psalm 80:1-7; Isaiah 66:7-11; Luke 13:31-35

Rev. Kim Purl is an online minister at [missouripastor.org](http://missouripastor.org) who lives in rural Missouri and is ordained in the Church of the Nazarene.

Kim is one of the hosts at [holydialogues.org](http://holydialogues.org), enjoying rich dialogue at the intersection of LGBTQI+ and faith.

As a mother of two teenagers and two young adults, she finds herself in natural conversation on social topics and faith over yummy Thai food.

Kim is married to her minister-husband, Joe, who helps her keep one foot on the ground.



## 3rd Sunday in Advent, December 12, 2021

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**Contributor: Rev Kim Purl**  
**Do Not Fear: Joy**

**Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-6;**  
**Luke 3:7-18; Philippians 4:4-7**

Our need to laugh when facing hardships and disasters is not a new idea. Laughter decreases stress hormones, increases endorphins, and just feels good. Releasing our pent-up anxiety, eases our worries. According to Lacy Rayfield, a scholar who has studied comedy, laughter gives us a sense of power over our afflictions. I suspect that rejoicing has the same effect.

Each of today's readings show us that beyond affiliations and fears we can find rejoicing. Rejoicing seems impossible when engulfed in pain. The writer of each scripture reframes our pain, suffering, and affiliation to allow us to find hope and promise in our response, to rejoice always (Philippians 4:4). Rejoicing is like respectfully laughing in the face of danger, giving us a sense of power and the knowledge that our suffering does not have to have the last word.

“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:6-7 NRSV

My life has been enriched by my LGBTQ+ Christian friends. I see how they must live cautiously, always facing potential harm due to their sexual orientation and confession of Christian faith. Think about that for a moment. This describes persecuted Christians. As they gather incognito to worship, encourage one another, express thankfulness, sin, rejoice, and pray for one another, their courageousness encourages my own faith. When I am welcomed to share worship in these sacred spaces, I feel so much holy love that overflows and splashes over me. Faces shine with holy love despite outside voices that deny that the Holy Spirit would allow this possibility to exist. Are you facing a unique fear as you live an authentic life for Christ? Yes... but Perfect love casts out all fear (1 John 4:18). Respectfully face this fear with holy love... and rejoice!

Prayer: Lord, we pray for the Holy Spirit to surprise us in new ways. We want your holy love to cast out fear.

**Monday, December 13, 2021**

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**Contributor: Rev Kim Purl**  
**Do Not Fear: Joy**

**Isaiah 11:1-9, Numbers 16: 1-19, Hebrews 13:7-17**

Martin Luther King, Jr's "I Have a Dream" speech in 1964 inspires us to imagine a future without polarizing fear and division between White and Black people. "I have a dream that one day out in the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood [sic].... I have a dream today." The Emancipation Proclamation that freed enslaved Black Americans was unable to make freed Black Americans equally accessible to justice and freedom as White Americans. King's speech called out America's political leaders to make good on the U.S. constitution that states all men [sic] are created equal.

The prophet Isaiah also shares a vision in chapter 11 of a future of justice and righteousness for all people. Isaiah's dream doesn't end with what he hopes for all people, he envisions the leader who will have the ability to unify the kingdom. "The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." (Isa 11:2, NRSV) The leader that Isaiah imagines will accomplish unity and peace like no other earthly leader has been able to accomplish among all people on earth. The power of unity will extend beyond people. It will overflow and have a healing effect on all creation. The most unlikely and dangerous opposites will share life together in peace. "They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord," (Isa 11:9, NRSV)

I long for this holy leadership in our world. I have a dream that the polarizing harm of LGBTQ+ and faith in the church would heal, and all Christians could sit together at the table of peace, justice, and righteousness. This unity carries the power to heal all creation.

Prayer: Lord, we pray for unusual peace through holy love to heal LGBTQI+ divisions and pain among believers in Jesus' name. We will not fear.

**Tuesday, December 14, 2021**

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**Contributor: Rev Kim Purl**  
**Do Not Fear: Joy**

**Isaiah 11:1-9; Numbers 16: 20-35; Acts 28: 23-31**

Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr are early American politicians. They politically disagreed so strongly that they ultimately decided to challenge each other to a duel... one that ended in death. Tragically, Burr shot Hamilton, and he died from his gunshot wound. This tragedy parallels the power struggles of conflicting nations and peoples. When we go to war, nobody wins.

In Numbers 16 the Levites, a priestly tribe, and the Reubenites, a tribe of the eldest son of Israel, both have their own power struggles with Moses. One tribe demanded more religious authority, and the other pushed for more political power. Ultimately, the desires of their hearts were selfish intent, and they lost their war with the Lord.

Christianity, and many religions, are embroiled in struggles over doctrines regarding LGBTQ+ and faith. There are as many opinions as there are people on the planet. However, arguments either “for” or “against” do not seem to be effective. In fact, hyper focusing on debates to the death is a tactic in which no one wins. Instead, we must take a deeper look into the motives of our souls. Do we desire a perpetual power struggle with the intent only to harm our opponent? Or is there a holy love that will heal and redeem deeply wounded souls? One that will overflow into a healing and saving effect for all of creation? That’s the power of God’s holy love. It touches the lives of every person who surrenders selfish intent in exchange for an infilling of holy love. Love always wins.

Prayer: Lord, fill us with holy love, awe and wonder, as the Holy Spirit leads us beyond human boundaries to a place of limitless love. Your love wins. We will not fear.

**Wednesday, December 15, 2021**

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**Contributor: Rev Kim Purl**  
**Do Not Fear: Joy**

**Isaiah 11: 1-9; Micah 4:8-13; Luke 7:31-35**

Our family had a vacation day coming up, so we planned on a day trip together to our state capitol. We googled things to do and places to eat, giving attention to written reviews and stars ranking previous experiences. Mingled among reviews I can usually find a rant with a low score. The rant is important in my decision-making, but more importantly is any response from the establishment receiving the rant. Responding in kindness to a bad review, seeking to make amends, goes a long way in overturning my final decision. A similar reply by Jesus to critics is going on in Luke 7:31-35.

Jesus communicates a cryptic saying using the experience of jaded children shouting their rants and low scores in the marketplace. Much like tabloid news, Jesus and John the Baptist's ministries have been compared, commentated, and criticized by the marketplace newsstand. In response to critical reviews Jesus says, "Nevertheless, wisdom is vindicated by all her children." (v.35, NRSV) His puzzling statement asks us to consider evidence beyond critical reviews and low scores. The ultimate proof in Jesus and John's wisdom is the fruit bore, or children.

Choosing either the way of Jesus or John brought public criticism. Similar polarizing debates break out with liberals and conservatives on LGBTQI+ and faith matters. Conservatives draw firm boundaries around LGBTQI+ faith issues in the context of traditional sexuality doctrines. Liberals reject traditional sexuality doctrines imposed on LGBTQ+ people. Then to add a twist, some queer people hold conservative sexuality beliefs, and some straight people hold liberal beliefs about sexuality. Where is truth? Find those reconciling replies to scathing reviews. Focus on where fruit is found. May we be surprised to find fruitfulness in more than one side of the debate.

Prayer: Lord, we worship you alongside our critics. Each of us will produce spiritual fruit in the unique places we are planted. Help us to be gentle with one another. May this loving action be the most redemptive fruit of all.

**Thursday, December 16, 2021**

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**Contributor: Rev Kim Purl**  
**Do Not Fear: Joy**

**Psalm 80:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31-34;**  
**Hebrews 10:10-18**

Psalm 80 is a heavy-hearted song. Lyrics drip with tears and stinging pain while pleading the Lord to return, be present, and rescue. Three times the song pleads, “O God, bring us back, and light up Your face that we may be rescued” (Robert Alter translation, The Hebrew Bible). The directions of the face of God and the face of people are important non-verbal clues in communication. If your face is turned toward who you are communicating with, you are fully present. The same is understood of God’s presence if God’s face is turned toward you or your face turned toward God. The psalmist is calling out for God’s face to be more than present, but to show power and glory in being lit up! Light was the first creation of God with super strength to push back darkness (Genesis 1:3). Martin Luther King, Jr said it best, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” We yearn for God to come and push back the oppressive darkness that hangs over LGBTQ+ and faith.

You’ve probably read my little bio and know that I’m a straight, conservative, online minister. That means the doctrine of my denomination is LGBTQ+ non-affirming but loving. How do we not affirm, yet love? We thought this simple statement of belief tied up everything nice and easy for us until we realized that many of us cannot bring ourselves to love, or be kind, in our non-affirming doctrine. In our conservative ranks, homophobia in the name of God has bullied, lynched, discriminated, and formed injustices against the people that we are called to love. These harmful actions done in God’s name are blatantly using God’s name in vain. To turn our face away and deny the light of holy love is sin that requires our repentance of the darkness that we have ushered in on LGBTQ+ people, withholding holy light from them. We need God the creator to restore light and love to deliver us all from our evil intent.

Prayer: Lord, convict us of our sin that has caused harm and oppression. May the light of your face return to those we have oppressed and harmed, and deliver us all from the darkness. We will not fear what the light reveals.

**Friday, December 17, 2021**

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**Contributor: Rev Kim Purl**  
**Do Not Fear: Joy**

**Psalm 80:1-7; Isaiah 42:10-18; Hebrews 10:32-39**

*“But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved.” Hebrews 10:39*

My favorite thing about holydialogues.org is sharing space with gracious LGBTQ+ friends who have the courage to testify publicly to the saving power of Jesus Christ. Before they share their testimony, our friends tell us they are a wee-bit nervous about sharing their testimony publicly because they fear messing up, offending others, or suffering criticism. Experiencing the freedom of the Spirit is worth the risk. They could shrink back, but they do not because they are among those who have faith and are saved. The presence of the Holy Spirit becomes evident as the face of the testifier radiates the glory of the Lord as they pour out their story of deliverance from sin and destruction and give grateful praise for God’s saving work through Jesus Christ in their lives. Their testimony inspires my own faith, and I am grateful we started holydialogues.org.

When I reflect on the beginnings of holydialogues.org, we were honest with ourselves about the risks of criticism and misunderstandings that we might face as we brought our doctrines and beliefs to a public middle-space to dialogue on LGBTQ+ and faith topics. If we were conservative, we could be called too liberal, and if we were liberal, we would be called too conservative. Alan Hirsch says in this book, The Forgotten Ways, that risk is in the DNA of thriving Christians who desire to fulfill the important calling of reconciling the world to Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has led us into risky, polarizing topics regarding LGBTQ+ and faith, where we meet in a public virtual space to model talking through polarizing topics with respect and kindness. I am so glad we didn’t shrink back. I am a better human for it. Go ahead, watch a few testimonies at holydialogues.org and see for yourself.

Prayer: Lord, reconcile us to one another despite our differences so that our faith is strengthened, and we are saved.



**Saturday, December 18, 2021**

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**Contributor: Rev Kim Purl**  
**Do Not Fear: Joy**

**Psalm 80:1-7; Isaiah 66:7-11; Luke 13:31-35**

In Luke 13:31-35, the Pharisees warn Jesus that King Herod seeks to kill him. This warning could be an echo of Herod's futile attempt to find and kill Jesus as an infant. Jesus implies that his death won't be Herod's plan but a divine plan. Jesus will lay down his own life and rise again in three days to fulfill his salvation work for Jerusalem and broken humanity. Jesus weeps for Jerusalem, the "city of peace." This city has been the most conquered and conflicted city on the planet, even today. Jerusalem's struggle for peace reflects the wider struggle of all humanity.

When Jesus weeps for Jerusalem he is weeping for everyone everywhere. He is moved with compassion for all who live inside and outside the borders of this city. Jesus grieves the turmoil to struggle and reconcile, steal and give lavishly, murder and heal, envy and celebrate, hate and love. Jesus, a Jewish man, describes his love and protection of Jerusalem like a mother hen, not a loud, crowing, strutting rooster. He identifies with a small, egg-laying, non-flying, domesticated bird, often roasted and eaten to satisfy never-ending hunger. Among chicks there may be infighting, but they all love their mother and their mother's love protects and provides for all of them regardless.

It's easy to focus on loving Jesus as a response to his immense love for us all. The harder thing is asking ourselves if we could turn to fellow humanity and not let our conflicts and differences rule. Instead, we must care for each other in holy love, like a hen gathering her chicks. Regarding LGBTQ+ and faith, conservative and liberal Christians worry that they will be asked to surrender personal beliefs or convictions in order to get along. Deeply held beliefs are sacred and should be respected by all sides. When I consider the deep desire for peace among us all, I am convicted by 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NRSV), "And now, faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." Faith and hope are important, but the greatest is always love.

**Prayer:** Lord, you love all of us so deeply. May the Holy Spirit do the work in our souls of filling us full to overflowing with holy love - and may that love change the world around us.

**Do Not Fear**  
**Week 4: Peace**

**4th Sunday of Advent**  
**December 19-December 25, 2021**

**Week 4: Peace**  
**December 19-December 25, 2021**  
**Contributor: Marie Nganga**

4th Sunday in Advent

Sunday, December 19, 2021

Psalm 80:1-7; Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:39-55; Hebrews 10:5-10

Monday, December 20, 2021

Psalm 113; Genesis 25:19-28; Colossians 1:15-20

Tuesday, December 21, 2021

Psalm 113; Genesis 30:1-24; Romans 8:18-30

Wednesday, December 22, 2021

Luke 1:46b-55; Micah 4:1-5; Ephesians 2:11-22

Thursday, December 23, 2021

Luke 1:46b-55; Micah 4:6-8; 2 Peter 1:16-21

Christmas Eve Friday, December 24 2021

Psalm 96; Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-20

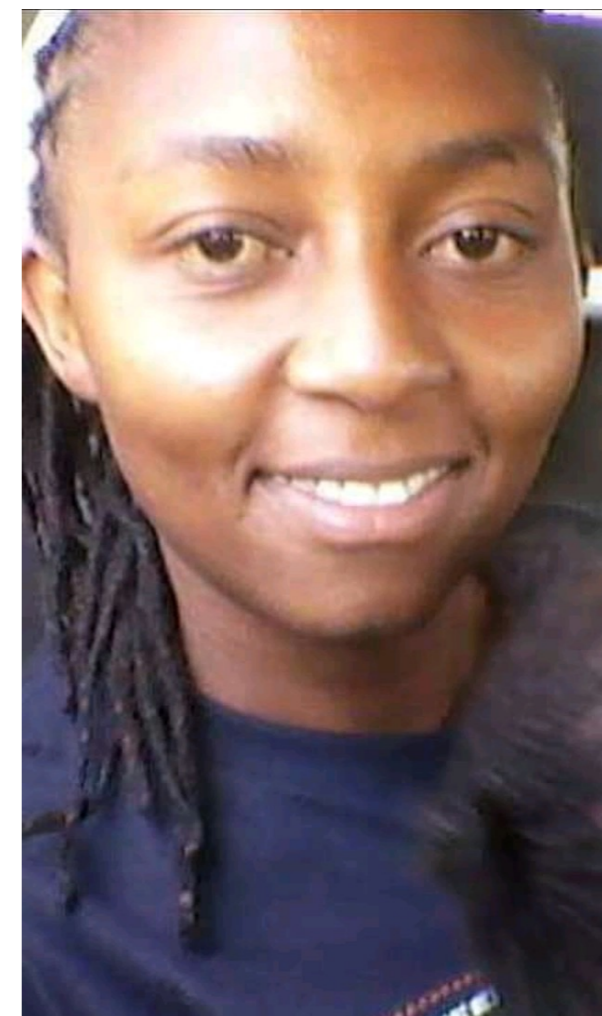
1st Day of Christmas, Saturday, December 25, 2021

Psalm 97; Luke 2:1-20; Titus 3:4-7

My name is Marie Nganga, and I am a Kenyan of African origin. I am 38 years old. I am a Christian lesbian woman. I love God with all my heart and I love serving God through humanity.

I have a passion for writing and studying the Bible.

I am a woman of faith and I look forward to the day when all of the LGBTQ+ community will feel safe at the Lord's table.



## 4th Sunday in Advent, December 19, 2021

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**Contributor: Marie Nganga**  
**Fear not: Peace**

**Psalms 80:1-7; Micah 5:2-5; Luke 1:39-55; Hebrews 10:5-10**

Psalms 80:1-7

God is our shepherd to whom we cry out while in distress. The LGBTQ+ community is crying out to you our God!  
Make your face shine upon us and restore us to your kingdom.

Micah 5:2-5

Micah prophesied when Israel was going through a hard time. The Israelites were being attacked by Assyrians and they were full of fear. It was a time of violence and uncertainty, and they felt hopeless, thinking their God had forsaken them.

Prophet Micah prophesied about the coming of a savior from the tribe of Judah, who will save them from all tribulations. In this chapter, Micah is promising the Israelites that their God will remain faithful to his promises.

Prophet Micah encourages us to look for God's presence where we least expect it.

Luke 1:39-55

Mary could have been full of fear when the angels came to her with the good news. She could have wondered how Joseph and the society would react to the news of her being pregnant when she was a virgin.

Mary chose to believe when the angels told her not to fear. Mary is called blessed not only because she is the mother of the Lord but for her trust in God's promise. Sometimes we hinder God's blessings because of our unbelief, yet our God delights in upsetting human expectations. For many years I was made to believe that the LGBTQ+ community was destined to hell and that God hates us all. God is surprising this world by raising worshipers who are LGBTQ+.

Let us believe like Mary did, and we shall be called blessed - no matter what our status is in the society. Let us wait upon the Lord with trust as we support each other with love and hope. God is coming to save us.

Heb 10:5-10

God's promises are true and - amen! - our Lord and Savior came to set us free. Jesus Christ taught us about obedience, he was faithful to God even in death.

Let's all desire to be like Christ. Let us love, trust, and obey.

**Monday, December 20, 2021**

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**Contributor: Marie Nganga**  
**Fear not: Peace**

**Genesis 25:19-28; Psalms 113; Colossians 1:15-20**

Genesis 25:19-28

God's Promises.

Experience God's promises for his promises are true! No matter how long it takes, whatever he has promised, he will fulfill.

From the story of Abraham, we see a very patient man. In his old age he had no child, but God had promised him that from him he would make a great nation. He was blessed with Isaac because he believed what God had promised.

It's from Jacob we see the promise being fulfilled, though Jacob's character was not the best. He's described as a villain and a swindler, seemingly not the best choice to be a father of Israel! He was to be cursed, but still he recognized he needed God to be with him. He wrestled with an angel until he was blessed.

With Jacob we learn that God can redeem even the worst sinners. We as the LGBTQ+ community are referred to as outcasts in society and yet God is using us to be a blessing to the world. We just need to believe and trust God.

Psalms 113

We have all reasons to praise God. Let us be a community of believers and praise a transcendent God who cares for us all. Our God, who reaches down to the poor and the broken-hearted to raise them up, deserves all the praise.

Colossians 1:15-20

Jesus Christ is the first born of all creation. All things invisible and visible were created through him. He is the head of the church. In him dwells all the fullness of God. Humanity was reconciled with God through his blood on the cross.

**Tuesday, December 21, 2021**

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**Contributor: Marie Nganga**  
**Fear not: Peace**

**Genesis 30:1-24, Psalms 113: Romans 8: 18-30**

We have all the reasons to praise God. Let's all be a community of believers to praise a transcendent God who cares enough for human-kind. This God who reaches down to the poor and the broken-hearted and raise them up, deserves all the praise.

Romans 8:18-30

When I think of eschaton my heart leaps with joy!

I look forward to that day when all the righteous will assemble together in heavenly glory. Creation will be set free from the bondage of decay. They will be clothed with righteousness. They will be embraced in God's love.

All illness, suffering, and financial problems, will be a thing of the past.

All the hatred and persecution we face because of professing Christ and being LGBTQ+, will be replaced, with God's embrace of love.

Let's be patient, because all things work together for good to those who love their God and are called according to his purpose.

Whatever suffering we are going through right now, cannot be compared to the glory awaiting when we meet our savior.

**Wednesday, December 22, 2021**

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**Contributor: Marie Nganga**  
**Fear not: Peace**

**Micah 4:1-5 Ephesians 2:11-22 Luke 1: 46b-55**

Micah 4:1-5

The Prophet Micah prophesied about peace and about the mountain of the Lord - a holy place and a safe space where all will run to for refuge.

As the LGBTQ+ community, we live in fear and are scared all the time. We all look forward for God's spiritual kingdom that will accommodate people from all nations who will assemble and live in peace.

Christ will be the judge of all, and peace will be the standard, because God will establish the ground of judgment.

Ephesians 2:11-22

In our African custom it's taboo to mention circumcision. The tribes that don't practice circumcision are degraded, and looked down by others, just as the Gentiles - and some now say homosexuals are unworthy - as people who didn't have hope, and therefore could not inherit the kingdom of God.

But Paul is giving us a message of hope, that we are all one in Christ Jesus. Through the work of the cross, we should know that we belong to one God, and we should live in unity. The church should be a light that paves the way by welcoming all and uniting them into God's mission in Christ. The Apostle Paul is calling on us to live together as one.

As Christians we should all live in unity, bringing all people to brothers and sisters in Christ.

Luke 1:46-55

The story of Mary is a proof that God can use anything and anyone. Mary received a special favor and blessing from God not because of any merit. Her social status didn't hinder her from being honored and blessed.

**Thursday, December 23, 2021**

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**Contributor: Marie Nganga**

**Fear not: Peace**

**Micah 4: 6-8, 2nd Peter 1:16-21, Luke 1:46b-55**

God is more pleased with our actions than our words. God is more satisfied with our obedience.

Micah says there are three things God requires: justice; loving-kindness; and walking humbly.

We should rely on God fully and with humility. Walking with God implies an active faith, one that sees God as a daily guide. It implies that we are seeking Him in all aspects of our lives. We are encouraged to set aside our selfish desires, and align ourselves with God's will, as opposed to our own.

Peter reminds all Christians that we are not missing anything by leading a Godly life. We must add to our faith, and put in effort, as we patiently wait for Jesus to come back.

Reflect on our own openness to how God works in our world. God works through unexpected people to glorify his name. Mary received a special favor, and blessings from God, not because of any merit, but because she believed.



## **Christmas Eve, Friday, December 24, 2021**

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**Contributor: Marie Nganga**  
**Fear not: Peace**

**Isaiah 9:2-7, Psalms 96, Luke 2: 1-20**

To us a child is born who will usher in justice and righteousness from this time forward and forever more.

Psalms 96 describes a growing crescendo of worship, and as God's people we are called to sing His praises, to tell of His glory among the nations.

The reason for the praise of all creation is the prophecy that the Lord is coming to judge the world in righteousness. Let us worship, witness, and wait expectantly for the day when the Lord comes to right all wrongs.

Why then is the Christmas story so important to many today, even those who do not believe in Christ for salvation?

Because, I fear, the babe in the manger is far less threatening than the Christ of the later gospels, who interprets and applies the Law, who condemns sin, and who speaks of faith in His blood.

The baby in the manger is sweet and cuddly, and "controllable." The baby in the manger is a kind of "God in the box." A God whom we are comfortable to approach, to think about, even to worship.

But the Christ hanging on the cross is not a pretty picture. He is not one to whom we are drawn, who evokes in us warm and fuzzy feelings.

Many have made much, too much, of the babe in the manger because this is the kind of "god" they wish to serve. As I reflect and celebrate the birth of the "baby in the manger" I am eagerly waiting for the second coming of Christ. My Lord and savior.

## Christmas Day, Saturday, December 25, 2021

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**Contributor: Marie Nganga**  
**Fear not: Peace**

**Psalms 97, Luke 2: 1-20, Titus 3: 4-7**

The Lord is King! Everyone on earth will be very happy - *all* of the people will be very happy.

God is a good and a fair ruler. The psalm ends with promises to God's people. God's people must hate what bad people do, and the Lord will make his people safe and free.

This will happen when the Lord God appears on earth, but it often happens now for his people. It is certain that it is true when they die. They will be safe and free with God in heaven.

Luke 2:1-20

Mary sings about the God who saves not just the souls, but who saves active people. She celebrates God who is not content merely to point people towards heaven.

God is our redeemer here on earth, he fills the hungry with hope and food. He lifts them up, granting them dignity and honor, and thus we should continue trusting this God who forever lives with us.

Let us not live in fear. Just as Job confessed, our redeemer lives and He's watching over us.

Titus 3:4-7

When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Prayer: Glory be to the highest God! Amen and Amen.

**Do Not Fear**  
**Week 5: God With Us**

**2nd Day of Christmas**  
**December 19-December 25, 2021**

## Week 5

**December 26, 2021-January 1, 2022**

**Contributor: Donna Techau**

**Do Not Fear: God with us.**

2nd Day of Christmas, Sunday, December 26, 2021

Psalm 148; Luke 2:41-52; Colossians 3:12-17

3rd Day of Christmas, Monday, December 27, 2021

Psalm 148; Proverbs 8:32-36; John 21:19b-24

4th Day of Christmas, Tuesday, December 28, 2021

Psalm 148; Isaiah 54:1-13; Revelation 21:1-7

5th Day of Christmas, Wednesday, December 29, 2021

Psalm 147:12-20; 1 Chronicles 28:1-10; 1 Corinthians 3:10-17

6th Day of Christmas, Thursday, December 30, 2021

Psalm 147:12-20; 2 Chronicles 1:7-13; Mark 13:32-37

7th Day of Christmas, Friday, December 31, 2021

Psalm 147:12-20; 1 Kings 3:5-14; John 8:12-19

8th Day of Christmas/New Year's Day

Saturday, January 1, 2022: Psalm 8; Ecclesiastes 3:1-13;

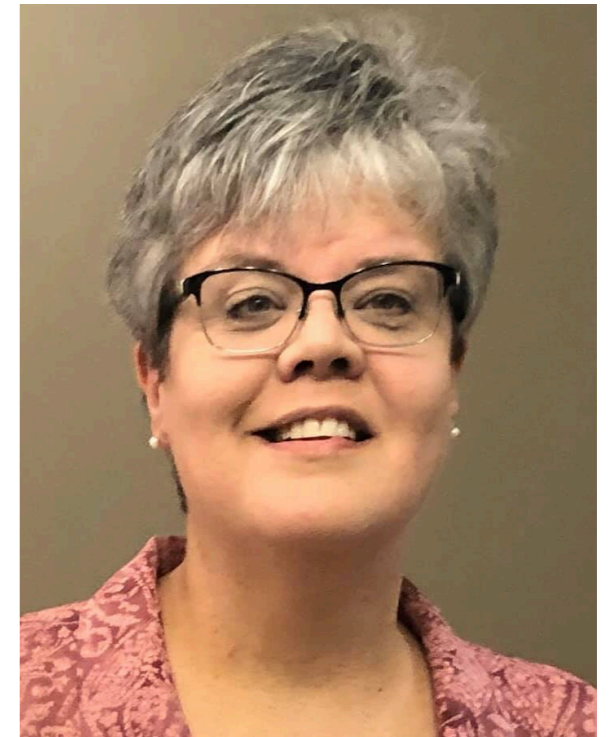
Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 21:1-6

"I'm an ecclesial misfit: a daughter of Nazarene missionaries (Papua New Guinea), educated by United Methodists and Catholics, welcomed by American Baptists, and served as a Presbyterian pastor. I've studied and taught theology at the graduate level, ran an ethics center, worked in educational technology, and was an RN in ICUs in Illinois and Missouri.

My closest informants are Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Christian feminists.

My current iteration is as a library director in a rural public library and as a hobby farmer.

I understand my library district as my parish--only without all the religious trappings."



## **2nd Day of Christmas, Sunday, December 26, 2021**

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**Contributor: Donna Techau**  
**Fear not: God With Us**

**Psalm 148; Luke 2:41-52; Colossians 3:12-17**

A Reflection on Luke 2:41-52

I've spent a lot of time in closets in my life. I was a hider as a child: one that hid in the hopes of being found. My mother reported occasions of suddenly becoming aware of my absence, and finding me in repose in the back of a closet somewhere—I'd waited so long for anyone to notice my vacancy, I'd fallen asleep.

I've often wondered whether the young Jesus at the temple was not also a child hoping to be found (out). He had a sense of his identity, whether or not that sense was fully developed. But that divine identity somehow remained hidden from those closest to him. You hear the expressions of disbelief and bewilderment from his parents. What had they done to create such seeming disobedience (or at the least, disrespect for them and their traditions)? And it's complicated: should they be annoyed or proud?

Closets are functional spaces for shelving and storing the parts of ourselves we aren't prepared to deal with (either personally or publicly). Sometimes the bits and pieces of ourselves which don't quite fit, sit shelved—only to be pulled out and worn on special occasions, if at all. But we also experience the liberation of spring cleaning, where closets are opened and laundry is aired. Items are sorted: some cleaned, restored and re-placed in the closet to return to someday in the future; these are often items of sentimental value. Other things don't seem to fit any more—and these are sent out on consignment. Finally, some items are deemed rubbish and are simply trashed.

These spring cleanings do us good: we find hidden treasures—items we put away—maybe they were inappropriate for the season, or the size wasn't right at the time—but are now comfortable and wearable—available for public viewing and consumption. They remind us of things forgotten and repressed and allow us to clean house and open up more space. Regardless of identity, we all have closets we maintain to various degrees.

The challenge remains: as we catch glimpses into each other's closets will we be able, by grace, to recognize and honor the Divine?

## **3rd Day of Christmas, Monday, December 27, 2021**

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**Contributor: Donna Techau**  
**Fear not: God With Us**

**Psalm 148; Proverbs 8:32-36; John 21:19b-24**

A reflection on John 21:19b-24

When I attended seminary in the 90s and first spent time with this passage in depth, I burst out laughing: the radio playing in the background while I was studying was belting out Salt-N-Pepa's raucous, "None of your business." I couldn't help but read Jesus' words as a rap: "What is that to you?"

The passage in John depicts the disciples at their worst: fussing over perceived favoritism; over possible privilege; over what they experienced as slights and injustices (how come one standard is applied to me but isn't applied to him?). They are not-so-subtly correcting Jesus' attitudes and behavior. We've all experienced it: whether on the side of righteous indignation or as the one being judged.

Jesus doesn't entertain it long. He shuts them down quickly. His message is firm but at the same time isn't condemning; corrective, without shaming. He simply asks the rhetorical question, "What is it to you?" and leaves the disciples to do their own work.

What is demonstrated in Jesus' gentle ways is what this theologian refers to as a 'robust pneumatology' (a robust doctrine of the Holy Spirit). Jesus can trust the disciples to, with the help of the Holy Spirit, work out their own salvation.

Our challenge is, of course, when the times arise and the temptation is to quickly condemn, gossip, judge or air our grievances, to pause and ask the divine question: what is it to me? Such self reflection does two things: it provides room for self-examination as well as places our hope and trust in the Holy Spirit to work.

Does such a robust pneumatology reflect indifference? On the contrary, we learn to entrust those people or situations for whom we have concern to God. We can then focus our energies on loving one another through our differences, in anticipation of the good work God is doing in all our collective lives. As the voiceover in Salt-N-Pepa's song commanded: "So chill, and let my Father do His job."

## **4th Day of Christmas, Tuesday, December 28, 2021**

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**Contributor: Donna Techau**  
**Fear not: God With Us**

**Psalm 148; Isaiah 54:1-13; Revelation 21:1-7**

A reflection on Isaiah 54:1-13

Today's reading in Isaiah envisions a future in which those living on the margins of society find relief. In this passage, the prophet declares good news to those who in ancient Israel found themselves teetering on the edge of ruin (the barren or childless woman, the widow, the divorced, the unmarried). At a time when science-based medical knowledge was scarce, barrenness was understood as punishment from God, or at the least, a demonstration of God's displeasure. It was associated with sin or failure. And to remain single or be widowed in this ancient culture was also to bear a stigma of disgrace. For a tribal nation to thrive--for Israel to retain its identity--progeny was necessary.

It is precisely to these women (single, widowed, divorced, and barren) that the prophet pronounces a word of good news: the future kingdom--God's kingdom--will be ordered differently. Production (or reproduction) will not serve as an indicator of Divine pleasure. These marginalized will not be forgotten by God--God's steadfast love endures.

A modern application of this seems obvious: one of the primary arguments against homosexuality the church has levied has been one of (re)production--that is, the 'good' of sex is procreation. The church has traditionally taken the stance that those for whom procreation is not an end are excluded from sexual relations--marginalizing folks who don't meet this criteria of the 'good' to the point of condemnation and brokering the judgement of God in such a fashion that anyone of a non-heterosexual orientation is excluded from grace.

Those who find themselves marginalized in this way by God's people--the Church--can take comfort in the prophetic word: God's steadfast love will not fail.

The challenge for the church is to ask the question: why are we so threatened by a lack of (re)production? How is our identity so bound up in heterosexual norms that we are willing to sacrifice our GLBTQIA siblings in Christ? What can we do to, as the prophet writes, "expand our tent... stretch our curtains... lengthen our cords... strengthen our stakes"--to make the church's tent roomier and more accommodating to all God's children?

## 5th Day of Christmas, Wed, December 29, 2021

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**Contributor: Donna Techau**  
**Fear not: God With Us**

**Psalm 147:12-20; 1 Chronicles 28:1-10; 1  
Corinthians 3:10-17**

A reflection on 1 Chronicles 23-1-10

The church's proclamation against homosexuals feels like a relic of the past--a far too long embraced bit of antiquated biology/psychology/theology. Countless gay Christians get stopped at the ecclesial door, stifled by well-intentioned "love the sinner/hate the sin" rhetoric pronounced by folks who would never in their wildest imaginations shelve their own (hetero)sexual identity, but are perfectly willing to demand it of others whose preferences seem to 'deviate' from the norm. It is exhausting, disheartening work to be an honest gay Christian. That is, to open up the most vulnerable of places to the church and be subject to the rejection of what lies at the core of who we are: our loves, desires, and intimacies. And the church regularly demands it--and does so at times with the vitriol and glee of a willing enforcer.

In today's passage, David is rejected because of his history of violence, and in contrast, Solomon is embraced by God. Solomon--famous for his wisdom AND his 700 wives and 300 concubines--by any standard a sexual deviant, is who God chose to build his temple.

We can take comfort in vs. 9 as we learn to embrace both our faith and our sexuality, because we are promised that God searches every heart and not only knows but understands our desires. There is no 'coming out' to a God who knows us so thoroughly and yet still calls us. Verse 10 contains the command: "God has chosen you... Be strong and do the work."

The challenge to the gay Christian is mighty: find the strength, in the face of judgement and humiliation, to be strong and to endure. To you I advise: Surround yourself with life-giving people in life-giving places. And remember that God promises that if you seek the Divine, you will find God.

The real challenge here is to the church: what will it take for you to recognize that it very well may be that the battles you rage and the culture wars you fight, like David, make you ineligible to build the Church?



## **6th Day of Christmas, Thurs, December 30, 2021**

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**Contributor: Donna Techau**  
**Fear not: God With Us**

**Psalm 147:12-20; 2 Chronicles 1:7-13; Mark 13:32-37**

A reflection on Mark 13:32-37

I associate this passage of scripture in Mark with childhood memories of watch night services. While these services were a time of reflection upon the past year, they also served as a time of anticipation: we looked to the future--the new year--and ultimately, to the coming of Christ. We hoped for heaven, for life without suffering, for a future beyond sin, for fellowship with God.

For the African-American community, the service carries with it additional history: on December 31, 1862, enslaved and free African Americans gathered to ring in the new year and await news that the Emancipation Proclamation had taken effect. On September 22, 1862, Abraham Lincoln issued the executive order declaring enslaved people legally free. However, the decree did not take effect until the clock struck midnight at New Years. The occasion, known as "Freedom's Eve," marks when African Americans across the country watched and waited for the news of freedom.

The theme is consistent in both: wait for our freedom. I cannot help but think "how cruel!" imagining the folks who suffered and passed away under slavery, having missed the magical date by mere days. I think the same about theology that promises the 'sweet by and by' without any substantive grace in the here and now.

There are those in the church who are hopeful, waving a future church in front of the LGBTQ+ crowd, promising that even though things are changing slowly, they are indeed changing for the better. They dangle the carrot of full participation and acceptance in the future, and ask the marginalized to hang in there and wait. But for some, the desire for God and longing for communion juxtaposed with the rejection of the church is too much. They are dying by suicide, homelessness, and apathy. They cannot wait.

The command to watch may not simply be an alert to a future event: perhaps it is also the sounding of an alarm that the time is nigh--time to take action and live into the grace to which we are called. The grace to love whom Christ loves.

## 7th Day of Christmas, Friday, December 31, 2021

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**Contributor: Donna Techau**  
**Fear not: God With Us**

**Psalm 147:12-20; 1 Kings 3:5-14; John 8:12-19**

A reflection on John 8:12-19

The interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees is fascinating, especially vs. 13-14: Jesus' self description in v. 12 ("I am the light of the world") is refuted on no other basis than he is speaking for himself. Somehow the validity of his identity is hinged on the input of others--his own word and his own experience doesn't matter. But Jesus refuses that logic--he knows where he comes from and where he's going; he trusts his experience and his history. His is a quiet confidence, unshaken by religious authorities.

When it comes to sexual identity, too often we don't trust the testimony of the person in question. We rely on our own experiences of sex and our own knowledge of biology and refuse to imagine the possibility of anything beyond our own tradition, narrative, or expertise. In refusing the question of identity in this fashion, we shift from an ontological statement or existential expression to a moral crisis: what was a simple question of identity becomes a theological or moral conundrum. Thus when our transgender neighbor discloses his preferred pronouns, too often the church's response is to question the validity of the categories: a simple self-identifier evolves into a moral debate.

Imagine the dialogue if the Pharisees had stayed on topic and simply and genuinely asked, "What do you mean? Tell me more?" instead of invalidating the discussion. What was missed in this conversational shift was a chance of redemption: an opportunity to know Jesus in his fullness; a chance at a real relationship with God--a relationship which would expand their horizon and disrupt their self-referential categories.

Can we learn to lay aside our own categories, suspend judgement, and hear the self-descriptions and narratives of our trans neighbors? Can we risk the possibility of a relationship that will disrupt our norms and in the end, make us think in new and creative ways? Can we trust their testimony and self description, knowing the possibility (like in v. 18) that God might be testifying on their behalf?

## 8th Day of Christmas, Saturday, January 1, 2021

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**Contributor: Donna Techau**  
**Fear not: God With Us**

**Psalm 8: Ecclesiastes 3:1-13; Matthew 25:31-46;**  
**Revelation 21:1-6**

A reflection on Matthew 25:31-46

This teaching of Jesus about “the least of these,” speaks a word of good news to those who are marginalized, and a word of extreme caution to those who are in a position to relieve suffering and oppression and fail to act or live into their calling. In it, Jesus, the Son of God, identifies with the lowest of society. This was no mere rhetorical simile: he actually made himself a servant of all, debased himself out of love, and suffered and died a humiliating and painful death--one normally reserved for criminals.

This teaching calls on the carpet those who have it within their power to alleviate suffering, humiliation, and oppression and don't. It isn't simply that they are unkind; it is that they fail to recognize the Divine in a form that doesn't mirror their expectations.

For too long the church has failed to recognize the Imago Dei in GLBTQI+ Christians. Instead of working to alleviate their pain (their hunger or desire, their naked honesty, their thirst for God) we stumble and trip over the unconventional form they take. And we translate that lack of conformity into moral failure or sin.

Jesus' teaching turns our conventional thinking on its head: it demands from us a revisioning of current social order and piety (hark back to Matthew 20:16 where Jesus describes the inverted nature of the Kingdom of God--"the last shall be first"). He demands that we consider ourselves no better (or worse) than anyone else--moreover, that we refuse hierarchical positioning and instead simply love one another. By leveling the ground on which we all stand, Jesus demands that we open ourselves empathically as ministers of grace.

No longer can we qualify our kindness and generosity by merit: those we imagine deserving are never the intended recipients. Instead, the challenge is to extend grace into the most unlikely of reaches--not because grace doesn't belong there, but precisely because that is exactly where it belongs. The Incarnate God in Christ is located at the margins.

Lord, teach us to de-center our faith and to seek you in unexpected places. Teach us to see you in all.

**Do Not Fear**  
**Week 6: God With Us**

**9th Day of Christmas**  
**January 2-January 6, 2022**

**Week 6: God With Us**  
**January 2-January 6, 2022**  
**Contributor: Lauren Horneff**

9th Day of Christmas

Sunday, January 2, 2022

Psalm 147:12-20; Jeremiah 31:7-14; John 1:1-18;  
Ephesians 1:3-14

10th Day of Christmas

Monday, January 3, 2022

Psalm 72; Job 42:10-17; Luke 8:16-21

11th Day of Christmas

Tuesday, January 4, 2022

Psalm 72; Isaiah 6:1-5; Acts 7:44-53

12th Day of Christmas

Wednesday, January 5, 2022

Psalm 72; Jeremiah 31:7-14; John 1:10-18

Epiphany of our Lord

Thursday, January 6, 2022

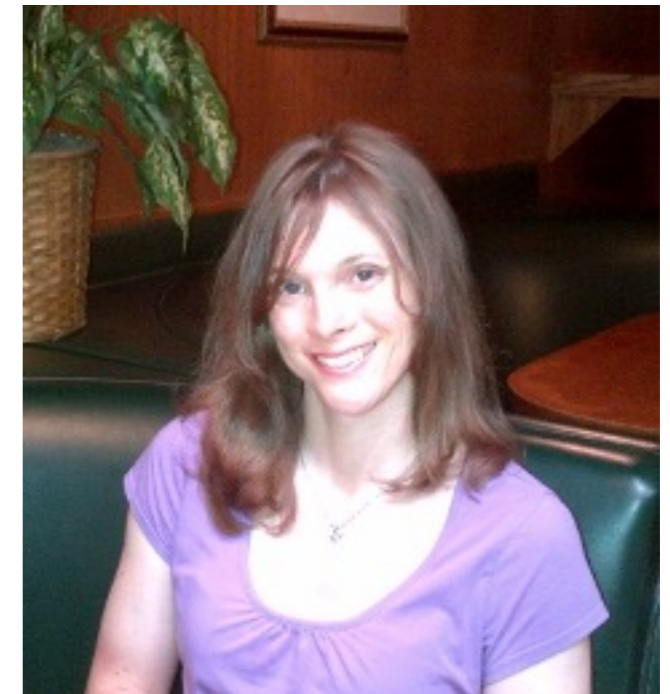
Psalm 72:1-14; Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12;  
Ephesians 3:1-12

Lauren Horneff (she/her) is a contributor to Holy Dialogues. She has been involved with LGBTQ Christian organizations since 2018.

She developed a passion for advocating for LGBTQ acceptance in Christianity when she heard from many in her community that left the Church because they were not accepted.

This broke her heart, since her faith experience was that it became stronger as she transitioned to become her authentic self.

She is also the graduate of a The Reformation Project's LGBTQ Christian leadership development program and the Treasurer of Q Christian Fellowship, an organization that cultivates belonging in the LGBTQ Christian community.



Lauren is from the Washington, DC, area.

## 9th Day of Christmas, Sunday, January 2, 2021

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**Contributor: Lauren Horneff**  
**Do Not Fear: God With Us**

**Psalm 147:12-20; Jeremiah 31:7-14; John 1:1-18;**  
**Ephesians 1:3-14**

*“In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”*

*John 1:4-5*

Everyone generally experiences some kind of darkness in one form or another. It could come in many different forms; however for me, it was severe depression and potential suicide caused by constant gender dysphoria.

I looked at this as a challenge given to me by God that I had to overcome in order to live life to its absolute fullest (although I didn't know that at the time). I knew what I had to do to overcome it, but I had one major obstacle—fear. Fear of the unknown if I took the steps needed and fear of rejection (from God, family, friends, work, society, etc.).

The depression caused me to drift away from God, but God was still watching over me. When I became suicidal, He ensured that I had a previously scheduled doctor appointment the next day, and my best friend had started attending church again and invited me to go with her. This started my journey to start letting in the light and accepting myself and bringing myself closer to God.

I prayed a challenge prayer for God to confirm I was doing the right thing and it was in alignment with His plan for me. He accepted! So I continued with surgery, turned on the bright lights, and quashed the darkness of depression and fear.

My life turned around 180 degrees. I experienced happiness for the first time, came out of my shell, am living life to the fullest, and more importantly, living authentically.

No matter what your darkness, it can be overcome by turning on the light. When a child is afraid of monsters under the bed, once their parent turns on the light, the fear goes away because they can see that there are no monsters under the bed. Darkness cannot overcome the light; however, the light can be turned off to allow the darkness in.

As long as you stay in the light with Christ, fear can be overcome. However, when you turn off the light of Christ (even in thought), fear can creep back in.

## 10th Day of Christmas, Monday, January 3, 2022

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**Contributor: Lauren Horneff**  
**Do Not Fear: God With Us**

**Psalm 72; Job 42:10-17; Luke 8:16-21**

A reflection on Luke 8:16-18

Why would one not want something to be disclosed or brought out into the open?

Fear. Fear of others' reactions and responses, fear of repercussions, fear of rejection, fear of being an outcast. These were my reasons to keep my history a secret from anyone new who I met. It's really no one's business, and there's no reason to disclose it, especially when there is a lot of discrimination against those with a history like mine.

However, what God teaching me is that when you hide a part of yourself, you can't really be your authentic self. If you're not your authentic self, it's very difficult to shine. When you are being your authentic self and God is behind you, He will get you through any negative effects.

I initially decided I wanted to live my life stealth (i.e., hide my trans experience to those who do not need to know). I realized it was tearing me up inside because I had to hide a major part of my life from others. There's nothing wrong with it. Many trans people do it post-transition. It's amazing how exhausting that was.

God had other plans. As my pastor frequently says, "God wants to get you where God wants you to go, more than you want to get where God wants you to go, and He's really good at getting you there."

Essentially, God put me in a variety of situations where I had to disclose my trans experience to those I would otherwise not. In addition, He put a strong desire to help educate people about the trans experience in order to help normalize it. Since these happened, I came to fully accept and be proud to be trans. He has given me more friendships, acquaintances, and opportunities than I could have imagined.

In life, it seems to be the cover up that gets you in trouble, not the thing you are covering up. Therefore, if you bring it into the light and be your authentic self in accordance with God's plans, there's no telling how far you can go.

## 11th Day of Christmas, Tuesday, January 4, 2022

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**Contributor: Lauren Horneff**  
**Do Not Fear: God With Us**

**Psalm 72; Isaiah 6:1-5; Acts 7:44-53**

A reflection on Psalms 72:12-14

Psalms 72 is a prayer of David for his son, Solomon, and it also appears to be foreshadowing the what Jesus Christ would do. Although the LGBTQ+ community did not exist as it does today, throughout history, different groups of people were afflicted and oppressed. Today, one of those groups is generally the LGBTQ+ community. Many times there is fear on both sides. The oppressors fear how the oppressed would affect their own way of life if they were not oppressed. The oppressed fear the oppressors and the pain afflicted on them.

One of the things that Jesus did was to help equalize everybody. He brought the outsiders of the time inside His circle, disconcerting the insiders. He disrupted society by doing this. Society is gradually catching up to this radical idea, one group at a time. Soon it will be the LGBTQ+ community's turn to be a normalized part of society.

The more personal experiences people have with the LGBTQ+ community, and the more that is learned about the LGBTQ+ community, the less fear people who were the oppressors have. They realize the impact on their way of life is minimal, and they know what to expect. With the oppressors' fears decreasing, the likelihood of oppression decreases, resulting in less fear from the oppressed. In this context, cisgender, heteronormative people would be the insiders with LGBTQ+ people being the outsiders.

I would also like to speak to the allies of and within the LGBTQ+ community. Jesus provides the perfect example of an ally by including everyone in His circle. Allies play a crucial role in the acceptance and inclusion of LGBTQ+ people. When people see others who are like them accept, love, and include LGBTQ+ people, they are more likely to as well. I believe that this is because the fear they had previously was resolved by this observation. Allies, please stand up for your friends in the LGBTQ+ community and help create other allies.

*Cisgender is an adjective for someone who's gender identity matches the gender they were thought to be at birth (i.e., not transgender).*



## **12th Day of Christmas, Wed., January 5, 2022**

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**Contributor: Lauren Horneff**  
**Do Not Fear: God With Us**

**Psalm 72; Jeremiah 31:7-14; John 1:10-18**

A reflection on Jeremiah 31:11-14

In this passage, Jeremiah is explaining how God will free Israel from Babylon when Israel did not see a way of freeing itself, similar to how it did not see a way of being freed from Egypt earlier. Once the Israelis are freed, Jeremiah is describing the joy they'll feel upon returning to Jerusalem.

God has the ability to do more than one can imagine. Before my surgery, I prayed a challenge prayer to God because I saw no feasible way to relax before the surgery. I had so many things to do to prepare for the surgery and related medical leave for work. I was told relaxing would help the surgery go smoother and easier. I never could get relaxed anyway, so this was a truly impossible task for me. In addition, I was questioning both the existence of God and whether I was following God's plan for me or was I possibly jeopardizing my seat in Heaven by having the surgery?

I lived in an area where, at the time, the power never went out for more than maybe a couple minutes in the previous 5 years. A major storm came through and knocked out the power of the area, including my building, for several days. During this time, I drained all batteries of computers, phones, etc., and no TV or internet (I know....travesty). There was nothing to do but relax.

I got a pre-surgery massage where I was told I've never been this relaxed. I went in my surgery and came out as relaxed as could be. And in over the 9 years since, the power in my building has not gone out more than a couple minutes, and my massage therapist recently mentioned I still have not been as relaxed as I had been that day.

Since then, life has been like a well-watered garden. I have experienced joy consistently, dancing (literally), and I have experienced everything Jeremiah said the Israelis would experience when returning to the promised land.

If you don't see a way, and it's in God's plan, God will deliver in ways only God can.

## Epiphany of our Lord, Thursday, January 6, 2022

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**Contributor: Lauren Horneff**  
**Do Not Fear: God With Us**

**Psalm 72:1-14; Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12;**  
**Ephesians 3:1-12**

A reflection on Isaiah 60:1-3

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” Isaiah 60:1-3*

Epiphany generally represents the revelation of God incarnate as the Christ Child to the Gentiles via the visit of the magi to visit and worship Jesus after His birth. Isaiah 60:1-3 is part of the traditional Old Testament reading due to its parallel to the magi visiting Jesus in Matthew 2:1-12. The “light” would generally refer to Jesus. Although darkness covers the earth, Jesus will bring redemption for all people.

Fear has plagued my life for as long as I can remember. Fear of embarrassment, fear of being myself, fear of being different. The enemy had a hold on me by instilling the fear. Fear has kept me from enjoying life, taking reasonable risks, having fun and different adventures. Even though I was able to overcome one of my fears of being myself to a point, I was only able to do that when all other options were gone—suicide or transitioning. All of the other fears still were there. I was still afraid of being myself fully, and all of my other fears were still present.

Then I heard a sermon, where the message was that no matter what fear you have, you can always give it to God. One of my favorite verses became, “do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, . . . present your requests to God. And the peace of God . . . will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7). After much prayer and a little testing, I was able to overcome those fears.

Jesus came to help restore our relationship with God and gave us a way to have a personal relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. Everyone can have this. As Paul said to the Galatians, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

The magi that visited Jesus on this day over 2,000 years ago were the first Gentiles to visit and worship Him.

Thank you for journeying  
through Advent with us.

May the God of hope fill you with all  
joy and peace in believing, so that by  
the power of the Holy Spirit you may  
abound in hope. - Rom. 15:13

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