



Fear Not

I bring you good news of great joy for all people
Luke 2:10



ADVENT 2020

Fear Not

Fear has been a constant companion in 2020. We have experienced social unrest and political divisiveness at all levels in our nation. We continue to navigate the frightening waters of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on us spiritually, physically, mentally, and financially. How desperately we are to hear the words, *Fear Not!* Advent 2020 offers the opportunity for us to prepare once again for the coming of a Savior. We do not need to be afraid because *Immanuel, God is with us.*

During the weeks of Advent, we will look at the *Fear Not!* stories surrounding the birth of the Christ-child. Zacharias, Joseph, Mary, and the Shepherds all had *Fear Not!* moments as they learned God's role for them in the coming of Messiah.

On the Sunday after Christmas we will experience one additional *Fear Not!* moment as an angel of the Lord encountered women at a tomb declaring, *He is not here, for He is risen.* Yes, the Jesus of the manger is the Jesus of the cross. And because of this, we no longer need to fear.

Advent 2020 will look a little different than previous years because of Covid-19. We will continue our Sunday morning services in the sanctuary as well as online. ***The Hanging of the Green*** will be November 29 and members of our church family will light the Advent Candles each Sunday. ***The Joy of Christmas*** will take place each Sunday morning during LifeGroups as our children make gifts and learn the Christmas story.

Thank you for continuing to wear your face masks and for practicing social distancing as we gather to worship each Sunday. Due to Covid-19, we will not host the ***Christmas Eve Candle-lighting service*** in the sanctuary. Rather, we will join together online to worship and celebrate through our social media platforms. Be sure to pick up your Christmas Eve worship bag, complete with candles, beginning Wednesday, December 16.

This devotion guide is a gift from First Baptist Norman. It is one of the ways we celebrate and share together as a congregation in preparation for Christmas. The members of our church wrote its pages as they reflected on their own life, spiritual journey, and *Fear Not!* moments.

Our prayer is that with ***Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love*** you will be encouraged and better equipped to face the fears and challenges of life. *Fear Not! Christ the Lord is Born!*

Dr. Wade E. Smith

Celebrate His Gifts

I bring you good news of great joy for all people

Luke 2:10

The Scripture tells us God so loved the world, that He gave. Jesus, whose birth we celebrate on Christmas morning, is that Gift. *Fear Not!* declared the angel, *I bring you good news of great joy. . .there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

The birth of Jesus opens doors for us to experience the gifts of God in new and deeper ways. His life, death, and resurrection make possible the gift of salvation to all who believe. As we unwrap the gift of salvation we discover that it is a multi-faceted gift of mercy, forgiveness, healing, and new life. The gifts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control manifest themselves as the fruit of this new life.

Advent preparation leads to Christmas celebrations. As we prepare to receive and Celebrate His Gifts on Christmas morning, let us do so by giving gifts of celebration and thanksgiving during this Advent season.

First, we can offer gifts to support the work of missionaries.

Missionaries live among people of different cultures to share the Gift of Jesus with the nations (people) of the world. A gift to World Missions through the Lottie Moon and/or Global Missions offerings enables and sustains missionaries as they live among the nations. First Baptist's 2020 World Missions goal is \$60,000. Your gift can be designated, given in worship, brought by the church office, or made online at fbcnorman.org.

Second, join my family in bringing a gift for baby Jesus.

A package of diapers or baby wipes reminds us that the Son of God entered the world as a helpless baby. The gift of formula satisfies the hungry cry of an infant. A warm blanket or coat helps keep a mother and child warm on a cold winter's night. Allow your special gift to be a tangible way that you celebrate and give thanks for the birth of Jesus. These gifts will be distributed through our Community Ministries, meeting the needs of the most vulnerable in our community.

Would you Celebrate His Gifts by offering a gift to support the work of missionaries and by bringing a gift to Baby Jesus and placing it under the Chrismon Tree on Sunday, December 20?

God Answers Prayer



LUKE 1:5-25; 57-80

God Answers Prayers

I have always tried to live my life with this assurance in mind. I must confess, however, that during this stage of my life, I'm learning to confront a new set of fears.

The story of the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist in Luke 1: 5-25 is an interesting part of our advent story. Zechariah was an elderly priest. His wife, Elizabeth, we are told was also elderly and was barren.

When Zechariah was performing his duties before the altar of God in the Tabernacle, an angel appeared to him, and the Bible says he was *gripped with fear*. The angel then told him not to fear, that his prayer has been heard. Your wife will bear you a son..... Because Zechariah questioned how this could be, the angel, after reaffirming the announcement of the birth of a son to him and Elizabeth, told him that, because of his doubt, he would be struck dumb until John was born.

I've always thought with a little amusement about the scene when Zechariah returned home. Of course, he couldn't speak, but I'm sure he got the message over to Elizabeth about what had happened to him and what was promised. They were to be blessed because, as Gabriel had told Zechariah, God had heard their prayers for a child. God, in His own time, at the right time, was answering their prayers.

During this Advent season, God is teaching me new lessons in life. He is showing me that I should not fear being alone. He is teaching me that I can be content and that He will provide everything I need, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He is sufficient for me. This has been a hard lesson.

He is teaching me that He can overcome my loneliness and provide for my needs. Although I've thought that I was faithfully serving God, I am learning a new depth to my dependence on God. I am, hopefully, learning to give my life and my time to serve God and his people.

God answered Zechariah and Elizabeth's prayer for a child. Advent is a time when we, as God's people, celebrate the answers to many of God's promises and the prayers of His people. This is the season when we especially remember that He loves and cares for us, and He watches over us. He demonstrated His love by sending the Christ Child. Immanuel!

I'm praying that I will learn the lessons God has for me. And I am praying that all of us will pause amidst all the chaos around us and reflect on the gift of God's Son to us, as a symbol of His answers to our prayers.

David Hopper

NOVEMBER 29

Trust In Prayer

The Christmas season always brings back sweet memories of my grandparents. Each year I looked forward to driving across the state with my family to meet all my aunts, uncles, and cousins at their house on Benton Drive in St. Joseph, Missouri.

Our family Christmas celebration included a kitchen full of homemade food and time to exchange gifts, but my grandparents always made sure that we kept our hearts on the birth of Christ and the true meaning of the holiday as each year, without fail, one of the grandchildren would be chosen to read the Christmas story aloud. Another *without fail* characteristic of my grandparents, regardless of the season, was that they lived their lives abiding in prayer.

In Philippians 4:6 Paul tells us to *not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God*. In August 2015 I moved from O'Fallon, Missouri to Norman to start school at OU and experienced many new fears. I was eight hours away from my family, didn't know anyone, and was fearful of the unknown of what the next four years would bring.

I can't sit here and claim that my prayer life has ever been perfect, but I thank God for answering my prayers for guidance during that time as He led me to the community at FBC Norman and the Baptist Collegiate Ministry on campus. I'm also thankful for the others who I know were praying for me, specifically my grandma. Whenever she called during undergrad, she'd give me an update on the weather and ask how she could be praying for me.

My grandparents have since gone home to be with the Lord, and though I miss them dearly I'm so grateful for the time I was able to spend with them. They were anxious at times, as we all can be, but always responded to those situations with a prayer for themselves and others.

This Advent season I pray that we can also live our lives characterized by prayer — not using it as a last resort but as a first response because we know that God answers our prayers.

Emily Lenhardt

NOVEMBER 30

We All Have Hope

As I write this, most of Oklahoma has been hit with the worst ice storm in many years. Electricity is out in thousands of homes and businesses, including my home. It is cloudy outside so there's not much light to write by. But, I am toasty warm because four of my five dogs are under the blanket with me on my recliner.

I ran an errand earlier today and was saddened by the number of trees that have limbs down or are completely split in two, especially along Main Street. As I was thinking of how much damage there was, I heard God say, *Don't be sad for them, if they survive, they will come back even stronger.*

Isn't that the way it is with us? The old saying, *What doesn't kill you makes you stronger*, seems rather harsh for a devotional, but it's true. We all go through hard times at some point in our lives. Jesus actually told us we would. In John 16:33 (NIV) He says, *...In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*

The wonderful thing is, with Jesus, we all have hope. Hope for the present and for the future. He knows everything we are going through and, if we truly turn to Him, He will give us peace and more hope.

Several years ago, I came to Norman for a job, only to lose it a year later. I didn't know what I was going to do. I had some financial difficulties prior to that and was still working my way out of them. I was unemployed for two months and wasn't getting any responses to the resumes I had sent out.

During those two months, I depended on God's Word to keep me from falling into depression and despair. I started putting my trust in Him and took comfort in knowing that He knew me and my needs. And He came through, every time!

When the rent was due, the refund from the health savings account arrived in the mail. When I needed a few groceries, the money would be there somehow. When I felt like I was never going to find a job, I received a call from my present employer. My faith grew exponentially and so did my hope. I was going to make it because Jesus was looking out for me.

Kirk Hatcher quoted the New Living Translation of the Bible in one of his sermons during that time. Psalm 31: 14-15 - *But I am trusting you, O Lord, saying, 'You are my God!' My future is in your hands....* This had become what you might call my life scripture. Any time I feel uncertain about the future, I go to it. It is my Hope.

Christianne Gray

DECEMBER 1

Jesus Is Alive

As I reflect on this year, I am filled with many emotions. I understand that this was, and still is, a very trying time for all of us.

I went through a period, particularly this summer, that was extremely difficult as did so many around me. There were times that I thought, how are we, as a society, ever going to get through this? Having time to reflect on these times, I also understand it was Jesus that got us through it and is continuing to guide our way even still. And for that, I know for certain, Jesus is Alive.

Through this troubling year, I would force myself to take in the subtle beauties of God's creation around myself and my family. In doing this, it was a stark reminder that God is in control. In a time when we feel that we have no control, it was a comforting feeling to know Jesus is with us.

Examples of this would be noticing the most minute coloring details of the summer flowers growing in my front yard or the breathtaking early morning sunrise. A group of not so friendly mockingbirds decided to take nest in our rose bushes this summer. Although I became frustrated with them, I ended up watching them in amazement with how they would communicate with each other so specially amongst the swaying trees in the breeze. Jesus is Alive. This year made me slow down and remember, appreciate God's creation. In doing so, it allowed me to lean on God, even more, knowing God was there to help us get through this difficult journey that has been 2020.

During one of Pastor Wade's sermons earlier this year, he said *The weight of the world is characterized by anxiety and fear. The weight of the Lord is characterized by hope.* This stuck with me for several days following. At a time when so many uncertainties exist around us, the one constant thing is knowing Jesus is Alive and this gives me hope. Christ is hope. I will carry this hope through our Advent season and beyond. I will be thankful for knowing Jesus is Alive and He is with me. He is with you as well. If you look closely, you can see Him every day, even in the swaying trees.

Lindsey Harper

A World Of Fear

I sought the Lord, and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to Him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.

Psalm 34:4-5

I was raised in fear and taught by people to be ashamed of my thoughts and comments. I was accustomed to looking down at the ground instead of looking forward or up. I looked down in regret, in apology, or just in fear.

Recently God gently lifted my chin to focus my sight upward and I have tried not to look down since. I breathe deeply, and pray to still my fears, to strengthen my reliance on Him alone; Not on the government, or the health care system, or my family, or my clients, or even my church.

During the plague of 2020 many fears have been revealed: the fear of the unknown, the fear of dying, the fear of getting sick, the fear of losing our job, the fear of losing contact with loved ones, the fear of not enough toilet paper, not enough income, not enough time, not enough, not enough, not enough. This year we have also seen so many others act out their fears through anger, violence, self-righteous cruelty and alienating exclusivity.

I see others fearing losses instead of seeing opportunities this circumstance presents. *I sought the Lord. I sought the Lord to deliver me from fear. I sought the Lord, David states, and then I was not afraid. I had hope.* Seeking God provides a vision of the bounty available, not the lack we perceive. I sought the Lord. When I seek God's will, He answers me some way.

And during this plague, He's been especially creative. I have enjoyed my weekly family Zoom meetings, each with a different discussion topic. Why did we not do this before...spread out all over the country...why did we not find a way to connect before this circumstance?

I have relished the extra time at home, to accomplish tasks, to garden, to sew, to slow down my auto-speed, to share time and stories and laughter with my daughter. There is so much bounty in my little quarantined world. I'm sure you have unexpected blessings too. Do you see them? Do you lift your sight upward and feel the radiance of His bounty? Lift your chin, feel His radiance, and have hope. Peace be with you.

Morgan Linn Rogers

DECEMBER 3

Hope For The Future

Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your Souls. For My yoke and My burden is light.

Matthew 11 28:30

That verse has sustained me over the years but never more than in 2020. In addition to all the issues of the year, Phyllis and I have faced some very difficult decisions on changes in lifestyle.

Many of you know that Phyllis has struggled with the early stages of dementia for the last few years. During normal times she had an interface with her LifeGroup, an occasional dinner with friends, and almost daily contact with the family. The pandemic changed all that.

We were completely isolated from church, friends, and family from March until June when we began to have some outside contact with the family. That isolation has accelerated Phyllis's status. That alone puts fear in my heart and my daily prayers are centered on hope for her well-being.

Our family was concerned about my welfare and the impact if something happened to me. They were encouraging me to move us into an independent living facility where, if something happens to me, hopefully the transition to a memory care unit at the facility would not be so dramatic for Phyllis.

I still am very active and if you want to experience fear, consider that kind of change in your lifestyle. I was overwhelmed in deciding what to do! The Pastor and Roy Joe were very supportive and prayerful as I struggled with what to do. After much prayer and referring to the above scripture many times, I decided in spite of my fears, God was guiding me to take care of Phyllis for the long term.

We moved to a cottage in Village on the Park in south Oklahoma City on October 1. It has been good! Meals are good, they do the housekeeping, I have a garage and my golf cart and can play twice a week. Phyllis has adjusted very well.

My God overcame my fears and concerns and all is well with my Lord.

Chuck Gage

DECEMBER 4

625 Square Feet

6 25 sqft. That is what my world consisted of during quarantine. 625 sqft, a dining table workstation, and two cats. No family. No friends. Just me, myself, and I.

It was an introvert's paradise! It was everything I thought I had always wanted. Then my dream turned into a living nightmare.

Having no human contact outside of a Zoom call was a blessing in the beginning. I could pick and choose whether I wanted to engage with anyone. If a video call was too peoplely, I could just opt out for the day. No explanation needed. No risk of hurting anyone. Slowly, that little bit of interaction became all that I had. That is when my thoughts started taking a turn for the worst.

625 sqft started to feel more like 6.25. Everything became cold and dark. That blessed reprieve from human interaction started to drive me deeper and deeper into myself until I started questioning my own validity. My own purpose. I was alone and isolated in a way that I had never imagined I could be.

Every day got a little bit harder. Just mustering the energy to pull myself out of bed felt like one of the trials of Hercules. The resounding thought that *this was it* played over and over again in my mind. I was going to live and die alone. My 625 sqft of paradise had become like a tomb. There was nobody there but me. Nobody to make sure I was alright. I was completely and utterly alone.

Then a voice in the back of my mind reached through the fog and reminded me of something I had almost forgotten.

It is the Lord who goes before you.

He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you.

Do not fear or be dismayed.

Deuteronomy 31:8

As I lay on my couch, tears rolling down my face, a tiny spark of hope welled up inside my chest. I imagined the Father's loving arms around me as he whispered reassurances in my ear. I was never truly alone. Nor would I be. He had never left my side, and no power on this earth would ever take him from me.

Erin McKnight

DECEMBER 5

God has a plan



MATTHEW 1:18-25

God's Plan

*When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel
of the Lord had commanded him...*

Matthew 1:24

Joseph had a plan for his life. He was looking forward to being married and raising a family. He would continue to be a respected member of the community as a faithful Jew. Then, everything changed!

Mary was having a child which was not his. Joseph's plan for his life was shattered. As Joseph was reeling from these major changes, he had a dream where an angel of the Lord explained God's new plan for his life. There was another plan for Joseph's life and was very different from his plan.

Joseph was an admirable person. He was faithful, loyal, and courageous. He followed the angel's instructions without fear. When the angel of God returned to tell Joseph to immediately take his family to Egypt, he acted. He did not hesitate in fear. He packed their belongings and moved his family to a foreign country so they were out of reach of King Herod's vengeance.

Unfortunately, I have not had visits from angels to explain God's plan for my life. Through trial and error, I have learned that when I follow God's will for my life things work out for the better. Knowing that God is in control relieves me of a lot of fear and anxiety.

During this unsettling year, I trust that God is in control and he is with us providing comfort during this pandemic. Fear not, God has a plan.

***For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They
are plans for good, and not for disaster,
to give you a future and a hope.***

Jeremiah 29:11

Lisa Portwood

DECEMBER 6

Christmas Peace

Christmas 1982 was full of much uncertainty. One week before Christmas my children were so excited about going to visit Grandma on her dairy farm in New Mexico.

Then the call came. Mom was found in the barn, collapsed and unconscious from a farm accident. When I got the call, she was in an Albuquerque hospital, in surgery with a fractured skull. She made it through the operation but was still in critical condition.

The neurological intensive care nurses said she was one of the worst cases they had seen in a while. Although feeling afraid at that moment, I thought, *Well, they don't know my mother!*

Suddenly a peace came upon me, and God reminded me of what a fighter she is.

Many people, including our church, were praying for Mom. The doctor said she had a brain infection which would be hard to treat.

Four days before Christmas, we put up her Christmas tree, baked Christmas cookies, and fed the baby calves on the farm. We also went to the Social Security office to get her benefits started. Heading back to the hospital, I pulled on to a busy interstate exchange in Albuquerque. We hit black ice, and the car spun across two lanes and an off-ramp before stopping on the snowy grass. Scared, but grateful we were not hurt, my kids and I just sat there stunned. Then, a second peace came upon me and the Lord told me all would be well.

When we got to the hospital, Mom was sitting up, smiling, and glad to see us. Her condition had improved, and although she had to spend three more weeks in the hospital, she went home with double vision.

What I learned was God has a plan, and is with us every moment, including the difficult ones, regardless of the circumstances. This means with you too!

When did she get to enjoy those Christmas cookies and her Christmas tree? It was in January. Her late Christmas present that year was a healing of the double vision. Her survival truly was a Christmas miracle for all of us. But, for me, it was the peace that surrounded me at that fearful and uncertain time — the Christmas peace — that I will never forget.

Mary Ann Spaulding

Peace Of Mind

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.

I do not give to you as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

John 14:27

In this verse, taken from the New Living Translation, Jesus is telling his disciples that he is leaving them with a gift — Peace of mind and heart.

Lately, I fear for what is happening to our country, our state, and the community. We seem to have forgotten how to treat our friends, neighbors, and fellow Christians. We all will have different views on politics, educational philosophy, how to address the Coronavirus as well as other mundane matters. However, there is one thing on which we all must agree. That is there is only one path to reach our heavenly home. Yet, we tend to argue and break up long time friendships and even families over trivial matters mentioned in the first part of this paragraph.

Fear can come in many different forms and from a multitude of sources. I hear my fellow Christians indicate they fear the Coronavirus, I hear others say I fear the results of the election, some will say they fear the direction our country is taking, finally many have told me they fear the direction our churches are following. Fear can easily affect our behavior toward our friends and family.

We need to read and understand how Jesus told us to address fear. John quotes Jesus in the verse shown above indicating that He is leaving all of us peace. Jesus said I am not giving you the worldly gifts of fear and misunderstanding. Instead, Jesus tells us *do not be troubled and do not be afraid*.

The Christmas season is a time of joy, love, peace, and hope. Let us each choose these attributes rather than fear. May God be with each of us as we serve God during this wonderful time of the year.

R. Leon Price

Peace In The Storm

The men were amazed and asked, What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the sea obey him,

Matthew 8:27

A few years ago I was flying back from Ohio where I had spent Christmas with Serena and family. Having just read a book about Hearing God's Whispers, and having the guts to follow through, I was a bit nervous about what God might ask me to do on this flight.

Shortly after taking off from Atlanta, I noticed lightning in the far distance. As the lighting came closer I was reminded that not too long ago a plane had crashed near Dallas due to a thunderstorm. When it became apparent that the thunderstorm was catching up with us, the captain issued a warning and gave advice as the turbulence became more severe. My seatmate, who was a young university student, grabbed my hand as we all realized that this was no joy ride. I looked at her and said, *It's time to pray.* She responded, *yes, please pray!*

I found myself praying out loud. (So much for political correctness.) I reminded God of how he had calmed the waves on the Sea of Galilee during a violent storm. I don't recall the rest of my prayer; but I do remember that after I prayed, I felt complete peace even though we were still being bounced around. I told my seatmate that it was going to be ok, and it was.

We gradually came out of the storm and landed safely in Oklahoma City, where she finally let go of my hand. The next morning my Bible reading included these words: *I rescued you out of a thunder cloud.* Coincidence? I don't think so.

The Bible is saturated with *Fear Not* and other great promises from God, but because of God's great love and concern, we also have verses that tell us to fear. Who and what are we to fear? Luke 12:5 tells us to *fear him who has power to throw you into hell, yes, I tell you, fear him!* (also see Rev.20:15). If you are a true follower of Christ, relax. You have a heavenly father who can speak peace to any of our life storms.

I like this quote from Billy Graham's *Unto The Hills*, *It is impossible for that man to despair who remembers that his helper is Omnipotent.*

Naomi Nakamura

DECEMBER 9

Peace Only He Can Give

As I sit at the kitchen table in a dimly-lit house for the third night due to power outages from the recent ice storm, I'm struck by how bizarre 2020 continues to be. Wildfires, hurricanes, and unseasonal blizzards have reached unprecedented numbers across our country in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. The punches keep coming, and yet in the forefront of my thoughts are God's continued blessings.

Anxiety is at its peak for many of us, and just when we think things are reeling out of control, He sends a reminder that all is taken care of. No matter the circumstances, each Christmas season we are reminded of God's fulfilled promise to send us a Savior. Though this year may seem especially bizarre, the truth is, every year is painful, disheartening, and grievous for someone. Advent is a way of reminding us that the brokenness of this world isn't how it's always going to be; that the true King is indeed coming soon.

I've been thinking a great deal about what I was doing this time last year in *pre-COVID* times, before the worries of masks, dining in restaurants, and gathering with friends became serious concerns. I'm obsessing too much about what was, instead of embracing what is.

Last fall, we were living in Germany and preparing for our move back to Norman. As with every military move, there was a great deal of anxiousness. As I gave my worries and concerns to the Lord, I received peace that only God can give, remembering that HE is in complete control. I am learning to embrace not what I'm missing out on, but what I'm gaining: quality family time, unique teaching opportunities for my children, and a deeper trust in the Lord's provision for my life.

My validation as a wife, mother, and friend does not come from experiences or traditions, but from my identity in Christ. God gave us the incredible gift of his Son, and what better time to reflect on His coming, than at Christmas. So, how do we anticipate the season of Christ's birth when we are worried or *bored*? As we ponder how God has drawn near to us in times past, we can deepen our appetite to pursue him in the present. Like so often this year, should we just *get through* this Christmas, or does God have a different plan?

My prayer is that you give any worries and fears over to God and prepare room in your heart for the season of Advent. It means something wonderful is coming..., and we don't want to miss out.

Cathleen Clough

DECEMBER 10

The Storms Will Pass

For 19 years my family had a special member that thought he was the focus and was in charge. And he was.

Our dog, Poochie, was afraid of storms. During the last three years of his life, he grew increasingly afraid plus his hearing was failing, his eyesight fading, and painful arthritis was beginning to invade his body. Before the lightning and thunder would start, my Mother would give Poochie two Tylenol to help ease the pain and when the thunder and lighting began, she would toss his favorite blanket in the dryer.

She would get it as hot as she possibly could, find Poochie, wrap him up, get comfortable in her rocking chair with him in her arms, and rock away. And each and every time he would fall asleep in her arms and snore! She would tell him, *Don't be afraid, buddy, the storms will pass.*

My Mother was a natural caregiver. She cared for her mother who suffered from cancer for two years, helped her brother through some difficult times, assumed caregiving responsibilities for her in-laws and great-aunt, became a constant companion to her Dad, and walked the journey of cancer with her husband, my Dad, for over a year. And then there was me.

After I moved to Oklahoma from Missouri I would call home each night. If she even detected a sneeze or sensed a sore throat or congestion she was packed and on I-44 headed to Oklahoma. Once she arrived she came bearing an arsenal of cough drops, Kleenex and Tylenol. After getting me tucked in, she would start a load of clothes and begin stirring some chicken noodle soup on the stove.

How grateful I am for her caregiving in whatever form it came my way. And how grateful I am that the Lord makes the same promise and we only have to claim it. He will never leave us and will help us amid this confusing and turbulent time.

During these difficult and uncertain times who can you reassure to not be afraid? Who can you reassure that the storms will pass? Who can you help? Family, close friends, church friends. But we should prayerfully consider looking beyond to those around us who cross our paths who may need a smile, from under our mask, a kind word, a *thank you*, a cold drink, some kind of encouragement during their storms.

Poochie knew he could rest in my Mother's arms and depend on her. And far greater than that we must know we can rest in the arms of our Heavenly Father and depend on Him. And at the same time be someone else's helper as He is helping us.

Vickie Riggs

DECEMBER 11

Cast Our Cares

As a young girl growing up in First Baptist Church in Hugo, Oklahoma, one of my favorite things was being a part of the children's choir program.

I have many fond memories of different programs. You may remember some of these: *Down By the Creek Bank*, *The Bible Tells Me So Show*, but my all-time favorite were the *Kids Praise!* series. The main character was Psalty a life-sized singing songbook.

Psalty would teach children how to handle different situations that would come up by using scripture and, of course, often through songs. One particular song stuck with me, *The Cares Chorus*. I still remember the words and still, as an adult, will silently sing those words in my head. *I cast all my care upon You, I lay all of my burden's down at Your feet, and anytime I don't know what to do, I will cast all my cares upon You.*

So many times I have whispered these words. Whether it was when I was young and afraid of the dark or preparing to take a test, to even now, before a big meeting at work, or even scarier, sending my newly driving son out on the roads.

1 Peter 5:7 says, *Cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you.* What a sweet and simple assurance our Lord has given us. No matter what we are going through. No matter how small or large our circumstances may be, He is truly there to take our burden. Not only to see us through those things but to go through those things with us.

Church family, this year has been one of many struggles, anxious thoughts, and uncertainty. May we take comfort in knowing we have a Savior that truly wants us to cast our cares on Him, rely on Him because He cares for us. He loves us so deeply and does not want us to go through these times alone but have faith in Him.

My prayer for us this Advent Season is that we take the time to cast our cares on Him, that we may celebrate the birth of Christ, and have joy in our hearts that even when we don't know what to do we can cast our cares on Him!

Kimberli Hester

DECEMBER 12

God is with you



LUKE 1:26-38

Don't Be Afraid

It was a cool and clear morning in the fall 1997. My cousin Tom and I were in his Cessna 150 flying 3,500 feet above Lake Texoma.

I was in the left seat as a pilot in command and Tom was in the right seat evaluating my piloting skills. It was three days before my check ride with an FAA examiner to determine if I would become a licensed private pilot or not. The particular piloting skill I was working on with Tom was flying at minimum controllable airspeed (MCA). This is the speed at which any increase in the angle of attack or reduction in power will result in an immediate stall.

As I slowed the airplane down to MCA, Tom began asking what a positive charge on the ammeter might indicate. As I was answering his question, little did I know the airplane had entered a slight left turn and was on the verge of stalling. Within seconds the stall horn sounded, the left wing dropped, and the airplane began to spin nose down toward Lake Texoma. As the airplane was freely spinning out of the sky all I could see was the shimmer of the sun's light on the ripples of Lake Texoma and I thought to myself, *We are going to die*. A level of fear I had never experienced before began rushing through me like a wide-open fire hydrant.

Tom immediately took control of the airplane and said, *Don't be afraid. I've got it!* He pulled the throttle back to idle, brought the ailerons to level, applied full right rudder, and began pushing the elevator control forward. Within seconds the airplane stopped spinning. Tom applied full power, the nose came up, and we were back to straight and level flying. Tom had successfully performed a textbook spin recovery. I remember shouting, *Thank you, Jesus!*

In these very difficult and uncertain days, there are sources of fear all around us. COVID. The economy. Losing a job. Rioting. Racism. A new president and administration. Broken relationships. The list goes on and on. If we are not careful, we can allow the fear to enter our hearts and minds and overwhelm us as it did to me on that cool fall morning in an airplane.

In the moments of our lives when fear overwhelms and paralyzes us, we must heed the words my cousin Tom spoke over me that cool fall morning in 1997, *do not be afraid*. When we have the faith and courage to heed these words from the Lord and to pray to God by faith to open our eyes, we will realize we don't have to be afraid and we will be able to see the God of angel armies, Immanuel, is with us.

Rev. Chad E. Smith

DECEMBER 13

Trust in Him

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen

Ephesians 3:20-21

The year 2020 has been one of great changes for me and my family, as it has been for everyone. When the year began, it became clear that God was calling me to leave my position as student minister at the church I was currently serving.

This was difficult for me and humbling as well, to resign my position without a clear path of what was next. But God had already brought together several families who weren't involved in a church for various reasons and He directed me to begin meeting as a home church with these families who were eager for this type of Christian community.

Although I didn't understand God's plan, as churches were closing down, our small group, because of its small size and simplicity, after taking a brief break from in-person meetings, was able to begin to meet outside and connect and support each other. I felt God's confirmation every step of the way.

After about 6 months of our home church experience, I was contacted about the position of interim youth pastor at First Baptist, and as I prayed about it, God reminded me of the things I enjoyed and missed about serving in youth ministry. I trusted God to open or close doors as He saw fit, and He opened up the opportunity for me to serve here at First Baptist while still continuing our home church on Sunday evenings.

I remain humbled and amazed at the journey God has placed before me. Although we still face an unknown future, I know I've seen God meet every need I've had. He has answered my heartfelt prayers. I can look back on this year of 2020 and I can clearly see God's provision, love, and care for me, my family, and my loved ones.

I know that whatever this next year brings, I can trust in the one true God who never changes, who has a plan for His people, and who loves us very much.

Blake Watson

DECEMBER 14

He Is With Us

I had spent years preparing for a specific time. I had studied. I had prayed. I was sure I was ready. And then I failed. In my despair, I heard the voice inside my head say, *You are not good enough.*

Have you heard that voice, too? I think we all have at some time. Many of us have heard it often. Some of us even torture ourselves with this over and over, and over again. *I am not good enough.*

The Good News is, we are not, and never will be good enough — and God knows it. God desperately wants a relationship with us. *Immanuel, God with us*, is our only way to find success when we are not good enough. God wants to be there for us, be there with us, so much so that He allowed His ONLY son to come live with us.

And when we were so wrong as to commit the worst crime in the history of the world — we killed the Son of God — Jesus defeated death and brought us back into a relationship with God. He is WITH us. And when God is with us, we ARE enough!

God is the giver of Joy. In Psalm 16, David lists these attributes of God being with us: *our protector, the source of all good things, our support, the provider of a beautiful inheritance.* When we abide with God, we will not be shaken, our heart is glad, and we will dwell securely in His presence.

In this wacky, crazy year we all have been confronted with things that are beyond our ability to control. We want to be helpful in correcting wrongs. We want to protect those around us from sickness and storms. We long to be a voice of reason and understanding. We want to be enough to change our world. We will only be enough when we allow God to dwell in us and allow His plan and His power to work through us.

Jesus' birth was the beginning of the story of God with us. Revelation 21:4 helps end the story by telling us:

...He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

Chuck Lawrence

DECEMBER 15

Finding Joy In 2020

It is likely none of us will ever forget the year 2020: the year of COVID. We've had to be flexible, *make do* and substitute a lot of things in a lot of ways.

In our family, we have developed different ways of finding joy in the midst of the pandemic. We have celebrated special days by visiting our children and grandchildren in their driveways and backyards, singing to them, and sharing treats and little gifts.

At Easter, for instance, my husband and I wore bunny ears and sang *Here Comes Peter Cottontail* complete with some dancing and acting as bunnies (grandkids thought it was funny!). On Mother's Day, we delivered gifts and goodies to the mothers and sang *The Mother Song*. Other times we sat outside in lawn chairs, visited, enjoyed cookies, and exchanged air hugs.

In early May I laid awake in the middle of the night because I realized our family could not be together for Mother's Day. I was thinking about the fears the children, grandchildren, and adults in the family had expressed because of COVID. As is my custom when I have something on my mind, I began to write.

What I wrote that night *God Is Near*, is as follows: *God is near in the words of the Bible, He is near in the care you receive from your loved ones; He is near in the home cooked meals from your wife, mother and others, He is near in the loving arms of your family and those dear to you; He is near in the prayers of your family and friends, He is near in the words of your pastors, SS teachers and church family; He is near in your thoughts and prayers for others, He is near when you are helping others and they are helping you; He is near in the sad and difficult times, watching over and protecting you, He is in constant contact with you; He is near in your daily life, Whether you are awake or sleeping; He is near in the lyrics and music of hymns and praise songs, He is near whether you are listening, singing or playing an instrument; He is near in your heart in all you say and do, God is never far from you, He is near; He is near when you are working, playing or resting, His presence is manifested in so many ways you cannot know or understand; He is near in a smile and kind word, As well as in the touch and hugs of family and friends; During these dark and difficult times of COVID we must always remember that....God is near.*

I gave a copy of *God Is Near* to each family member on Mother's Day, May 10, 2020. Even though COVID is still with us, I know God is near and we should *Fear Not* as we continue to seek joy in everyday life.

Sarah Redwine

Joy Over Fear

Fear is overcome by forced acts of courage.

David Wolfe

I do not know about most people, but fear is a big issue for me. I try to control my fear by controlling my environment. It is my biggest struggle, the desire to control all the circumstances I find myself in.

Control my emotions, control my work, control my responses, control, control, control. It is a constant mantra for me. I wonder how many belly laughs God has when He elbows Jesus and says *look, Son, she thinks she is in control again!*

The year 2020 has shown me I am not in control of anything; and, to be honest, COVID was the least of it for me. I watched my father's health fail and the relationship between my sisters struggle with dad's passing. But, for once in my life, I think the most courageous thing I have done is admit I cannot control anything.

People will do what they do, God will call much-loved people home, God will answer your prayers in ways that you do not expect. By accepting this, I cannot control anything, I have come to peace, I really have not experienced before. I also learned that peace and happiness are not always on the same page, but joy and peace are.

Even when things are difficult, I can choose joy. Joy over fear. I must choose, or force myself, as the author stated above; to be joyful. Happiness is based on my circumstance, but joy over fear is a choice.

My prayer for you this year is that you will make the courageous choice of Joy over fear.

Robin Nipper

DECEMBER 17

God Is There

I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble.

But take heart! I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

This morning as I write, I am constantly jarred by the sound of shattering icy branches hitting the ground nearby. From the first crack to the shower of ice and the thud as it hits the ground (and sometimes part of my house), my body cringes and tries to guess where each one has landed.

After a while I realize my shoulders are tense, hunched up almost around my ears. I take a deep breath and relax a little. This is really not so different from how I have felt for much of this year as we all moved into collective crisis mode in early, early spring. There are times to relax and breathe, and then another icy branch of some sort breaks loose.

An upsurge in COVID cases, school changes, another murder, an unexpected doctor's diagnosis, hurricanes, wildfires, cancellations of all kinds — each of these bringing more questions, stress, and change.

Admittedly, some of these will bring about changes for the better. That branch now resting on my porch roof was the same one we never could reach to remove, and constantly needed to be pruned to prevent roof damage to the house. The shutdown of much of our church's plans and ministries forces us to rethink who we are to be and what we can do for our community, something we would have been too busy to do otherwise. And yet each change is still something new and challenging on so many levels.

God is there in the midst of all of it. He is helping us break our old habits and routines, forcing us to lean on His guidance and direction as we strive to rebuild in newer, healthier ways. He is there in the storms, providing moments of protection and peace to help us endure.

He sends people and resources our way to help us in the midst and in the aftermath, in both expected and unexpected ways. As you continue to face all of the trouble that we will see in this world, may you take some time each day to take a deep breath. Rest in Jesus' care and peace, and know that as we celebrate His birth, we also celebrate His presence with us in our world.

Angela Atkins

DECEMBER 18

Heaven's Army

*Those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength;
They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run
and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.*

Isaiah 40:31

Beginning this past September, I was challenged through a Bible study to write a poem. As I started to pull words together, they seemed to just flow. This is the fifth poem that I've written and is taken from a very special verse, Isaiah 40:31. As we encounter challenges in today's world, it seemed appropriate to pen this.

Heaven's Army

*With the God of Heaven's Armies,
On the wings of eagle's soar.
Covering the world and all its madness
Your presence we implore.*

*God, we need you every hour of the day
As we sit with You in silence and pray.
Lead us to Your mountain, to renew our strength and hope,
As we struggle with the problems and try to cope.*

*My heart says to You,
Your face Lord, do I seek,
As I'm standing here before You,
Feeling mild and meek.*

*We know You have told us not to be afraid,
But look to You to renew our strength and pray.
We shall run and not be weary,
We shall walk and not faint.*

May God bless you and keep you, may you feel His presence all around you!

Judy Spearman

DECEMBER 19

A Savior Is Born



LUKE 2:10-11

I've Got You!

Daddy! the little girl on the slide cried out. *I'm afraid! It's okay, honey*, the dad said. *I've got you*. With that, the little girl smiled confidently, took a hold of one of her father's large hands, and slid down, screaming with delight.

The little girl's words came back to me recently. *I'm afraid!* are words I've said and heard a lot lately. *What about COVID? What if my parents get sick? What if I get sick?* So many questions, all prompted from fear. Lately fear and anxiety hang over us like a dark cloud and we simply don't know what to do about it

It's natural to try and run from or escape our fears. But sometimes fear is a strong nudge to examine our current situation and make a change. Fear can turn us to our Heavenly Father or to other people in our life and make us ask, *What should I do?* God can use fear to lead us to seek answers, change directions, or get out of our comfort zones when we would not normally do so.

Fear is inevitable, especially right now. But God does not want us to be *stuck* feeling afraid, frozen in fear so that we are not finding any joy in our life. As His angel told the shepherds, *"Do not be afraid! I bring you good news of a great joy!"* (Luke 2:10).

Yes, we should examine our fears and see if there is a chance to grow and learn from it. But also remember all the times in the Bible God tells us not to be afraid. *Whom shall I fear?* (Psalm 27:1). *He delivered me from all my fears* (Psalm 34:4-5,). *Do not fear. You are of more value than the sparrows* (Matthew 10:31). And when Jesus walked out on the water and calmed the storm, He said, *Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid* (Matthew 14:27).

Like the dad next to his child, God has *got us!* He is greater than our fear!

Pat Wilson

Trust in Him

Perfect love drives out fear.

1 John 4:18

These are unprecedented times. How often have we heard that phrase lately? Being quarantined has had its challenges. I have tried to use my time wisely in spite of being anxious about the world situation. I tend to get too many projects going - such as last week.

I was working on *Writing My Life Story* (Thanks to Vickie). In the between times, I was making masks for my family and friends. One day after sewing, I could not find my sewing scissors. My SEWING scissors! The ones I never let anyone else use. Those special scissors that have cut out children's clothing, school costumes, my daughter's (and others) wedding dress! Those scissors that remind of such good memories!

As I was anxiously telling a friend, I was advised to go to Walmart and buy two pairs so I would have an extra. I said, *These are not Walmart scissors. Do you not understand? These are my SEWING SCISSORS!*

After frantically emptying the inside trash, I went outside and tore through those cans. In desperation, I said *Lord, only You know where they are. Please help me find them.* I kept looking - but to no avail. Then I finally said, *Okay, this is an earthly treasure, so I will forget it and not stress.*

The next Thursday morning (trash day), since I had just recently emptied the trash, I merely picked up the few things left, and to my amazement, saw my scissors laying in the trash can. They were heavy enough that when I dropped them, I should have heard them, or I should have seen them when I previously emptied the trash. Who can explain!?

God has miraculous ways of reminding us of His all-knowing, ever-seeing wisdom and His assurance of His love for us. He even cared about my scissors. How can I doubt that He will take care of all things in our life — COVID-19 and all those other large or small things that we are experiencing. How blessed we are to serve a living, loving God? So, *Fear Not.*

Sallie Kennedy

DECEMBER 21

Following His Light

When I was a child, I loved traveling on the city bus with my mom and brothers to Akron from my home in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. Each Advent season we traveled to see the transformation of the downtown area. It was magical and a special Christmas tradition. Yes, it was a Christmas highlight! Why was it special?

We loved viewing the animated store windows and all the decorations, but most of all... we loved the lights. An ordinary downtown area came alive with light! We walked around town stopping frequently to gaze at the lights and express our great delight and JOY! My mom would always say, *Slow down and LOOK UP! Don't miss the LIGHT!*

Our final stop was always the beautiful lighted nativity at the Methodist church. It was there that we talked about the story of Jesus' birth. The star was large and oh so bright! It could be seen throughout the downtown area. The light of the star made all the difference then and it still does today. We are reminded in scripture...

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

Matthew 2:1-10

It is my prayer this Advent season that we will all *Slow down and LOOK UP!* Even in the busyness of the season may we find our JOY in the true meaning of Christmas. As my mom reminded me, *Don't miss the Light!*

Suzette Mason

DECEMBER 22

Christmas Angels

Getting out my angel collection for Christmas each year is a special time for me. The Angels remind me of all the everyday Angels in my life — family, friends, neighbors, and all my church friends. The angel collection gave me a message. Apparently, I had been too busy to realize how precious my earth angels had been to me this year.

A little over 30 years ago we moved to Norman and I learned about the Assistance League of Norman, an organization to dress school children in need, referring to it as School Bell. I became an active member.

Members not only raise the money to purchase new clothes, but they also assist the children when they are brought in for their fittings. I shall always remember one 10-year-old boy. He said to me, *This is better than any Christmas I've ever had.* He was wearing a giant smile! I think of this boy at Christmas time, and I smile hoping he remembers how he was helped by School Bell.

A couple of years ago I was having trouble with my computer and called our local service company to send someone out to help me. A nice young man came in and fixed my computer trouble. When he finished, he said, *I saw an Assistant League Yearbook on your desk, are you a member?* After proudly telling him I was, he immediately told me he had gone to School Bell and was given clothes every year. *You don't know what a blessing those clothes were to me and my family.*

What a blessing this young man was to me. I have learned the more time, clothing needs, or encouragement you give to children the returns are our greatest blessings. Through the years many students have blessed my life while I volunteered. A high school senior, when I asked what he needed most, told me he really needed a suit. A suit, he said, might help him get a job at a museum. He said it would show respect to whoever interviewed him. We seldom had suits, we take those to the Voc-Tech. I told the employees at Stein Mart (where I directed style shows). Everyone wanted to help him. I had him come to the store where we completely outfitted him.

He said it changed his life. It made all of us feel blessed that we could do this for him. He came back to the store a couple of weeks later and told us he got the job! We were doubly blessed!

We are never so lost that our Angels can't find us. May your Angels strew happiness wherever you walk each day, and may Angels smile on you all along the way not just at Christmas but all year long.

Dot Adkins

DECEMBER 23

Jesus is Alive



**LUKE 2:1-20
MATTHEW 28:5-6**

Release the Struggle

Years ago, I attended a conference around Christmas time. One speaker asked if we were familiar with the Charlie Brown Christmas special. Every hand in the room was raised and I was eager to know where the speaker's thoughts were headed since I am a Peanuts fan and the Christmas special is my all-time favorite!

Then he wanted to know if we had noticed a small yet very symbolic detail that the creator, Charles Schultz, so beautifully wove into this animated program. In the scene where the children are rehearsing for the Christmas pageant, Charlie Brown is flustered because nothing is going right, no one is paying attention to his directorial instruction and his vision of the perfect pageant is spiraling.

Just then, Linus and his blanket step up and he quotes Luke 2: 8-14. He follows the passage with, *And that's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown*. Everyone in the conference room agreed that we in fact had not missed that part. It's the most famous scene in the whole show.

But our speaker went on to share a detail within that scene that most people miss. When Linus gets to Luke 2:10 *Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people*, he drops his blanket when he says *Fear Not*. He just lets it go! Did YOU ever notice that? I certainly didn't and I have watched that show a million times!

I am thankful to Mr. Schultz for adding that special detail. Now, I always notice it when I watch it because it means so much to me. He made me think about the old, ratty *security blankets* I have in my life that I continue to carry around. Those things that I cling so tightly to instead of giving them over to God. Or sometimes, I may drop them but I eventually pick them right back up again.

Maybe you're struggling to forgive someone. Maybe you're mourning what this year was supposed to be like. Maybe you're scared of what lies ahead. Whatever your *blanket* is, God wants you to know it is ok to let it go. He never meant for you to carry it.

The *good news of great joy* is just that! Jesus came to earth to drive out fear so we no longer have to face life's struggles alone. All we have to do is trust Him. So, go ahead. Drop your *blanket*. Release the struggle of having to carry it all by yourself. And once your arms are free, embrace His peace and fear not.

Staci Rhea-McFarland

DECEMBER 24

The Christmas Story

About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant.

While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.

There were shepherders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're looking for: A baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger.

At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:

**Glory to God in the heavenly heights,
Peace to all men and women
on earth who please him.**

As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherders talked it over. Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us. They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about the child. All who heard these shepherders were impressed.

Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherders returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told.

Luke 2:1-20

DECEMBER 25

An Antidote For Fear

Worry — we are human so it's what we do. Regardless of the brave face that many of us put on in certain situations, fear is still there. Or, as some of us say, we are just concerned.

Psychologists tell us that anxiety is the most common mental disorder that they encounter. Hundreds of books have been written on how to live a fear or worry-free-life, but the real antidote is found only in the Bible. Throughout it we are assured that everything is going to be okay. Just these few verses might help us cope with uncertain outcomes.

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Matthew 6:34

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?

Luke 12:25

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

John 14:27

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

Worry – we are human so it's what we do. However, as Christians, these verses reassure us that it's going to be okay.

Jim Spearman

DECEMBER 26

Lessons for the future

As the holiday season approaches and we come to the end of 2020, I look back on this year with both gratitude and sorrow. This year has been one most would like to forget. Gratitude for its conclusion and looking forward to a bright, new beginning in 2021.

On September 3, 2019, my daughter got the devastating news that she had breast cancer. This rocked the entire family to its core. As her mom, I wanted nothing more than to take it away from her. Her husband and her two precious babies are her world, and I could not imagine the battle she had facing her, all while trying to remain strong for them.

It came as no surprise to anyone, she put her faith in God and in her doctors and began her journey. Kristen is strong, brave, courageous, fearless, fierce, and beautiful and *kicked cancer over the edge*. She is now cancer-free and is such an inspiration to all women fighting this disease. For this, 2020 will always hold a special, happy memory.

It was not long after we received the news we had prayed about for Kristen, that we would feel the heartbreaking loss of Connie, my daughter-in-law's mother, after courageously fighting metastatic breast cancer for three years. Connie holds a special place in my heart, as we watched our kids (Josh and Lisa) build a beautiful family and glorious memories too numerous to count. I miss my dear friend tremendously but will always cherish the time we had. Connie exemplified strength, courage, bravery, resilience, and beauty every day of her fight.

2020 has dealt more emotional blows to the world than most years ever have. Between social distancing from friends and family, teachers and students navigating remote learning without any true roadmap, our neighbors losing businesses, towns being ravaged by division and hate, and the loss of life due to COVID 19, we will truly look back on this year with mixed feelings, but I can only pray those feelings will turn into lessons we can take into the future.

My prayer for our country (and the world) is that we can find our way out of the darkness and truly live the message of Luke 6:31 *Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

Patty Edge

DECEMBER 27

ADVENT WORSHIP SERVICES

10:30 A.M. • NOVEMBER 29 • DECEMBER 6
• DECEMBER 13 • DECEMBER 20
FBCNORMAN.ORG • FACEBOOK • YOUTUBE

THE HANGING OF THE GREEN

10:30 A.M. • SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29

JOY OF GIVING

9:15 A.M. DECEMBER 6 • DECEMBER 13 • DECEMBER 20
KID'S LIFE GROUPS

GIVING TREE

ORNAMENTS AVAILABLE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH LIBRARY
AND THE CHURCH OFFICE.
RETURN UNWRAPPED GIFTS BY DECEMBER 13

YOUTH CHRISTMAS PARTY

DECEMBER 16 • 6:00-7:30 P.M. • FAMILY LIFE CENTER

CAROLS AND COCOA

DECEMBER 18 • 5:00-7:00 P.M.
CAROLING AT SENIOR ADULT HOMES
ON THE FRONT LAWN OR PORCH

DIAPERS AND WIPES COLLECTION

10:30 A.M. • SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20
BRING A GIFT OF DIAPERS AND WIPES
TO SHARE WITH OUR COMMUNITY

CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLE LIGHTING

DECEMBER 24
FBCNORMAN.ORG • FACEBOOK • YOUTUBE
PICK UP YOUR CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP BAG, COMPLETE WITH
CANDLES, BEGINNING WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16

CHRISTMAS DAY LUNCH BY FOOD AND SHELTER

11:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M. • HALLOCK HALL
REGISTER TO VOLUNTEER ONLINE AT
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FLC AND CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED

DECEMBER 24 • DECEMBER 25 • JANUARY 1



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