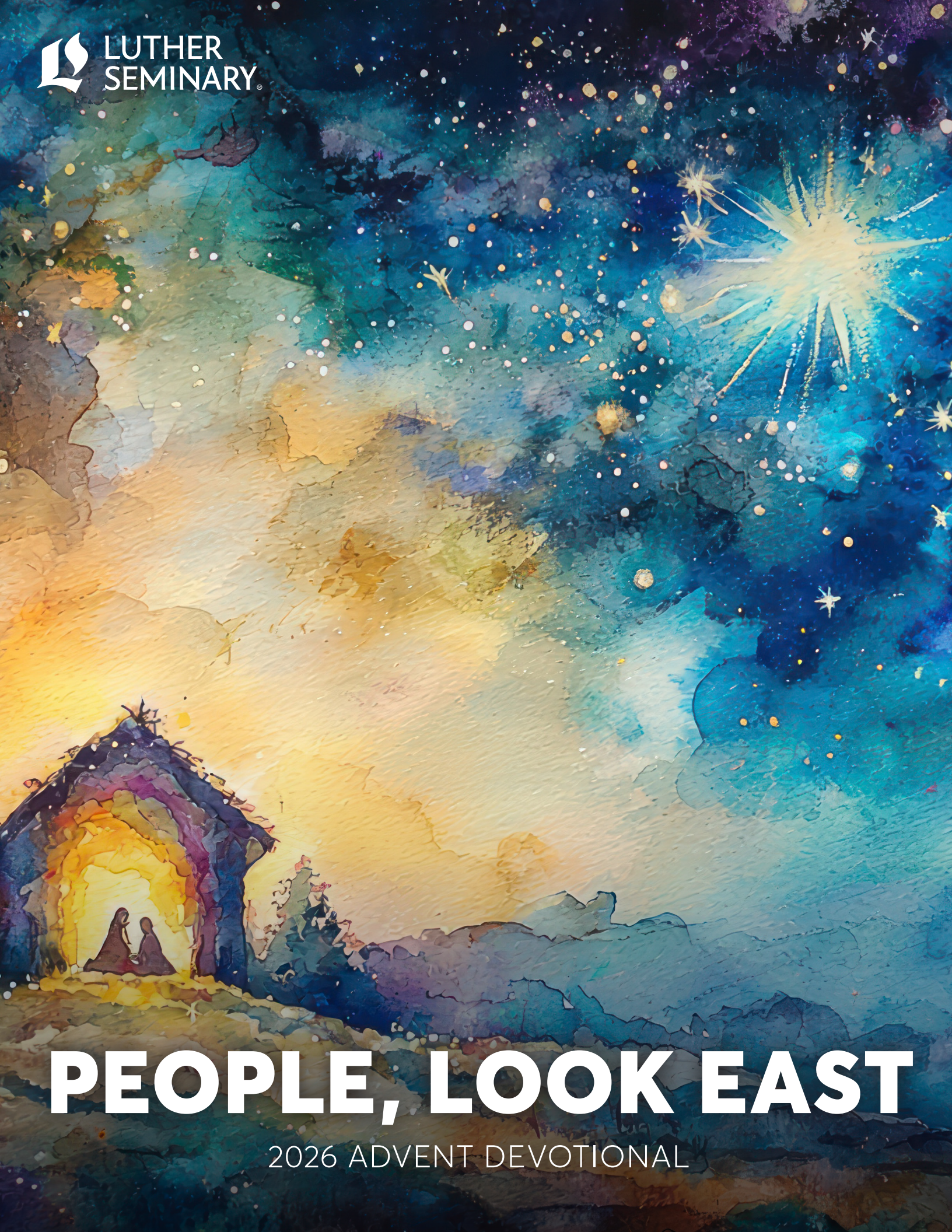
LUTHER SEMINARY



PEOPLE, LOOK EAST

2026 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

People, Look East (ELW 248)

1

People, look east. The time is near
of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able,
trim the hearth and set the table.
People, look east, and sing today:
Love, the guest, is on the way.

2

Furrows, be glad. Though earth is bare,
one more seed is planted there.
Give up your strength the seed to nourish,
that in course the flow'r may flourish.
People, look east, and sing today:
Love, the Rose, is on the way.

3

Stars, keep the watch. When night is dim,
one more light the bowl shall brim,
shining beyond the frosty weather,
bright as sun and moon together.
People, look east, and sing today:
Love, the Star, is on the way.

4

Angels announce with shouts of mirth
him who brings new life to earth.
Set ev'ry peak and valley humming
with the word, the Lord is coming.
People, look east, and sing today:
Love, the Lord, is on the way.

Text: Latin Hymn, 1632; tr. Edward Caswall
Music: William H. Monk; Public Domain

Sunday, November 29

"People, Look East" (ELW 248)

Eleanor Farjeon, the author of "Morning Has Broken," wrote "People, Look East" during an early 20th-century revival of joyful, nature-filled congregational hymns. Tracing a classical pattern known as the "Scala Naturae" or "Great Chain of Being," her Advent hymn uses four classic metaphors to show how divine Love gently restores every corner of creation. "Love, the Guest" (human) invites us to throw open our doors and set a cozy, welcoming hearth for a weary traveler. "Love, the Rose" (plant) brings sweet, miraculous life blossoming right through the cold, frozen soil like a root from Jesse. "Love, the Bird" (animal) wraps all creation in grace, bringing comforting warmth even to chilly, shivering wings. Finally, "Love, the Star" (celestial) fills the night sky with a radiant light brighter than the sun and moon. Throughout, Farjeon's vivid imagery reminds us that Christ's coming renews the entire universe—from our dining tables to the distant stars.

Open the doors of our hearts, Lord, and make us ready to welcome your restoring presence as your love shines through all creation—from our everyday lives to the furthest star. Amen.

Monday, November 30

Isaiah 40:1–11

Isaiah 40:1–11 opens with a double imperative: "Nachamu, nachamu ami"—"Comfort, O comfort My people." This prologue to Deutero-Isaiah marks the end of exile, declaring that Jerusalem's sentence is legally and spiritually satisfied. God speaks directly to the heart, transforming covenantal rebuke into unconditional restoration. As the divine highway is cleared through the desert, obstacles yield to God's self-revelation. The physical landscape bends to signal a renewal of creation itself, ensuring the exiles return home smoothly without the hardships of travel. Though human empires seem imposing, they are merely transience—fading like grass before the enduring Word of God. The towering power of Babylon will wither, but the divine promise stands eternal to comfort the weary. Finally, the Lord arrives as both a victorious sovereign and a gentle shepherd. The same mighty arm (zero'a) that displays cosmic strength cradles vulnerable lambs, ensuring even the fragile are carried home with intimate care.

Tender Shepherd and Mighty Lord, level every obstacle in our hearts and gather us into your gentle care, that we may rest securely in the enduring comfort of your unfailing promises. Amen.

Tuesday, December 1

Psalm 85:1–2, 8–13

Psalm 85 captures a profound truth: Past redemption fuels present hope, empowering future renewal through our response. Composed by the Sons of Korah during Israel's restoration from exile, the psalm recalls God favoring the land and pardoning sin, giving the nation a firm foundation to pray for renewal. Yet divine grace calls forth human response. Heaven touches earth when God's mercy enables us to live in truth, and God's righteousness actually heals our conflicts. As the psalmist envisions, "Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other." These gifts are far from abstract: As we step into grace, truth springs from the ground below while divine righteousness shines from above. God invites us to become living sanctuaries where love and truth embrace. Peace is not merely a distant promise; it unfolds right here and now as God's righteousness brings peace to our divisions. As the slogan of the ELCA states: "God's work, our hands."

Root us in the memory of your past faithfulness, Lord, and make us living sanctuaries where your love and truth embrace and your righteousness heals our wounded world. Amen.

Wednesday, December 2

2 Peter 3:8–15a

Time often feels like it's slipping away or dragging on, and our impatience can make us doubt God's promises. Yet 2 Peter 3 reminds us that the Lord operates on a divine timeline where a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a single day. What feels like slowness to us is actually patient grace: Christ delays his return so more people can encounter the gospel, turn away from sin and injustice, and heal. While the final day of renewal will arrive unexpectedly—transfiguring our polluted world into a new creation—we aren't called to wait passively or retreat from life's difficulties. Instead, we're invited to live lives of active holiness, loving God and our neighbors right where we are. As we embody God's mercy and justice in our daily routines, our trust in the certainty of God's promises grows all the stronger.

Teach us, Lord, to rest in your divine timing and trust your promises through the love you radiate within and around us today. Amen.

Thursday, December 3

Mark 1:1–8

Mark opens his Gospel with an urgent call to "prepare the way of the Lord." Stepping into the wilderness, John the Baptist offers a baptism of repentance. His call to "metanoia" is not a weight of guilt or shame; it is a gracious invitation to turn away from the exhausting miasma of dysfunction, injustice, and subtle idolatry toward the healing light of God's truth.

While John's water baptism marks a clean break from destructive patterns, he points to someone infinitely greater: Jesus, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Water clears away old structures, but the Spirit invites us directly into God's active reign of boundless mercy, justice, and restoration. Amid the season's clutter and commercialism, the call remains clear: make straight the paths. As we turn toward Jesus, he meets us where we are, freeing us from the past and creating new life within and around us through his Spirit.

Lord, immerse us in your Holy Spirit so that we can step away from the clutter and dysfunction of our past and walk freely in your healing light. Amen.

Friday, December 4

Mark 1:1–8

Just as crossing borders can shift the hands on a clock, so baptism radically alters the time zone of our lives. John's baptism of water points to Jesus' baptism of the Spirit, which tears open the heavens and pulls us out of our past into God's promised future. John's call to repentance prepares us for the new identity granted through the Spirit. No longer bound by the greed, fear, and envy of a passing age, we are now defined solely by God's loving declaration: "You are my Son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased." Living in this divine time zone frees us from the urge to control—or be controlled by—others and our circumstances. Instead, we can rest in the secure promise that we are wanted, loved, and held safely in God's hands, empowered to step out in faith to serve those around us in true freedom.

Dear Jesus, pull us out of our past into the time zone of your Spirit, that resting securely in your love as your beloved children, we may live free from fear and serve others with transformed hearts. Amen.

Saturday, December 5

"People, Look East" (ELW 248, Verse 1)

Inviting us to make our houses fair and trim the hearth, the first stanza of "People, Look East" reminds us that "Love, the Guest, is on the way." This call echoes the ancient sacred duty of hospitality in Near Eastern and early monastic cultures. But why is Christ the guest? Because in the incarnation, the very God through whom all things came to be now humbles Godself as a vulnerable traveler seeking shelter. Remembering how "he came to his own," yet "there was no room at the inn," we are urged not to repeat that coldness (John 1:11; Luke 2:7). More than tidying things up to impress guests, our preparation this Advent opens us to the world-changing radicality of the incarnation: when we welcome strangers, we welcome Christ himself (Matthew 25:35). As we receive Love incarnate into our homes, they become capacious enough to receive even those alien to us.

Lord Christ, teach us to open our hearts and homes to the vulnerable strangers through whom we receive your Love incarnate. Amen.

Sunday, December 6

"People, Look East" (ELW 248, Verse 2)

"Furrows, be glad. Though earth is bare, one more seed is planted there." Eleanor Farjeon calls us to rejoice, announcing that "Love, the Rose, is on the way." This imagery draws directly from Isaiah's prophecy: "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse; and a branch will bear fruit out of his roots." (Isaiah 11:1). In medieval typology, the bare winter earth symbolizes humanity's desperate need and corruption. Yet amid this barrenness, a miraculous bloom unexpectantly breaks through. The rose—immortalized in the hymn "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming"—is one of hymnody's oldest symbols for Christ. The flower signifies both the Messiah, who blooms directly from Jesse's lineage, and the incarnation's power to renew all of creation. Just as the furrows in fields nurture hidden seeds, so we are invited—even amid the "furrows" of our anxieties—to trust that new life is bursting forth from what appeared dead.

Lord, teach us to rejoice even in the bare furrows of our anxieties, trusting that your love is secretly at work bringing new life where all seemed dead. Amen.

Monday, December 7

Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11

Isaiah 61 is rooted in the Jubilee Year—a time when debts are canceled, enslaved people freed, and land restored (Leviticus 25–26). Its story of reversal and hope would later inform New Testament depictions not only of Jesus' ministry (Luke 4), but also of what it means to "announce good news" or "evangelize" (euangelizomai). Captives find liberation, grievers receive comfort, and heavy despair gives way to vibrant praise and beauty. As sturdy "oaks of righteousness," former victims now become a restored community displaying divine glory in their very lives. And this transformation grants true agency. Rather than dwelling in ruins, they are now empowered to rebuild ancient structures, repair devastated spaces, and heal generational dysfunction. Their purpose is anchored in an enduring covenant rooted in God's devotion to justice. Adorned in salvation like formal wedding attire, they sing praises as God's creative righteousness naturally sprouts and inevitably flourishes before all nations.

Anointed by your Spirit, Lord, transform our despair into beauty and clothe us in salvation so that as oaks of righteousness, we may actively rebuild broken spaces and reveal your creative justice in every moment of our lives. Amen.

Tuesday, December 8

Luke 1:46b–55

For today's time of reflection, please reread Mary's song of praise as your own (out loud if possible), inserting your name as indicated below:

"[Your name] soul magnifies the Lord,
and [your name] spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for God looked with favor on the lowly state of
[your name]. Surely from now on all generations
will call me blessed,

for the Mighty One has done great things for
[your name], and holy is the Creator's name;
indeed, God's mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

The Mighty One has shown strength of
being and has scattered the proud in the
imagination of their hearts.

God has brought down the powerful from their
thrones and lifted up the lowly;

The Lord has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.

God has come to the aid of [your name], in
remembrance of God's mercy,

according to the promise the Lord made
to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his
descendants forever."

Mighty One, help us to remember how you fulfilled your covenant promises through Mary's praise. May we lean into your call to reverse justice by exalting the humble and feeding the hungry so that our souls along with Mary will magnify the Lord! Amen.

Wednesday, December 9

1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

This is the joyful way of walking with Christ that guides us into a peace that cannot be shaken by all that life throws our way—not feigned happiness, but peace in allowing the Spirit to hold our faith when we cannot. It is most certainly true that when I maintain a mindset of gratitude and prayerfulness, with both being other-centered, a constant joy and peace rules my heart and mind. This is the formula for living one's best life.

Lord God, guide us faithfully to hold fast to what is good and abstain from every form of evil so that your Spirit within us will emanate peace and joy as we trust in your faithful sanctification of our soul and body. Amen.

Thursday, December 10

John 1:6–8, 19–28

This portion of Scripture beautifully shows us the humility of John, who clearly understood his role when responding to the priests and Levites trying to figure out who he was and what he was doing. It reminds me of when I attended seminary back in the early '90s. During a children, youth, and family course, our professor gave us a visual demonstration I will never forget. He stood in front of the class with his arms wide, blocking the chalkboard he was writing important points on, and said, "Your role as a leader is not to become the focus, but" (then he stepped aside) "to point the way to Christ." My takeaway to this day is that, like John the Baptist, all of us as Christian leaders are called to be humble witnesses—not shining the limelight on ourselves, but pointing away from ourselves to Christ as the true light.

Creator God, may we mirror the humble witness of John the Baptist who knew himself to be a messenger "crying out in the wilderness" to "make straight the way of the Lord," the bearer of light and love in whose image we are made. May our actions and our words point the way to you, Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Friday, December 11

John 1:6–8, 19–28

I trust this text makes each of us wonder what our wilderness context is for proclaiming the way of love for One some may not yet know. As we left the state fair with two of our grandchildren, a man proclaimed repentance loudly to the crowd waiting for the light to turn green. My husband tried to engage him with a question, but he clearly had a memorized script and was not ready for conversation.

I wonder how many people tuned out open to hear John the Baptist's voice as one anointed by God as Christ's messenger? At the exit of the state fairgrounds, it seemed to me that most people just wanted to go about their day and let the preacher's cries be background noise. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus through bold, selfless proclamation. May we be bold and loving in the context we are given to proclaim that Jesus is Lord.

Dear God, there are so many ways to share your love and light. May we be open to uninvited encounters to engage with questions from the many who wander in and out of our circles of influence. Help us to have eyes to see, ears to hear, and a welcome heart to bear witness to your love on the journey. Amen.

Saturday, December 12

"People, Look East" (ELW 248, Verse 3)

The tune of this hymn during the Advent season is very catchy—wavelike in its rhythm. This third verse in particular calls us to watch during this season of shorter days of light and longer hours of darkness, because even in the dark, there are sources of light. Look at the stars, the moon, and the frosty glow of cooler weather: "Love, the Star, is on the way." Holy anticipation and expectation keep us on high alert for our Guiding Star to arrive. May we, the people we love, and especially those we are struggling to love look east, pause in wonder, and sing today.

Creator of all, thank you for the gift of darkness this season. May we pause to understand your constant presence with us and be carriers of your love that can permeate the darkest hour and the hardest hearts. Amen.

Sunday, December 13

"People, Look East" (ELW 248)

In this beloved hymn, each verse calls us to look at various aspects of our lives that are enveloped in turning toward the East during Advent. This season is an opportunity to create cozy warmth in our homes and to welcome guests. Love, the ultimate guest, is on the way. We are called to find rest in the barrenness of the earth, knowing there is a Rose that grows and flourishes in all seasons. "Love, the Rose, is on the way." We look to the dark sky holding stars of light—one shining brighter than all others—that led the Magi to baby Jesus. "Love, the Star, is on the way." We are brought into the heavenly choir of angels who set the peaks and valleys humming with anticipation of the Lord's coming. "Love, the Lord, is on the way."

God of wonder, may we envision your coming in the ways this hymn has inspired us to look for. Help us to see you as the ever-present guest in our hearts and homes. As a lovely Rose in the barren time this season represents. May we look to the stars this season and be reminded of the great gift of coming to us in human form and showing us your Love, as a way to love you and others through all that we say and do. Amen.

Monday, December 14

2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16

In America, it seems we like things. During this season, we bring out the Christmas decorations to prepare our homes for guests. More stuff tends to come our way during this season; if our homes become too full, there are storage lockers to rent that can hold the things we are not using.

In our scripture today, the house the Lord declares to make for David is not built of cedar. Instead, God makes a sovereign covenant—promising an everlasting house and lineage, a kingdom and throne established forever before the Lord, rather than requiring a physical temple. Wow, how about that for perspective on what is truly important to build? Tangible things can be measured more easily than legacy impact. The value demonstrated in this text gives us the right priority for our spiritual journey and faith walk, versus our clamoring for more and better stuff to manage.

Dear Lord, in this season of giving, may we rest in your abundance and see with eyes of contentment and love. May we hold to your promise that you made to David that we are bearers of your image and heirs of your merciful grace. Amen.

Tuesday, December 15

Psalm 89:1–4, 19–26

Our practice for today will be a rereading of the text from your heart, using your name in place of David's to construct a contemplative poem. May its assurance blow your mind in the best way possible to receive the Christ child, who makes all things possible by stretching us to believe and receive beyond all that we can ask or imagine.

Today, [your name] will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

Today, [your name] declares that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, [your name]; I have sworn to my servant, [your name] 'I will establish your descendants forever and build your throne for all generations.' " Selah

Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, [your name] and said, "I have set the crown on one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people.

I have found my servant, [your name]; with my holy oil I have anointed [your name]; my hand shall always remain with [your name]; my arm also shall strengthen [your name].

The enemy shall not outwit [your name]; the wicked shall not humble [your name].

I will crush [your name's] foes before [your name] and strike down those who hate [your name].

My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with [your name], and in my name [your name's] horn shall be exalted.

I will set [your name's] hand on the sea and [your name's] right hand on the rivers.

[Your name] shall cry to God, "You are my Creator, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!"

Solid Rock of our Salvation, hear our voices that join with David to celebrate your unchanging faithfulness, steadfast love, and anointed covenant with David's line and with us this day, this week, this Advent season, and through the new year. Amen.

Wednesday, December 16

Romans 16:25–27

Praise to our wise God who strengthens believers through the revealed mystery of Christ for all nations during Advent and all year long—thanks be to God! I have been asked, "How do you know God is real?" and "How can you put your faith in a God who cannot be completely understood?" These are great questions, and this is my humble response: I really like the description of God's presence being like the wind: You can't see it, but you can sure feel it! I also wouldn't want to put my faith in a God I could completely wrap my head around. It hurts my head in the best way possible to try to fathom God's infinite love for us—knowing us and loving us unconditionally, even in our mother's womb. That is the God I wait longingly for each Advent season: the One who loves me so much as to take on humanness, so that we can better understand a glimpse of glory and righteousness.

Lord God, keep us patient as we actively wait for your hidden promises to come into the light. May we be filled with a deeply rooted faithfulness that outlasts human timelines and stretches us to embrace the longheld mystery made known to all nations. To you be the glory! Amen.

Thursday, December 17

Luke 1:26–38

Mary's questions began before she heard the messenger finish telling her that God was going to do something unique and decisive for God's world—and that she would be in the middle of it. She must have been stunned as she processed this message and the implications of the news.

Gabriel, the messenger of God, reveals the incarnation of Jesus to Mary. She was "much perplexed by his words." We all would have been.

I am thankful for her questions, wondering, and pondering. Her need to process this news gives us permission to join her with our own questions and wonder about the way God chose to work back in her time. We also continue to wonder about how God chooses to work in our own time.

Mary's heart and mind turned when she heard the promise that "nothing will be impossible with God." We join her, looking east these days … with hope.

Gracious God, prepare us to celebrate the birthday of Jesus. Open us up to your presence and work in our lives. Open our eyes to see your presence and work in our communities. Stir us up to receive the mystery of your incarnate love in Jesus and hear his surprising call to follow him into your future. Amen.

Friday, December 18

Luke 1:26–38

Read the Gospel text again, out loud this time. Notice where God's Spirit grabs you, or where you get stuck pondering like Mary. What in this lesson is sticking out, grabbing your attention today?

Two of my teachers, Dr. Pat Keifert and Dr. Pat Ellison, invited us into the ancient practice of Lectio Divina with some adjustments. They called this communal practice "Dwelling in the Word." We were encouraged to notice where we heard God calling us in a passage like this, and to listen for what "reasonably friendly strangers" in small group triads had also heard.

What do you notice? Hear?

"Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you," keeps grabbing my attention. This is something new for me.

This lesson reminds me that I am, through my baptism into Jesus, a "favored one" as well. Through Jesus you are also blessed with God's favor, through this One whose incarnation we will soon celebrate.

Gracious Triune God, hear this prayer which Mary taught us. "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Empower and guide us to trust in your will for our lives and your work in our midst now. Amen.

Saturday, December 19

"People, Look East" (ELW 248, Verse 4)

"People look east and sing today." Each verse invites people to sing for joy because our loving Lord is on the way.

After mowing the cemetery around our church building, I remember asking, "Why do we bury people with their feet on the east side? Someone taught me. "We place our loved ones and those who have died in their graves facing east so that when they rise at the end of time, they will be facing their Savior and Lord, Jesus." We expect Jesus will return in the east like we see the sun rise there.

A friend lost his son way too early. He waits for the sunrise each day, and remembers the words of Zechariah's prophecy:

> "Because of the tender mercy of our God,
> the dawn from on high will break upon us,
> to shine upon those who sit in darkness and
> in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into
> the way of peace." (Luke 1:78–79)

Gracious Lord, we give thanks that with this birth you came, with your resurrecting love and grace, to free us from all our kinds of bondage, even death, and guide us into the way of peace. "Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that would obstruct your mercy, that willingly we may bear your redeeming love to all the world, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen." (Advent 4 [B]. Evangelical Lutheran Worship)

Sunday, December 20

"People, Look East" (ELW 248)

I grew up on a midsized dairy farm. My folks loved to get everything ready ahead of time so that on Christmas Eve we could quickly milk our cows, feed the animals, enjoy family time, and attend worship at Crow River Lutheran Church near Belgrade, Minnesota.

Once all four Advent candles were lit, my mother liked to say, "We have to get ready for the coming of the Christ Child." We would tear into the list of chores to get ready for our celebration of the birth of Jesus. Extra hay bales were moved into position. Extra feed had to be prepared so the animals could have a feast. Manure was hauled. The animals were given clean bedding the day before Christmas.

Inside, gifts were wrapped to prepare to follow the great gift-giving of our God in the amazing and disorienting birth of God's Son, Jesus in a feed box. And that was just the beginning.

Prepared yet?

Surprising God, continue to send messengers of the good news into our lives, reminding us to get ready for the ongoing presence of our Lord. Surprise us with the good news of your gracious and stunning incarnated love. Inspire us to not only get ready, but to join the celebration, because the Lord, the great "I Am" or the "I Will Be Who I Will Be," loves us enough to come as the hymn says: "With the word the Lord is coming … Love, the Lord, is on the way." Amen.

Monday, December 21

Isaiah 9:2–7

I recall the first Longest Night (or Blue Christmas) service I attended. It happened in a smaller community and congregation, in a place where the rural population was aging and growing smaller.

It was perfect, as we gathered in candlelight, a couple handfuls of people. We were in an old, wooden, beautiful, and small sanctuary. The pastor and musicians of the congregation led us in our worship of God, acknowledging that not all people are joyful for a number of reasons as we approach the celebration of the birth of Jesus. We were also fed with God's meal of grace, and anointed with prayers for healing.

Resting in the darkness, we shared our lamentation as God's people have done throughout the centuries and chapters of time. God's promises and God's presence shone into our sadness and despair, finding us wherever we were stuck, struggling, or withdrawn.

And we remembered that God zealously longs for our lives to be filled with the light of God's child.

Gracious Zealous God, call us … guide us … toward deeper and wider love and wholeness through your incarnation. We give thanks that "Love, the Star, is on the way" and your gracious love meets us in our ordinary lives. Amen.

Tuesday, December 22

Psalm 96

I love to stare into the heavens and think about the stars, galaxies, comets, planets, sun, and the overwhelming scale of the creation. The creation itself calls me to remember and praise our Creator, whose work exceeds my imagination and comprehension.

Psalm 96 calls us to sing a new song to our Lord. When the northern lights are dancing, it reminds me we all need to sing praise to this One who is so mighty and mysterious, who made all the heavens, and all the microbes full of life in the living soil below our feet.

When the psalm talks about judgement, it is also good news because the quality of our judge really matters. God will judge us with equity, righteousness, truth, and grace. Jesus was born to communicate that our God is for us, with us, and full of gracious love.

God's creation is beautiful. We are part of it. This psalm calls us to praise God, to respond to God's incomprehensible power and work.

Gracious God,

We join with your heavens to praise you.

We join with this planet to praise you.

We join with your roaring seas to praise you.

We join with the fields full of food and beauty to praise you.

We join with the forests of many kinds to praise you.

We know all that we have comes from you.

We know through the child, Jesus, whose birth we will soon celebrate,

that you are a healing, teaching, resurrecting, and gracious God.

We join all of creation in praising you. Amen.

Wednesday, December 23

Titus 2:11–14

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all." Do you remember when you last saw the grace of God appear?

Jesus, the one whose birth is being celebrated soon, is an example of visible grace. His birth reminds us of how far God will go to reach us. His words have a visible impact as they open up people's understanding of God and of themselves, as he releases people from sins, as he raises people from the dead, and invites people into fellowship with him. Christ's actions, as he suffers, dies a tortured death on the cross, and is raised from the dead also are all moments of visible grace. Hard moments.

In the sacraments, God's grace appears as Jesus invites us with his words and the common elements of bread and wine, and we see God's grace embodied in the action of washing in the water of God's baptismal promise.

We ask, Triune God, that you continue to teach us and train us, gracefully leading us from brokenness to wholeness, and from death to life. Teach us with the incarnate visible words of Jesus and all those you have called to follow him. Send your Spirit to keep inviting us deeper and wider into this life of embodied trust and grace. Amen.

Thursday, December 24 Christmas Eve

Luke 2:1–14, (15–20)

There is nothing quite like holding a newborn, fragile, and beautiful baby.

Our gospel, with all its details, reveals that the birth of Jesus had surprises. He was away from home. Jesus did not look very royal as a newborn, wrapped in bands of cloth, and laid in a place where you feed animals (manger).

The first guests were not the normal crowd for a king's birth either. Instead they were shepherds. As a former sheep farmer, I find myself drawn to the ancient shepherds out in the fields who received the news from armies (hosts) of angels. I can see them half running, half walking, hurrying back to town after assigning someone to keep an eye on their flocks.

I bet they did some serious wrestling as they traveled with what had just happened out in the fields, and what they heard. The early church would wrestle for centuries, searching to find the right words to talk about this surprising baby.

Just hold him … in your mind and heart for now. Jesus is God's love incarnate.

Gracious Triune God, help us rest in the wonder of the story of Jesus being born. We give thanks that you sent the messengers (angels) to people who got their hands dirty every day. We remember Mary who responded in faith to a great mystery … as well as Joseph. Help us to see the miracles of your presence and grace around us today. Guide us, Jesus, as you hold us close. Amen.

Friday, December 25
Christmas Day

"People, Look East" (ELW 248)

Our theme hymn connects the story of Christ's birth to our stories. In this Christmas holiday, our faith, traditions. and cultures all dance together.

When I hear the phrase, "People, look east, and sing today," I remember Christians around the world who will be celebrating the birth of Jesus in a few weeks, especially the Eastern Orthodox part of the Christian Church.

We all have our traditions. Some live in our families. Others are cultural. Some come from our congregations. Our Orthodox Christian siblings in Christ celebrate Christmas on the Eve of Epiphany, Jan. 7th. Their traditions are similar, but different from ours. They are a reminder that our faith takes on flesh in many different contexts and communities.

All of our traditions, like those from our families, our communities of faith, and our theme hymn for this season of Advent combine to communicate the joy that comes in the birth of Jesus.

We give thanks today for the incarnation, the birth of Jesus, our Lord. Hallelujah!

People look east …

Love our guest is here in our midst.

Love is here as a newborn and as beautiful as a fragile rose.

Love enlightens our darkness like the bright light of the Epiphany star.

Love has come to bring new life to earth.

Love is here, calling us to follow in Christ's way.

People, look east, and sing today. Hallelujah. Amen.

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