

2025 Advent Devotional



Now and then a Quaker, generally tongue-in-cheek, will refer to our December 25th festivities as “the day the world calls Christmas.” Referring to Christmas that way places Friends at a bit of a remove from the yearly cycle of Christian holidays. It reminds us that every day is one in which we should expect God’s arrival, that every day can overturn our expectations of power and mercy, that every day is a day in which God is incarnate with us.

And yet, Advent can be seen as the most Quakerly of the Christian seasons. It’s time set aside for quiet waiting—for experimenting with the openness to God that we seek in our times of silence each Sunday. Each Advent, as we take time to practice the art of waiting on God, we find an opportunity become better Friends.

We hope you will enjoy this series of Advent and Christmas devotions offered by Friends across the United States. You’ll find many different ways of speaking about God, each pointing toward the same grounding truth that God is truly, miraculously, and lovingly as with us now as in the manger long ago.

May the grace and peace of Christ surround you in this season and always, and may your Christmases be merry and bright.

Dan Kasztelan
Julie Rudd
Michael Sherman

Dear Friends,

As Christmas approaches again, I find myself thinking again about the remarkable truth at the heart of my faith. The Light truly does shine in the darkness. And the darkness has never been able to put it out. The shadows of hopelessness and fear seem ever present. We see injustice and witness unimaginable heartbreak. We see families and communities carrying burdens that feel far too heavy. Yet the promise of Christmas is that God steps into that very place and brings a Light that will not fade.

What moves me deeply is how quietly this Light comes. Often, not with fanfare. Not with force. It comes in a way that invites us to draw close and to listen. It meets us with tenderness. It steadies our hearts when we feel overwhelmed. It reminds us that hope is not a theory. Hope is a gift that God keeps giving.

My prayer for Friends this Christmas is simple. May we receive the Light with open hearts. May it warm what has grown cold. And may it shine through us in ways that bring comfort, hope, and love to a waiting world.

Grace and peace,
Kelly Kellum
General Secretary, Friends United Meeting

Monday, December 1

The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God...”

Read: Luke 1:26–33

It’s often said that Friends know God’s call when they “feel at peace” about a decision. We feel a sense of serene surrender and say, like Mary: “Let it be to me according to your word.” (Lk. 1:38) To borrow from a popular internet meme, that might be “how it’s going” for Mary later in the chapter, but it’s not “how it started.”

How it started was Mary trying to make sense of a disruptive and disturbing encounter with some kind of divine messenger. The messenger messed with her life; she was “pledged” or “betrothed” to a man and a plan. Serious commitments and a proper order of things: “First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Mary with a baby...”

I believe God is invitational and uncontrolling; God’s call is always: “Your mission, should you choose to accept it...” Mary had to choose whether she would accept the mission. She was “favored” but not forced. Before she could accept or reject the mission, however, she had to understand what was being asked of her. It was a lot to take in!

Later we will witness Mary “treasuring and pondering” (Lk. 2:19) the unfolding events with that serene surrender; but before the treasuring and pondering was the “disturbed and wondering.” (Lk. 1:29) Even the greeting caused her to be “greatly disturbed” or “much perplexed” (NRSV). She was trying to process the strangeness of the situation and the meaning of the message. The Greek word for “wondering” is *dialogizomai*—she was having an inner dialogue about what was happening and how she should respond.

We can take encouragement from this brief window into Mary’s process. Like Mary, we may get to a point of serene surrender where we “feel at peace” about a decision, but we don’t start there. We often start with “troubled and wondering” before we get to “treasuring and pondering.” We cannot and should not bypass this process; it’s what makes a decision free and authentic.

Whatever invitation or interruption you are processing, remember that the process is part of the purpose. Mary reminds us that the truest “yes” to God’s call is consent on the other side of confusion, rest on the other side of the wrestling, simplicity on the other side of complexity.

—Andy Stanton-Henry, *Wilmington Yearly Meeting*

Tuesday, December 2

“Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’”

Read: Luke 1:34–38

Could it be that the angel that visited Mary and announced to her the coming of Jesus through her pregnancy is the original “possibility thinker?” As Luke records it, when Mary has a hard time grasping what is going to take place, the angel presents her cousin, Elizabeth, as Exhibit A and says, “...even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled ‘unable to conceive’ is now six months pregnant. Nothing is impossible for God.” (Luke 1:36-37)

Maybe, though, the angel helps us to reframe what it looks like to hold out hope and possibility in our lives. As the angel put it, “This woman who was labeled ‘unable to conceive’ is now six months pregnant. Nothing is impossible for God.” Maybe the places in which we need to be open to more possibilities are the places in which we find it hard to conceive that hope, and possibility, even exist.

I know there are times in which I am “unable to conceive” of certain things happening in my life or in our world. I’m often “unable to conceive” of a time in which there will be peace and nonviolence. I’m sometimes “unable to conceive” of a future in which Quakers will begin to really flourish and grow. I’m often “unable to conceive” us overcoming our differences as a nation. But it’s in those times I truly need to hear the words the angel offered to Mary, “Nothing is impossible for God.”

Advent is about opening ourselves to possibility and hope. It’s about remembering that light is coming into our darkness. It’s about paying attention to what new life God is seeking to birth into this world through us. And don’t think it can’t happen through you or through Quakers, because it can! Because nothing is impossible for God, and with God.

Amen.

—Scott Wagoner, *High Point Friends Meeting (Independent)*

Wednesday, December 3

*“Every warrior’s boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.”*

Read: Isaiah 9:1–7

Isaiah’s vision of a people in darkness seeing a great light held out the hope of peace for an embattled Jerusalem, in the eighth century BCE. The church reinterpreted these words and identified the light with the coming of Christ; then the first Friends experienced this light shining within themselves. Isaiah’s vision continues to be relevant for us because it is not yet complete. This is what it means to live in a broken world: a great light shines, but it yet shines in darkness. Just as in Isaiah’s time, and in the time of Jesus’ birth, today we have to acknowledge darkness and despair: continuing wars in Ukraine and Sudan; a fragile cease-fire in Gaza; an American culture that is increasingly divided and inhumane; and our own weakness in the face of injustice.

The early Quaker James Nayler was a powerful preacher and theologian, fully the equal of George Fox. But he fell into disgrace and alienation when he was convicted by Parliament for blasphemy, tortured, and imprisoned, in 1656. After his release and near the end of his life, he wrote the following advice:

Art thou in darkness? Mind it not; for if thou dost, it will fill thee more; but stand still and act not, and wait in patience till light arise out of darkness to lead thee.

When we find ourselves walking in darkness, whether darkness from within or without, we are not to focus on it, for to do so will only draw us deeper into it. This does not mean that we should ignore sin and evil, or that we can be excused from working against injustice. But we cannot struggle against darkness using its own tools. Mind not the darkness, but wait for the light—Isaiah’s great light that shines on, and in, all people.

—Brian Young, *New Association of Friends*

Thursday, December 4

*“Lift up your heads, you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.”*

Read: Psalm 24:7–10

Are we ready to greet the King of Glory as we come to Advent again? What do we need to do in order to have or celebrate the Lord who is strong and mighty in our presence? What does it mean for us to be lifted up, to open doors so that the Lord Almighty, the King of Glory can come into our lives?

I think back to December, 1973, for my attendance at a Moravian Love Feast in Wait Chapel at Wake Forest University. It's a Christian worship service originating from an early Christian tradition and revived by the Moravian Church in 1727. Centering around a simple meal with a sweetened bun and coffee, the congregation and choir joining in hymns and anthems, scripture readings and message, the service is not a sacrament but a communal experience designed to foster spiritual unity and a sense of belonging. At Christmas love feasts, beeswax candles with red paper frills are often passed to attendees, creating a warm, glowing atmosphere as they sing together.

Near the end of that service, as the unlit candles were distributed, the chapel lights were dimmed then off as the light from one candle was spread to others around the room. In preparation to sing the last hymn we were asked to raise our individual candle to celebrate Christ as the light of the world being born. I didn't want to do that! I wanted to hold the candle closer to me so I could see the words of the hymn—how selfish! But as the whole congregation lifted their candles, there was ever more light than before! Tears still come whenever I relate that event! Don't hold the candle close, but lift up your light, your gate, your ancient doors (fears, selfish ways, etc.) so that the King of glory can come in to both you and others!

—David Hobson, North Carolina Fellowship of Friends

Friday, December 5

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.”

Read: Isaiah 11:1–5

Grief is not a traditional Christmas feeling. We are encouraged to focus on the warm fuzzy things as we get close to Christmas—love, peace, joy, etc. This can leave those of us grieving out of step with how we “should” be feeling. Too often we’re expected to coo over the baby Jesus and not make anyone uncomfortable with our sadness.

This forced Christmas cheer is emotionally stifling but it also completely ignores the reality of the incarnation. God comes into the world in the person of Jesus because of and through the brokenness of the world. The prophet Isaiah promises a shoot will grow out of the stump of Jesse. You don’t get a stump unless something has been cut down and appears dead.

Jesus was born into an occupied land, to a displaced and impoverished family. The Hebrew people had suffered loss after loss—exile, conquering armies, subjugation, destruction of their holy city and temple. If we, in our desire for peace and comfort, ignore the fact that Jesus came into a world that was awash in grief, destruction, and injustice, we strip his birth of its power and meaning. Not only is there room for a sense of loss in Christmas, it is required.

Isaiah, in calling our attention to the felled tree, allows us to see the new growth. The promised one, he writes, will be filled with the Spirit of God. And because of that indwelling Spirit, he will judge without prejudice and bring justice for the oppressed. New life will result in a new way for the world to be. Trees have been cut down, but there is a shoot that is growing.

—Faith Kelley, Western Association of Friends

Thursday, December 6

*“The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.”*

Read: Isaiah 11:6–10

Once every three or four years, Friends in our faith community are challenged to read through the Bible together. Passages from each week’s readings are then used in Sunday worship. This year is one of those years. Reading chronologically through the Old Testament is sometimes a challenge, but each time we do this together I am reminded again of the incredible story of God “with us” throughout all of human life. The Bible reminds us, as people of God, of how we survived struggle, conflict, human failures, exile, and rebellion. It reminds us of how Immanuel—“God is with us”—shapes us into a people of God in community whose mission is to make God known to the world.

In Isaiah 11:6–10, the prophet Isaiah gives a visual picture of what the peaceable kingdom should look like for the people of God. Isaiah longed and hoped for the Messiah to bring truth and justice to a world often filled with harm and destruction. As we once again celebrate the arrival of Christ to the world, much of the world still waits and longs for truth and justice. We still long for the world to be filled with the knowledge of God.

The root of Jesse, the Messiah Isaiah longed for, is with us today. Advent is always a time of hope and peace for the people of God. Often that hope flies in the face of the world we live in. Has the Messiah’s arrival changed how we live in today’s world, how we lift up Christ to those around us? Are we living witnesses of the “glorious dwelling of God?” Are we making the peaceable kingdom visible to a world longing for peace? Let’s be people who fill the world with the knowledge and love of God.

—Pam Ferguson, Winchester Friends Meeting (Independent)

Sunday, December 7

*“The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.”*

Read: Isaiah 35:1–10

Early this week, I heard someone in a public television interview lamenting the economic chaos in the U.S. due to inflation, new tariffs on imported goods, and the absence of federal food assistance funds. That person asked, “If this keeps up, what will become of Christmas?”

In the mid-1980s, Pam and I worked alongside Dutch missionaries in a refugee project in southern Sudan. As December approached during our first year there, they told us about their culture’s unique way of celebrating Jesus’ arrival into the human story. On St. Nicholas Eve and St. Nicholas Day (December 5 and 6), they gathered for family meals, exchanged gifts, and visited relatives. St. Nicholas was a Greek bishop in the fourth century AD who became the patron saint of children. Dutch kids were encouraged to leave their shoes on the porch on St. Nicholas Eve and would find them stuffed with small gifts and treats from Sinterklaas the next morning.

After all that activity and expense in early December, our Christian friends would spend Christmas Eve and Christmas Day attending worship gatherings, resting, and reflecting upon God’s gift of Jesus and the salvation he came to earth to offer. They told us that non-Christians in Holland treated Christmas as just another commercialized secular holiday. As Christians, however, our friends were grateful for the separation of St. Nicholas Day and Christmas observances as a means of sustaining the spiritual focus and meaning of God’s gift of Immanuel.

Isaiah 35 details the prophet’s vision of God’s promised rescue of the exiled Hebrews from Babylonian captivity, and their delight as they returned to Zion. Many believe that Isaiah’s vision also describes the joy the world could experience from the Messiah’s entry into the world as the baby Jesus, and from his future return at the end of human time.

Christmas—the real one—will happen this year, no matter what our outward circumstances may be. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

—Ron Ferguson, Winchester Friends Meeting (Independent)

Monday, December 8

*“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb,
and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed:
‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!’”*

Read: Luke 1:39–45

Unbelievable news has come to teenage Mary: A baby (without the *hoo-ha*?) and he will be a Prophet: “Son of the Most High.” Rather than cower at this confusing news, she runs to her elderly cousin, Elizabeth, also miraculously with child.

When Mary arrives at Elizabeth’s door, angels don’t trumpet. It is simply two women, each carrying a mystery they did not ask for, greeting one another in a humble house in the hill country. And...the Holy Spirit filled the room.

Friends might recognize this as a kind of first Meeting for Worship. Mary comes with an inward revelation she barely understands. She has said “yes” to God, but she needs community to draw it out of her. Elizabeth listens deeply: body and spirit attuned. And as she listens, something in her leaps! Life stirs. Her whole self responds before she even forms the words. Then, as vocal ministry rising in worship, Elizabeth speaks Truth she has been given: “Blessed are you... and blessed is she who believed.”

What strengthens Mary is not rationale, but recognition. In that moment, the faithfulness of one woman awakens the faithfulness of another. Spirit is not delivered from on High; it wells up between them.

This Advent, let us remember that hope is not abstract. It is embodied. It kicks and leaps. It is felt before it is understood. God’s work is revealed in ordinary encounters, in the courage of women who trust what is growing within them, and in the quiet affirmation offered all of us when we gather and listen, with our whole selves, together.

May we be like Mary and Elizabeth—arriving, listening, blessing—and discovering again that when two or three open themselves to the Light, joy rises up unbidden.

—Kristina Keefe-Perry, New England Yearly Meeting

Tuesday, December 9

*“God has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.”*

Read: Luke 1:46–56

Our Advent and Christmas celebrations make Hope, Peace, and Joy shiny. We cover them with glitter, and wrap them in bows. We forget that before hope comes deep longing, and before peace comes we experience brokenness. We want the glory without the grime.

I never have a Martha Stewart perfect table, or a Marie Kondo simplified household, or a Mr. Clean sparkling kitchen. I might come close for five minutes but then there are children, or kittens, or a long day at work that leaves me without the energy to produce perfection. Life is messy.

In the Magnificat, Mary rejoices in anticipation of the fulfillment of God’s promises in the person of Jesus. (Jesus, who is still safely ensconced in her womb.) The promises are coming, but at the moment these words were uttered the world was still a mess.

Joy is rooted in what is True, solid, and unchanging. We can find joy in the reality of God’s love, presence, and grace. Real joy requires us to lean into the truth of our experiences. We can hold joy and sorrow at the same time.

There’s a tendency to try to use false joy to overcome sadness or pain. We are uncomfortable with negative feelings in ourselves and others. We try to be happy, or we try to make others happy instead. Words of happiness sound like a cruel joke when suffering has not yet ended. In Proverbs 25:20, it says, “Like vinegar on a wound is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.” Joy does not deny the pain and difficulty of real life. In a strange way, joy takes on a richer and deeper tone when we embrace the hurting places in our hearts.

In Mary’s song of praise we are assured God sees us. God will re-order things so that the proud and powerful will fall and the lowly and meek will be uplifted. God’s people are not forgotten. God will continue to be merciful and faithful.

Joy recognizes the reality of our situations, the reality of injustice around us, the reality of pain and loss. Joy also recognizes the character of God, giving us a foundation for praise even when our circumstances look bleak. Joy embraces the pain of the loss, and the love for the person we miss, and the beauty of creation, and heartbreak over injustice, and hope that a good future exists on the other side of what we see now.

What does your heart long for? How can you participate in an increase of peace and justice? When was the last time you experienced real joy?

—Charity Sandstrom, Great Plains Yearly Meeting

Wednesday, December 10

*“Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God...”*

Read: Isaiah 40:1–5

On a cold December night in eastern central Indiana, the large Mennonite church in Berne is filled with people, even the balconies. The crowd quiets as the musicians begin to play. When the tenor starts to sing “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God...,” the first words of Handel’s *Messiah* fill the church, and a reverence fills the space as the choir joins. It is Isaiah 40:1–5 that are these first words—these verses that Handel started his masterpiece with.

In the early darkness of the Advent season, it is the light of Christ, the expectancy of his birth, that gives us hope and joy. For Christians, Isaiah prophesizes of Jesus. Yet, Isaiah is a book of the Hebrew Bible, and Christian interpretation is only a way of reading and understanding the text. Isaiah 40:1–5 is a message of comfort offered to the exiled Israelites that their suffering under the Babylonian empire is over. Through a Christian lens, we can step centuries back in time before Jesus to a promise of him, and, uniquely, we also know how the story ends—Jesus is born in a manger in Bethlehem, lives a radical life of holy peace and love under God’s new covenant, and dies on the cross at the hands of empire. We get to see the span of answered prayers, ended suffering, renewed suffering, transformation, love, peace...all the bits of life.

But, in our own lives, we can’t magically see our future and somehow know how our story will end. It might be too hard to survive if we knew all the difficult and terrible things that lay ahead. However, in not knowing the end, our comfort in God and from God is hope. Hope paves the road for a brighter future. Hope inspires and feeds us through the challenging times; it is the anticipation of life’s joys and wonders. When we hope, we accept God’s gift of comfort, and, each Advent season as we hear Handel’s *Messiah* sung out washing over us, through one holy story, we live into the possibility of comfort.

—Lucy Enge, *Wilmington Yearly Meeting*

Thursday, December 11

*“Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.”*

Read: Psalm 85:10–13

Listening with an appreciative heart, the Psalmist shares God’s loving intent for all humanity, even all creation. Listening with our appreciative hearts this Advent season we hear of the love of Jesus and of the love that sent him to earth. Jesus showed us not only in words, but by example. Showing us how God could walk perfectly as a human; as a part of creation himself. And, as if that were not enough, he sent us the Spirit who still speaks.

Listening as the Spirit whispers encouragement to us directly, letting us know how we, too, can take part in uniting righteousness and peace for the blessing of others and creation. It reminds us that the promises in this Psalm remain true; God’s steadfast love and faithfulness continue to be with us. The Spirit helps us so we can share in uniting ground and sky, heaven and earth. We are empowered to increase His love in the world. We can work until there is enough to share with all. Enough to fill the needs of the bodies and souls of all.

And, in the last verse of our Psalm today? Where it says righteousness goes before him? That is us. We are to be the righteousness going before Him. We are to be clearing a path for His steps to follow. Just as others have shown us in the past, we can make straight a highway in the wilderness for our God, a path ready for His blessings to flow unobstructed.

May His blessings be celebrated with thankfulness.

—John Burdick, Western Association of Friends

Friday, December 12

*“The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever.”*

Read: Isaiah 40:6–11

This passage in Isaiah became a comfort to me forty-nine years ago when my younger brother Andy was dying of testicular cancer. It became clear to me that my brother had become like withering grass—his 6’ 4” frame was fading like the autumn prairie grasses surrounding the hospital near Iowa City, Iowa.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but God’s love remains with us forever. God’s love is forever—God’s love is persistent—God is love. This became my prayer mantra as I drove back and forth to the hospital, as I took care of two small children, and as I sat with Andy while he received chemotherapy.

This passage also spoke to me that during this difficult, scary, and horrendous time, God was present with us, and that presence was filled with loving strength. Isaiah states, “Behold your God!” Another mantra for me became, “Behold, God is here with you.” God is here with your brother. God is present—behold and look. Look for the gift of love, it is everywhere.

This passage ends with the image of a shepherd taking care of us during our most vulnerable times—when we feel lost and our strength is diminished, God’s love and strength are there, embracing us. It is powerful for me to think of a shepherd bending down and embracing a frightened lamb with compassion and care.

My brother’s earthly journey ended in that hospital, but in my heart and mind, I am still comforted by the image of the loving Shepherd embracing him. During this advent season as we journey toward the gift of love, I hope this passage reminds us that all is temporal, that God is present with us and the Shepherd walks with us.

—Nancy McCormick, *Wilmington Yearly Meeting*

Saturday, December 13

*"A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice..."*

Read: Isaiah 42:1–9

This passage lays out much of God's vision for us individually and as a people. We are to listen deeply to God and are called to serve people in their need, be lights in the darkness and hope for the people. We are told that we need not falter in this work as we, too, are loved and guided by God.

This passage speaks to how we approach all people—to not break bruised reeds (the man in the story) and not be yelling in the streets (forcefully stating my opinion). We are to tend the blind, those imprisoned or in darkness, to address justice. In a recent conversation, my heart was tendered when someone who had been describing "the other side" as "hateful" found his own heart more open and loving when he said, "I just want people to treat each other with respect."

Are there people in your life who are bruised reeds? How might God be calling you to tender your heart, to see them as God's beloved? God is calling us to tend those people who God has placed in front of us. In this season, how might you be called to be a beacon of light, the hope for others, until they too experience God's redemptive love?

In these days that are shortening in the Northern hemisphere, how is the darkness within being illuminated in this advent season? Are there prisons in our own hearts that we want freedom from? How will you open your heart to this kind of freedom that God is offering? God affirms that we will be accompanied in this journey.

Oh children of God,
see my love for all people,
bear my love in all.

—Anne Pomeroy, *New York Yearly Meeting*

Sunday, December 14

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.”*

Read: Isaiah 60:1–3

The people are discouraged, some even to the point of despair; their hearts heavy with the burden of their grief, their loss, their bitter exile and defeat. Yet, every day, they can turn to the East and watch the promise and possibility in each new dawn, recite again the old prayers that remind them of the promise that the light will overcome the darkness.

“I offer thanks to You, living and eternal Ruler of the Universe, for You have mercifully restored my soul within me; Your faithfulness is great.”

How, then, do we restore our souls? Do we rely on cherished forms that give new life, do we ask mercy for our own shortcomings? How do we prepare our hearts so that they may be the mangers for the expected Light of the world? Do we believe that God’s faithfulness and redemption are available to all of us and act as if that truth is true? Whether shepherd, prophet, thief, wise one, or king?

The promised one is here and among us, Emmanu-el, the indwelling God, the mighty Counselor, the Prince of Peace. How can we use this time of waiting to make ourselves more prepared to welcome that Promise every morning of our lives?

For when the walls of the sacred city are torn down, and the sanctuary destroyed, where does God live, if not in our hearts?

“May the meditations of my heart, and the words upon my lips, and the works of my hands, be found acceptable to You.”

—*Leslie Manning, New England Yearly Meeting*

Monday, December 15

*“When Joseph woke up,
he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him
and took Mary home as his wife.”*

Read: Matthew 1:18–21

In verse 19, Matthew tells us two things about Joseph’s character in the midst of his dilemma. On the one hand, Joseph finds himself wanting to “turn loose” Mary from the betrothal, as she has been “found to be pregnant”—clearly not by his action. At the same time, Joseph doesn’t want to publicly shame and disgrace Mary—I’m reminded of Micah 6:8, and the reminder from the prophet that God wants us to walk humbly. As with so much else in the scripture, the details are left for us to fill in about the situation, but we know this much about Joseph’s character, even before the arrival of the Angel of the Lord.

I can’t help but contrast that with what American society and culture has held up as models of male leadership in 2025. Working with young men in schools and paying attention to the leadership of our culture, I long for more public examples of leaders who emphasize mercy and compassion rather than “owning” somebody who did them wrong—especially when it comes to the way boys relate to girls, men to women. Mercy, warmth, compassion—rather than “payback.”

I believe that it wasn’t an accident that God chose Mary, with her joyful agency—and I believe that it wasn’t an accident that God chose Joseph, whose quiet decision motivated by mercy, and then humble acceptance of the Angel’s words about his betrothed’s child, speak of a man whose understanding of masculinity isn’t rooted in violence or demeaning others.

I’m reminded of Pa Kent, from this year’s *Superman* movie. We see Superman —Clark—return home for comfort and guidance from the parents that raised him, wondering about his place in the world. Much older than Joseph probably was, an aging farmer showing the effects of a hard-working life, we see Pa as an openly compassionate, loving, and gentle man toward his wife and son. The emotional vulnerability Pa demonstrates as he and Clark have coffee on the front porch, as he expresses his pride for the compassionate man Clark has become, reminds me of Joseph’s humility and mercy. Men of today could use more Josephs, and more Pa Kents, as we prepare for the arrival of Mary’s son.

—Jonathan Goff, *Wilmington Yearly Meeting*

Tuesday, December 16

*“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,”
which means, ‘God is with us.’”*

Read: Matthew 1:22–24

The author of the Gospel of Matthew calls back to the prophecy of Isaiah, which details the coming destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and predicts a future resurrection under the messiah.

The kingdoms of Israel as Isaiah knew them would indeed be destroyed, returned a few hundred years before Jesus, only to be destroyed once again a few decades after Jesus’ death. The Israelites of the time were looking for a different kind of change in the world than they were going to get.

We are less likely to be sent off into exile than our Israelite forebearers, but our Quaker culture has as much a chance of being wiped away as their own. The prophecies of old are writ large in the statistics of today: 24% of Quaker Meetings closed between 2010–2020. All sociological signs point to massive decline in religious practice in the United States. Isaiah’s message of destruction should be burning our ears.

We have an opportunity to be like Joseph today. Joseph heard a message that said, “you have a role to play in God’s work.” For Joseph that meant a cultural humiliation: marrying a woman carrying what everyone else would assume was another man’s child. But he trusted that God would bring a new good from this supposed shame.

To follow God, Joseph had to go against the culture in which he was raised. To follow God today we will have to go against our own culture that prizes quiet and slow process rather than radical change. Faithfulness will demand discomfort from all of us. We can remember the discomfort Joseph felt in his own time among his own people, as we try to find how God is with us today.

—Tom Rockwell, Western Yearly Meeting

Wednesday, December 17

*“You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way . . .”*

Read: Luke 1:57–80

Elizabeth had a baby. Her neighbors and family came to circumcise and name the baby. They wanted to name him after his father, according to tradition. And then Elizabeth had an experience most women can recognize from our own lives. She said, “No, his name is John,” but her community did not accept her words. Instead they argued with her and then consulted her husband (who could not even talk at the time). Only once Zechariah confirmed that the baby’s name was John did they accept the unexpected news that Elizabeth had shared.

Where are we in this story? Are we Zechariah, having trouble communicating with our community and relying on someone else to share our message? Are we Elizabeth, speaking truth and facing disbelief and arguing, and then watching people refuse to take action—watching them instead turn to someone else they can more easily believe?

For a moment, imagine that we are the neighbors and family. Are we having trouble believing someone who is telling us their truth? Who are the people in our community that we have trouble believing? Whose word carries a little less weight with us—not because they have shown themselves to be untrustworthy, but because they are part of a marginalized group of people?

This Advent season, let us consider our hearts—who might we have trouble believing? And then let us listen more closely to their unexpected news, even if it is unwelcome. This Advent, let us be Listeners. Let us be Believers. Let us take action based on what we hear and believe. Let us not hesitate to name the baby John.

—Nikki Holland, Baltimore Yearly Meeting

Thursday, December 18

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

Read: Psalm 89:1–9

Singing—Proclaiming—Love—Faithfulness:

In the season of Advent we proclaim God's faithfulness in bringing Jesus, who comes to humanity to speak to our condition and teach us a new way of living and loving. Each year we take time to prepare for the commemoration of Jesus' birth at Christmas. We prepare, we wait, we fill with expectation that Jesus will be present in our worship and in our living. The themes of this time are rich with promise and the songs of Advent express our longing for the coming and presence of Christ. Take time to savor and ponder God's gift to the world, Jesus.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel...

"Comfort, Comfort, Now My People; tell of peace!" so says our God...

Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free...

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry announces that the Lord is nigh...

Savior of the Nations, Come, show yourself the Virgin's son. Fill with wonder, all the earth,
that our God chose such a birth...

Our hearts rejoice as Mary's song becomes our hymn of praise...

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...Love, the Guest, is on the way...

All Earth is hopeful, the Savior comes at last!

Furrows lie open for God's creative task; this, the labor of people who struggle to see
how God's truth and justice set ev'rybody free...

Awake, awake, and greet the new morn, for angels herald its dawning. Sing out your joy, for soon he is
born, behold! The Child of our longing. Come as a baby weak and poor, to bring all hearts together,
he opens wide the heavenly door and lives now inside us forever.

—Russ Litchfield, *Western Association of Friends*

Friday, December 19

*“The battle bow shall be cut off,
and [the king] shall command peace to the nations...”*

Read: Zechariah 9:9–10

Nobody ever rode a donkey into battle. Not that donkeys were absent from warfare; in fact, they were used extensively (even into the twentieth century) to carry heavy loads and for human transport, especially through difficult terrain. Another thing about donkeys: Did you know they appoint themselves as protectors of other animals in the barnyard? By chasing, loud braying, and kicking, they will fiercely go after predators who are trying to seize the sheep or the goats. Donkeys are kind of amazing in their own way. But they are not a good choice for the front lines. No general would choose to ride a donkey to lead the charge. For that, everyone knows you need a horse.

In chapter 9, Zechariah lists the nations around Judah who were experiencing defeat despite their wisdom, fortresses, and wealth. Then God says to the people of Judah through Zechariah (verse 8) that he will surround them and protect them.

In verse 9, he tells them to “rejoice greatly!” And that, “your king is coming...riding on a donkey.” I submit to you that the picture of a king riding into town on a donkey is every bit as ludicrous as the image of a general on a donkey leading a troop into battle.

It’s a different kind of king that is coming. Clearly not the usual kind. The aim of this king is to dismantle the weapons of conquest—not just from these other nations, but from Jerusalem as well! In this world where conquest and defeat has always been the norm, for this unusual king, the goal is PEACE—not just peace and protection for Judah, but peace to all the nations, peace that extends to the ends of the earth.

May the peace of Christ rule in your heart both today and forever.

—Cliff Loesch, *Great Plains Yearly Meeting*

Saturday, December 20

*“I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come,
and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord Almighty.”*

Read: Haggai 2:6–9

The book of Haggai is set in the period immediately after the Israelites returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon. A few exiles remembered the glory of Solomon’s temple, and they all had great expectations for the glory of the temple they would build upon returning home . . . expectations that the reality of the rebuilding process have not met.

Haggai delivers God’s word of hope to the Israelites in the midst of their disappointment. God declares that the glory of the new temple will surpass the former, and that peace will be given to this place. God promises to shake the heavens and the earth, bringing peace and glory in ways that overturn human expectations.

This prophecy points not only to the physical temple but to the coming of a greater reality—a promise fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, in the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, and wherever two or more believers are gathered now.

When God’s presence is made manifest among us, our expectations are shaken. Perhaps we can even say we are quaked. As the greatest example of the Creator becoming present in creation, Christmas is an exercise in overturning expectations. The Messiah did not come as a conquering king in a palace, but as a humble baby in a stable. The world expected a powerful ruler who would bring peace through force, but instead, God chose to bring peace through love, sacrifice, and vulnerability.

Following God’s example, we have to rethink what true power and glory look like. Will we be people who embrace the shaking? Will we yearn not for the safety of what we knew, but for the promise that is unfolding?

As we wait for Christmas, may we open our hearts to the ways God is inviting us into unexpected glory.

—Julie Estelle Rudd, *New York Yearly Meeting*

Sunday, December 21

“[The Lord] will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap.”

Read: Malachi 3:1–2

Admiral Jim Stockdale was held captive as a POW in Vietnam for almost eight years, from 1965 to 1973. When asked in an interview why he was able to survive he answered, “You must never confuse faith that you will prevail—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”

I see those words echo the passage from Malachi. I will send My messenger, the one in whom you delight, but who can stand when He appears? He will be like a refiner’s fire, like a launderer’s soap. We are tempted to rush to the end. One year my sister found the stash of unwrapped presents. No one was more excited on Christmas morning than she. She knew what was coming. She had seen the presents. Despite the fact of her sister and brother, she had, in her mind, claimed them all for herself. Every gift she found under my mother’s bed was anticipated. They were the ones in whom she delighted. That day was miserable for her. If you do the math, most of the gifts she wanted, anticipated, planned for, went to other people.

All of us have an ending, the camera shot at the end of the movie of our lives, the picture in our minds of how we want to finish. Do we have the discipline, the patience, the self control to bring our picture into focus? Can we wait? Can we endure the brutal facts of our current realities?

As we anticipate the coming gift will we be able to unwrap this vulnerable present and stand the refiner’s fire and the launderer’s soap? Will we be willing to endure the struggle and strain that is a God’s love which meets us where we are, but a love that refuses to leave us where we sit?

—Michael Sherman, *Winchester Friends Meeting (Independent)*

Monday, December 22

*“[Mary] wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger,
because there was no guest room available for them.”*

Read: Luke 2:1–7

The story of Jesus’ birth in Luke attempts to answer why Jesus was born in Bethlehem instead of Nazareth, where his family lived. None of the other gospels mention a census, and there is no evidence, in the records of the time, that any such census was taken. Why would Luke go into such detail about Joseph and Mary’s sojourn to Bethlehem? Perhaps Luke is giving us a hint about his agenda, or Jesus’ agenda. A census is a good place to start.

I worked in the 2000 census, and folks seemed to go a long way to avoid filling out the paperwork, especially if they were poor or spoke another language, despite the translators. Commentator Sharon Ringe says, “Finding oneself on governmental lists can have consequences: military conscription, investigation from social services or immigration officials, or taxation.”

If a census was taken in Palestine, its purpose was likely to expand the taxation base. Taxes were high for first-century Jews, some paying as much as half their income to the government and another percentage to the temple. And those who lived in rural areas, like Nazareth, found them even more burdensome.

The whole narrative of Jesus’ life was, in some way, about the unfairness that the common folks faced. It’s the muckety-mucks (those with money and power) committing institutional violence on the marginalized, and ultimately, on Jesus himself. Jesus spends his life speaking ethics to the powerful, and comfort to the poor. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall be given the kingdom of God,” Jesus said. Or, as *The Message* interprets it, “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.”

Those ethics that Jesus teaches? They are, at their core, twofold: stop the violence against the poor, and get yourself in solidarity with them. “Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven,” Jesus says, “then come, follow me.”

What does solidarity with the poor look like in our time?

—Lia Scholl, *Friends Church of North Carolina*

Tuesday, December 23

*“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?
We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”*

Read: Matthew 2:1–9

Have you ever headed someplace, unsure of your destination? Yet you sensed you needed to be there, that you were being led toward something special? Maybe you felt a sense of anticipation, or a quiet hope, trusting that each step was bringing you closer to something meaningful. That moment of uncertainty mixed with excitement can make the journey unforgettable.

When the Magi left their homes in the east to follow the star that would guide them to the one, born king of the Jews, they had no idea where they were going or how long their journey would take. They only knew that God had given them a sign to follow, and they were determined to follow it with God as their guide. This leads us to wonder how these Magi came to recognize and follow a sign from God in the first place. Perhaps during their captivity in Babylon, Jewish leaders like Daniel may have shared their faith and wisdom with Babylonian scholars, including the Magi. These connections could have introduced the concept of looking to God and the stars for guidance.

The star continued to guide them toward Bethlehem and the child. Their hearts filled with hope and anticipation as they spotted the place where the star stopped and they could find the one born king of the Jews. When they entered the house and saw Mary and the child, each one could hardly contain their awe and joy as they fell on bended knee to worship and pay honor to Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. Many people find their journey to faith is often marked by unique twists and turns. The path to discovering Jesus is often lengthy, winding through periods of doubt, busy schedules, and unexpected challenges. For some, distractions may come in the form of family responsibilities, or conflicting beliefs, while others encounter detours such as moments of loss, uncertainty, or searching for purpose.

The Magi followed a star. They did not know the location or when they would arrive—however, they did know they would worship the child, born king of the Jews, and brought their gifts to honor him. These gifts of gold, incense, myrrh, and most importantly, their presence—remind us that the act of traveling together and sharing experiences is itself a precious offering. Just as the Magi followed a guiding star, we, too, seek direction and purpose in our own journeys. What guides us as we move forward? Which star are we following on our journey?

—Lynda Ladwig, *Western Association of Friends*

Wednesday, December 24

“An angel of the Lord appeared to [the shepherds], and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.”

Read: Matthew 2:1–9

Back around the year 2000, someone wrote a Christmas musical called *Child of the Promise* that had a very silly song called, “Nothing Ever Happens to a Shepherd,” where a group of shepherds are sitting out in a field complaining about how boring and ordinary their lives are. The final line they are singing is, “while exciting things occur all over the world, nothing ever happens to me . . .” when all of a sudden the sky lights up and an angel is telling them to not be afraid and a whole gospel choir of angels is singing, “Glory to God in the highest!”

This night was turning out to be anything but ordinary and boring. And after going to see the baby for themselves, they became the very first heralds of the new king, telling the news to anyone who would listen. And they continue to hold an important place in history, being featured in literally millions of nativity scenes, Christmas movies, and songs.

What is so engaging and captivating about these shepherds? As they sang and complained, they were poor and boring and ordinary. But that’s precisely one of the things that makes them so interesting to me. They are going about their ordinary boring lives, when heaven breaks in in the most astonishing way and changes everything.

The shepherds listened to the angel, pushed past the fear, and obeyed. While there isn’t likely going to be anything quite as momentous that happens to me, I believe that Heaven (God’s Spirit or maybe even an angel now and then?) still regularly breaks into my life circumstances, and if I’m paying attention and am willing to push past the fear to obey, it still has the power to change everything.

Here’s to the shepherds!

—Katrina McConaughey, *Western Yearly Meeting*

Thursday, December 25

“...the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’”

Read: Luke 2:15–20

Cuando Dios habla, mueve el corazón

Los pastores estaban en la oscuridad de la noche, en la rutina diaria de su trabajo, lejos de los templos, lejos de los centros religiosos... pero no lejos de Dios. A ellos, personas sencillas, el cielo se les abrió con un anuncio glorioso.

A veces Dios nos sorprende en los lugares ordinarios, en medio del cansancio, de la preocupación, o cuando pensamos que todo sigue igual.

Él aún habla. Él aún se acerca. Él aún ilumina nuestras noches.

¿Y nosotros? ¿Aún creemos que Él puede sorprendernos hoy?

Los Pastores vinieron apresuradamente, el corazón que responde.

Los pastores no lo pensaron dos veces. No pidieron confirmaciones complicadas. No dijeron: mañana iremos. Fueron de inmediato. Porque cuando Dios toca el corazón, la demora roba bendiciones.

Dios te ha estado invitando a: Reconciliarte con Él, Retomar tu oración, Servir con lo que tienes,

Soltar los miedos, Volver a creer.

Corre a Belén. Corre hacia Cristo. Allí siempre hay lugar para ti. Dios siempre se deja encontrar

Los pastores no encontraron un palacio, sino un pesebre.

No encontraron un rey vestido de oro, sino un bebé envuelto en pañales.

No encontraron grandeza humana, sino la ternura de Dios haciéndose pequeño.

Ahí entendieron que Dios no es difícil de alcanzar.
Que se revela a quienes buscan con sencillez.
Que su gloria no está lejos: está cerca, humilde y accesible.

Tú también puedes hallarlo hoy, no en la perfección, sino en la vulnerabilidad. No en lo que tienes, sino en lo que Él es.

Y al hallarlo regresarás glorificando y alabando... tu vida será transformada.

Los pastores regresaron al mismo lugar, al mismo trabajo, a la misma vida, pero no eran los mismos.

Eso hace Cristo en nuestras vidas:
No siempre cambia nuestras circunstancias rápidamente, pero cambia nuestro interior profundamente.

Cuando Cristo es encontrado, la rutina se vuelve adoración.
El cansancio se vuelve gratitud.
La noche se vuelve alabanza.

Oración

Señor Jesús, como aquellos pastores quiero correr hacia ti sin demora.
Abre mis ojos para verte en lo sencillo, en lo pequeño, en lo cotidiano.
Que mi corazón no se acostumbre a la noche,
porque tú sigues iluminando el camino.
Transforma mi vida para que regrese a mis responsabilidades
con una nueva canción.
Hazme portador de tu alegría, de tu paz y de tu esperanza.
Amén.

—Rosa María Rodríguez & Odalys Hernández Cruz, *New Association of Friends*

Translation:

When God speaks, the Light awakens the heart.

The shepherds were in the darkness of night, in the simplicity of their work—far from temples and religious structures . . . yet not far from the God who enlightens every soul.

To them—simple, open-hearted people—the Light revealed itself in an unexpected way.

So it also happens among us, the Friends: God breaks through the everyday silence and surprises us in the ordinary, in the exhaustion, in the worry, in those moments when we think nothing changes.

He still speaks.

The Light still guides.

His Presence still shines in our nights.

And what about us? Do we keep our hearts attentive to the whisper of the Inner Light?

The shepherds responded . . . and they responded promptly.

The shepherds did not ask for proof or guarantees. They did not postpone their visit. They felt the motion of the Spirit and obeyed without delay.

So it is with us: when the Light knocks at the door of the soul, we are called to respond immediately, with simplicity and obedience.

Perhaps God is moving you today to:

reconcile your heart, return to silence and prayer, serve through your gifts, release your fears, make room for faith once more.

Run to Bethlehem.

Run to Christ, the true Light who enlightens every human being.

He is always willing to be found.

They found a manger, not a palace.
The shepherds found humility, not splendor.
Smallness, not human greatness.
The tenderness of God drawing near in silence—neither imposing nor forcing.

In this we hear the Quaker testimony of simplicity:

God reveals Himself in what is simple.
The Light manifests without ornament.
His glory is near, humble and accessible.

You too can find Him today—
not in perfection, but in your vulnerability.
not in what you possess, but in who He is.

And they returned transformed . . . though they went back to the same place.

The shepherds returned to the same work, the same field, the same responsibilities, but they were no longer the same.

This is what Christ, the Living Light, does in those who seek Him: He does not always change our circumstances immediately, but He does transform the heart profoundly.

When Christ is found: routine becomes worship, weariness becomes gratitude, night becomes praise.
All of life reflects His Light.

—Translated by Jade Rockwell, New Association of Friends

Friday, December 26

“ . . . since you are [God’s] child, God has made you also an heir . . . ”

Read: Galatians 4:4–7

When the Israelites had no food in the desert, God met their need with the miracle of manna. Yet they protested, longing for the “fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic” they had eaten “at no cost” in Egypt. There *was* a cost to these things, of course: *their freedom*. Yet in their nostalgia for certain flavors, they lost sight of that. They foolishly longed for captivity because of the comforts it offered.

Paul saw the same instinct in the Galatian community. While God offers true liberation in Christ, they were tempted to return to the familiar comforts of lesser things—systems of rulemaking, gatekeeping, and hierarchy. Both scenarios provoke holy anger: *why return to slavery when freedom is here?*

Paul’s exhortation is also for us. Our age is full of “elemental forces” that promise comfort or certainty while luring us back into bondage. This Advent season, we’ll be bombarded with the gospel of consumerism and its glittering claims of individual freedom. These “weak and beggarly elements” may tug at us with their false promises.

But as in Paul’s message, true freedom is calling. *God-with-us* means we do not have to live in the poverty of consumerism, individualism, or any other spirit of our age. We don’t need to wait for the systems that bind us to collapse, or for the calendar to turn. Christ is here, now. And we are God’s children—heirs of our Creator’s power for good. Let us claim our inheritance.

—Jade Rockwell, *New Association of Friends*

Saturday, December 27th

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

Read: Philippians 2:5–11

This passage invites us not only to follow Christ’s teachings but to share Christ’s inward posture—the orientation of the heart that shaped his life, ministry, and message. These verses offer a vision of the Incarnation as relational revelation: Christ, fully God, did not cling to divinity or remain distant. Instead, he entered human life, walking with us, breaking bread with us, taking the form of a servant so that God’s love could be known from within our own human experience.

This is not a diminishing of divinity but its fullest expression. Christ’s “self-emptying” shows us a God who draws near—who chooses presence over power and relationship over domination. His humility is the pathway by which God’s blessed community becomes accessible to us. And in this nearness, we are invited into participation—into the same indwelling Christ presence that lived and moved in Jesus. The Light within Jesus is offered to guide us, inwardly and directly.

In a world shaped by competition, cruelty, and domination, Christ reveals another pattern of life—another way. He teaches us to listen deeply, to yield rather than grasp, and to allow love to lead even when it costs us something. His journey moves through suffering and surrender, yet it is precisely this poured-out love that opens into resurrection, renewal, and joy.

Queries for reflection:

- Where is Jesus, who calls us Friend, inviting me to move from distance to presence, from guardedness to trust?
- How is our Quaker community being drawn into deeper participation in Christ’s self-giving way of love?
- What does it look like, in my daily interactions, to let the indwelling Christ shape my posture, my choices, my practice?

Prayer: Christ Jesus, within and among us, shape our minds and hearts in your image. Let your humility guide us, your nearness comfort us, and your love become our daily pattern and practice. Amen.

—Jim Fussell, Baltimore Yearly Meeting

Sunday, December 28

*“...in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,
and in Christ you have been brought to fullness.”*

Read: Colossians 2:6–10

A challenge to having a healthy body, mind, heart, and spirit can be finding a plan to follow. For physical health we exercise and consider diets and supplements. To be mentally healthy we read, take classes, and do brain puzzles. To nurture emotional health we connect with others who are empathetic and compassionate, and participate in a nourishing community.

Spiritual health might take some of the same paths; learning, reading, seeking and sharing with others, and meeting in community for worship and ministry. But the True essential ingredient for spiritual health is grounding in and connecting to the Divine everywhere around and inside of us. What is even more profound is this critical movement, this overwhelming wonder, can create pathways for all of the rest.

Once we hear the Truth of reality our bodies become sacred vessels to nourish and cherish. Once we see the Light that illuminates everything our minds are opened to wonder and awe. Once we touch the Love that creates everything we feel our hearts connect with others, nature, and the universe. Once we have experienced the Source, we understand we are made in the image of the Divine and our spirit is grounded in Being.

During Christmas we celebrate with gratitude the Christ; Truth, Light, Love and Being. We are encouraged to ignore any distractions from living in peace, justice, joy, and love, to abandon the superficial and experience true interconnectedness. We are invited to walk the sacred path set before us in the fullness of God.

Prayer: Divine Source; Love, Light, Being, and Truth, in gratitude we welcome your Presence in our body, mind, heart, and spirit, and all of Creation. May we fully live into your Image. Amen.

—Loletta Barrett, *Western Association of Friends*

Monday, December 29

*“...everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected
if it is received with thanksgiving, because
it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.”*

Read: 1 Timothy 3:16–4:6

Friends—may we always be grateful for the blessings and trials in life. Our lives are sustained by the Lord and God knows our every want and need. How much time do we spend worrying over how we will sustain ourselves? Here we are, alive, in the here and the now. Let us give thanks to God for our lives, for we did not create ourselves, nor did we create the infinite numbers of gifts that God has created for us to enjoy and experience.

May we not judge others for how they experience their lives. Their relationship to God, and the blessings of this world are our own. We know what is beneficial for us and what is harmful. Knowing this—let us be in a state of thanksgiving for understanding experientially what is wholesome and unwholesome.

In God’s own experience, God took on a human form —appearing to us in flesh—so that we might be reconciled into right relationship with God. Doing this, the Lord must have come to a fuller understanding of the experience of human existence. Christ Jesus took every opportunity to eat, drink, and make merry with others. How many times have we denied ourselves and others the joy of our company? The joy of our gifts, lives and presence?

My beloved Friends, as we continue on into this advent let us look to the model of Christ. Let us dine with the tax-collectors, the soldiers, the pharisees, and our siblings in Christ. Let us serve one another and be served in turn.

Your Friend in Christ Jesus,

O.H. Jackson Napier, Western Yearly Meeting

Tuesday, December 30th

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Read: John 1:5–13

In times of joy, it is easy to believe that God is with us. When our hearts are full of love, when we know we are loved, when we are able to love, God is with us. When beauty stirs our souls, God is with us. When we are centered and at peace, we know God is with us.

But when we are too busy to notice, God is still with us. When we forget to listen, God is still with us. When we have trouble believing God is with us, God is with us.

In times of sadness, God is with us. When we are afraid, God is with us. When anxiety threatens to overwhelm us, when we worry that we will screw this up like we’ve screwed things up before, God is with us. When we feel broken, God is with us. In the midst of despair, God is with us. God’s light shines in the darkness.

Where in your life is darkness threatening? Take a moment. Where in your life is darkness threatening? Hold that darkness. Hold it in your hands, and lift it up into God’s healing light.

Where in the life of our church is darkness threatening? Lift that, too, up into God’s healing light.

Where in our city, our nation, our world, is darkness threatening? Lift that up into God’s light and love.

May we be channels of God’s light shining into the darkness of our lives, our world.

—Catherine Griffith, *New Association of Friends*

Wednesday, December 31

“So the word of God became a human being and lived among us.”

Read: John 1:14–18

So the word of God became a human being and lived among us.

So what?

Well, everything.

The story of Jesus’ life, from birth to death and resurrection, and the stories Jesus told, gave us a new way of seeing and interpreting reality. Jesus told us a story about a world in which the power of love prevails over the love of power—and by living that story, he showed us that it was and always will be true. Jesus listened to the prophets and then painted for us a picture of a God who is more than the distant humming thrum of the universe in motion, a God as tender and close as a baby’s breathing and as warm as a stable crowded with woolly sheep on a clear cold starry night. God’s life among us tells us that, once and forever, we are created, witnessed, and named by the creative impulse that binds molecules into minerals and assembles minerals into continents.

Even beyond the magic of binding us to the created, evolving materiality of the universe, Jesus found a way to bind us to one another. To show us, to persuade us, that our most basic instinct to meet our individual needs and desires above those of any Other could be broken down and transformed into a love and compassion for others more deeply satisfying to us—as living water—than our short-sighted, under-informed understanding of individual freedom and individual need could ever be.

“Every one of us has shared in his riches—there is a grace in our lives because of his grace.” In both life and death, Christ demonstrated that love beyond what we merit, beyond what we could ever earn, is always available to us. And that by committing ourselves to the alternate reality of love over fear, we can not only experience that love, but become channels of that love to others.

—Dan Kasztelan, *Wilmington Yearly Meeting*