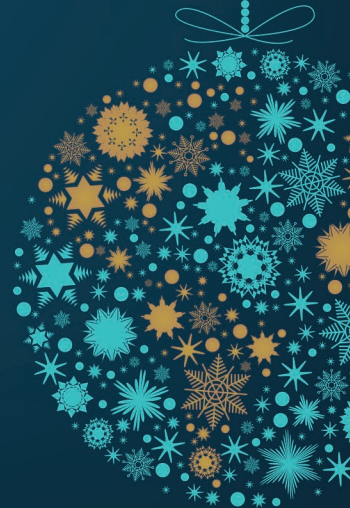
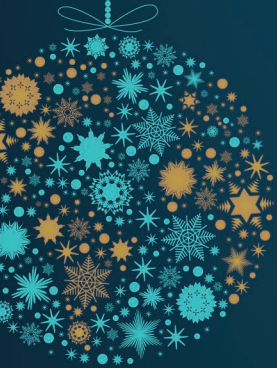




PEACE ON EARTH GOOD WILL TO ALL





Christmas Offering

Each year, the St. Luke's family of faith joins together in a special, second-mile offering. 100% of the funds raised will be used to bless the lives of others through ministries and missions supported by St. Luke's. You can make a donation to this special offering during worship, by calling the church office, online at stlukesokc.org/give, or by texting "SLM Christmas" to 73256.



Angel of Hope Service

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22 AT 5 P.M.

ST. LUKE'S DOWNTOWN CAMPUS MANSION AND GARDEN

Sunday, December 1

The Advent season is a time to prepare our hearts for the birth of Jesus and what it means to our lives. That is why I am intentional during the Advent season to begin each day with devotional time in front of our Nativity scene. I read the Bible, then the daily Advent devotional, and then spend a few minutes just looking at the Nativity before taking time to close in prayer. Including the Nativity scene in my devotional time always helps me center in on what is most important.

When I look at the figurine of baby Jesus in the manger, I am reminded of the tender love Christ has for all of us. Considering that Jesus came so that we would know and be known by Him fills my heart. I'm challenged to balance life so the busyness of the holiday season doesn't diminish the meaning.

Seeing the Holy Family figurines on my fireplace mantle, I give thanks for the blessings of my own family, beginning with the love of my parents, who are now in the kingdom eternal, to the love I have with my wife Marsha, and our love for our children, their spouses, and our grandchildren. I am incredibly blessed by my family and my family of faith.

The shepherds with their sheep remind me that though they would have been considered "lowly" at the time, they were personally invited to visit the baby who offered love for all of humanity. As were the wise men who came from a far-off land and had spent their lifetime looking for the birth of the King. And so, welcomed to the manger were the young and the old, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor; Christ came for the world. It is beautiful imagery that declares that each and every person is loved by God.

I hope you will join me and begin each morning with a time of devotion. If you've never done that, it's a great time to start! A good practice is to read a portion of scripture (you can use The Year of the Bible readings for the month), read the St. Luke's Advent devotional, reflect on the nativity scene, and then close in a time of prayer. Adding that time of reflection upon the Nativity can be very meaningful during Advent.

The star guided the wise men, and the angels shared the joy with the shepherds. If we keep our eyes and ears open, we will experience the true gift of Christmas. Jesus Christ was born so that we might experience peace on earth and goodwill toward all.

Dr. Bob Long, Senior Pastor

When I was 11 years old, my parents allowed me to go on a short excursion with friends. Alongside me in the backseat were my best friend and her younger brother. In the front seat were her sister, who was the teenage driver, and two of her friends. We were traveling at 55 miles per hour when we crashed into the back of a vehicle that was stalled on the highway. Our vehicle wasn't equipped with seatbelts. (Yes, I know I'm old.)

We were transported to the nearest hospital and examined for injuries; my friend had a fractured leg, and the teens needed stitches and were missing some teeth. My injuries were limited to things that healed with time; my eyes swelled shut, my lips turned inside out, and my entire face was bruised. Unfortunately, this worsened as the days went on, and I looked monstrous! We had a mirror at the end of the hallway that led to my bedroom. I recall backing down the hall because the sight of my bruised and swollen face made me nauseous! I was traumatized!

Fred Rogers said as a boy anytime he was afraid, his mother would say to him, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping."

During that accident all those years ago, I wish I had looked for "the helpers." Those teens who cared for me after the accident even though their injuries were more critical, the strangers who stopped to help, the ambulance drivers, the doctors and nurses, and my parents who nursed me back to health.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, dealt with a life-changing experience when she was just a few years older than I was at the time of my accident. Luke 2:19 tells us regarding the birth of Jesus, "*Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.*" The Greek word for treasured is *suntereo*, meaning protecting and remembering. The Greek word for pondered is *sumballo*, which indicates preserving and observing. Mary looked for "the helpers" - the innkeeper who allowed them to stay in the barn for protection, Joseph who cared for her, and the shepherds who came to see Jesus.

As you prepare for Christmas, look for "the helpers." When you spot them, be sure to breathe a prayer of thanks for them and thank them personally whenever possible. Furthermore, if you see someone going through a difficult time, be "the helper." Try to put yourself in the person's shoes and think about what is needed. When we do things for others, we are blessed!

Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. - 2 Corinthians 13:11

Susan Meharg, Assistant to the Executive Pastors

Tuesday, December 3

The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. - Matthew 4:16

When people arrive at Neighborhood Services Organization (NSO) looking for help, they often come in the most vulnerable of conditions: unemployed, homeless, and usually, they have experienced great tragedies in life. Whether it's a young teen aging out of the foster care system or a single mother wanting to provide a better life for her children, NSO is there to help. The team at NSO understands the peace that comes with stability and the light of hope that arrives through a loving neighbor willing to help.

Madeline arrived at NSO after escaping an abusive relationship. She left with her children and the clothes on their back. After spending time sleeping on couches at friend's homes, Madeline was given the keys to her fully furnished apartment at Martha's Home, one of the powerful ministries of NSO. While staying at Martha's Home, Madeline and her children experienced peace in their lives for the first time in a long while. They were safe. It opened the doors for Madeline to realize who she was created to be. Madeline did not speak English but began receiving the necessary education to help her survive and thrive. She learned English, earned her GED, learned to drive, and get her driver's license.

Last year, Madeline attended the NSO yearly fundraiser. Although she is a proud recipient of NSO's ministries, Madeline came as a representative of the bank, where she is now employed as an interpreter. Her story is one of many who have received the help they needed to fully embrace life and experience the joy God intends for His children.

Neighborhood Services Organization doesn't just help a person with their needs today but makes a difference tomorrow and for years to come. Madeline's two children received their education and are finding great success on their own. One is a construction engineer, and the other is a robotics engineer. The goodwill and peace first offered at NSO have helped to create generational change. And now, Madeline and her family are in a position to bring light and hope to their neighbors.

St. Luke's is proud to be connected with the ministry of NSO. Lives are being changed by what happens when people are supported in their housing needs. In addition to this needed service, NSO has an active WIC clinic, helping mothers better provide for their families, and also offers affordable dental care. This past year, NSO received 155,000 phone calls from people in need. The staff at NSO works tirelessly to help bring the light of hope to each of these people in need.

Neighborhood Services Organization - Learn more at nsookc.org

During the holiday season, millions of Americans (115.2 million cited by AAA, to be exact) will travel to visit loved ones and celebrate together. In theory, this sounds like fun, even potentially joyous, but when your last name is Griswold, traveling tends to come with some interesting baggage. Yes, my maiden name is Griswold, as in the famous National Lampoon film: *Christmas Vacation*, or in my family, we called it “The Griswold Family Christmas.” In the film, Clark Griswold and his family experienced all of the hysterical ups and downs of visiting family members, an extremely large Christmas tree, and a house so adorned with Christmas lights that it caused a power surge that created a city-wide blackout.

My family was in many ways exactly like that of the famous Griswolds, and it was always a bit of a spectacle. As I grew older, I sought out different experiences during the holiday season, thinking perhaps I would find more peace elsewhere. It would always start hopeful and optimistic, but once I approached the ticket counter for whichever airline I was flying, without fail, I would be greeted with a “Wow! What a time to be a Griswold!” and subsequently, my flights would get delayed, canceled, grounded mid-flight, or in a few fun cases would hit turbulence so violently that the masks would be ejected from the ceiling (I would not recommend this experience). Needless to say, even with a new last name, I found that my holiday season never really lost that “Griswold flare.”

Ultimately, I have to give credit to my husband, who patiently taught me the new practice of finding peace wherever my feet are planted. It turns out that if you seek peace, peace will find you. I once expected chaos, frenzy, and anxiety, but now I have found that my practice is to find comfort in the discomfort and remember Jesus promised, “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.*” John 14:27.

Wherever my feet are planted, there is always peace to be found, whether it’s in the smiles of the people at the ticket counter, the warm cup of coffee while doing your devotional in the morning, or good conversation with those visiting your home for the holidays. Peace is a gift, and one I know God wishes for each of us to enjoy this season.

Kelsey Paul, Downtown LifeLight Worship Leader and
Arts Administrator for Arts @ St Luke’s

When I think of the word peace, there are many images that come to mind: flowing streams, the cool breeze on my face, sitting on our patio listening to the birds chirping, the sounds of the fountain, and children laughing and playing on the playground at the school not too far from where we live. I think of holy moments shared with friends when our shared conversations center on the places and experiences where we have experienced God at work. I think of quiet moments when holding a newborn baby and the joy I see in his or her parent's eyes.

Most often it is music that brings a sense of peace in my life. When the world around me feels chaotic, and I struggle with those things that make me anxious, I know there are several "go-to" songs that have the ability to center and bring me peace. One of those songs is *Let There Be Peace on Earth*.

This beautiful anthem was written in 1955, with the words written by Jill Jackson and the melody by her husband, Sy Miller. For me, knowing the history behind a song gives it a deeper meaning. The author, Jill, struggled with depression in her life which led to an attempted suicide.

In an archival interview aired on David Freudberg's National Public Radio program *Humankind*, Jill Jackson talked about her background and the context of the song: "When I attempted suicide (in 1944), and I didn't succeed," she said, "I knew for the first time unconditional love - which God is. You are totally loved, totally accepted, just the way you are. At that moment, I was not allowed to die, and something happened to me which is very difficult to explain. I had an eternal moment of truth, in which I knew I was loved, and I knew I was here for a purpose."

This realization was followed by years of exploring her spiritual nature and her relationship with God. A decade later, she writes "that she and her husband went to a retreat in the mountains of California where they met a host of young people from various socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds where the song was introduced." Sy and Jill were pleased to see the young people lock arms and embrace the lyrics of the song.

The lyrics to the song bring me peace, as well as challenge my role to be one who lives as a "peace bearer" because in *every* situation, as the song proclaims, peace must begin with me. I often find that just humming the song brings me peace.

*With every step I take, Let this be my solemn vow
To take each moment, And live each moment
In peace eternally, Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me.*

When I was little, one of my favorite holiday traditions was driving around with my family to see the Christmas lights in our neighborhood in Ardmore, Oklahoma. I was in awe of the amazing decorations and the lights on the roofline of the houses. My mom always said the solid colors, all blue or all white, were the most beautiful, but I really liked the ones that were multicolored - to me, that seemed fancy and perfect. We would enjoy spending time taking in all the joy and peace of the season represented in these simple lights and decorations shining in the darkness.

I couldn't wait to get home to decorate our house. We would light the house and the lone evergreen in our front yard. We always asked for the multicolored lights - though my mom would usually win out, and for years, we had solid blue lights lining our roof. The process was an all-day activity - retrieving the decorations from the attic, long strands of lights on the lawn, and the dreaded checking to see if they still worked. Dad would then spend the rest of the day attaching each one along the roofline. We would stand on the lawn in darkness and wait for dad to plug in the lights so we could "ooh" and "ahh" at the bright glow from our house. Sometimes, we would even sing *Silent Night* - just our family standing on the lawn, the true meaning of Christmas flooding our hearts and minds.

Later in life, I realized both the joy and the dread of seasonal decorations. Though I still loved the decorations, my desire to bring it all out and go through the work involved hampered my motivation. When Brad and I first got married - our only outdoor Christmas light was a single green bulb that I would routinely place in our porchlight on December 1. The green hue bathing the front steps would be "the decorations," and I would call it good. Not great game when all the neighbors have décor to rival *Christmas Vacation*, but good enough considering the ease of execution.

One year, when our daughter was old enough to enjoy Christmas lights, she asked, "Where are our lights?" That year, we bought icicle lights for the house, had colorful lights down the front steps, and a moving display shining on the front. I still remember her excitement when we drove up that first night, circling to the front to surprise her. She couldn't believe all the lights and laughed with joy at seeing our house ready for the season, too. Our Christmas lights not only brought joy to her but brought flooding back all the memories of my childhood Christmases. The simple lights, driving around with my family to see the neighborhood, and singing a Christmas carol as we watched the unveiling of our own.

Long into my adulthood, dad still decorated their home with lights. I could be wrong, but it seemed like those same 40-year-old blue bulbs lined the edge of our roof. The last time he was able to put them out, I recall that old evergreen tree still draped with simple bulbs, but this time, they were multicolored, and boy, were they fancy and perfect!

Peace is a multi-faceted word. It can have a plethora of meanings to different people. Let's consider imagery associated with the word peace for a moment. I am a visual learner and tend to think about things in images or pictures. When you hear the word peace, what do you envision? You may see a peace sign. It could be a pointer and middle finger held up with the other fingers tucked away by a thumb, or maybe you thought of a circle with a line down the middle and two diagonal lines branching off the center line to the sides of the circle. Did you see a white dove carrying a piece of an olive branch when you read the word peace? Some people imagine God cradling planet Earth with His protective hands.

As the Director of Children's Ministries at the Edmond Campus, one of my personal favorite images of peace is our big, beautiful, blue and green planet with various children around the perimeter of the world. In the image, the children that are represented around our Earth are from all different descents and religions, not one child around the world looks the same. In this depiction, it doesn't matter what clothes they are wearing, what they believe in, or even how their families are comprised; there is peace among all of them. They all have one thing in common. They are all children of God. God wants all of us, every color, race, religion, or belief to get along. He wants us to realize that we each bring something to our universal table. Our differences are what make us all unique.

In Sunday School, we discussed how God gave Moses the 10 Commandments, or rules, that we should live and work by. The last commandment, *Thou shalt not covet*, means that we shouldn't want other people's things or assume the actions and behaviors of other people. We should not envy other people. Why is that? The reason is quite simple, but sometimes it is hard for us to comprehend. God created each of us perfectly imperfect. In 2 Thessalonians 3:16 we read, *Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.*

I want you to focus on the last part of the scripture: *The Lord be with all of you.* It does not depict to whom God is giving peace. He wants everyone to always be at peace, no matter what each person's background may be. However you perceive the word peace, there is a special meaning to us all and I hope you remember that when you see your neighbor, near or far.

Jocelyn Morgan, Edmond Campus Director of Children's Ministry

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." - Luke 1:31-33

Over and over, through the stories that tell about the birth of Jesus, we read about different angels appearing. They appear to Zechariah in the temple. They appear to Mary. They appear to Joseph. They appear to shepherds. It seems that each time they appear, the initial response from the people seeing them is fear. Almost immediately, each time, the angels respond with, "Do not be afraid."

I was recently teaching our Confirmation class and we were talking about the Church Seasons. When we talked about Advent and Christmas, one of the students asked why we celebrate Christmas on December 25. There is actually a lot of history around why that date was chosen (hint: we don't believe it was actually the day Jesus was really born). Part of the reason why that date was chosen was because, in the early Church, they thought that December 25 was the darkest day of the year. It is actually December 21, but they were close! They wanted to make a statement that the light of Christ still shines even on the darkest of days.

It is easy for darkness and fear to take hold in our lives. But it is in those moments the angels come to us with the reminder that we don't have to be afraid. Because we know that even in the darkest of days, there is good news of great joy. A baby will be born in Bethlehem who will be called the Son of the Most High. He is the Prince of Peace, and we no longer have to live in fear.

Rev. Josh Attaway, Edmond Campus Pastor and CFO

You, Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light. - Psalm 18:28

Students across the great state of Oklahoma are involved in sports of all kinds. Each year, students compete in football, basketball, softball, baseball, track, cross-country, volleyball, wrestling, soccer, tennis, dance, cheer, swimming, golf, and more. Sports allow students to develop the discipline needed to compete at a high level. Through athletic activities, students learn positive practices that will help them succeed for many years. Sports provide an opportunity for growth. Athletics can change a kid's life.

Mark and Stacy McDaniel were big believers in youth sports. Their three children's used and outgrown equipment, including shoes, had been collecting in the garage. From that pile of used sports equipment, Cleats for Kids (C4K), was born in 2011. They wanted to make a difference in the lives of others and began to develop relationships with schools and the community to provide equipment that would help to ensure students would have the opportunity to participate in life-changing sports.

Tommy was a single father of two. Both his daughter and son had athletic talent. Tommy worked hard. His job provided a home and the necessities for his family, but he did not have extra money for expensive sports equipment. When Tommy was diagnosed with cancer, he knew he would need help. He wanted his children to have the best chance possible to succeed in sports and school. Tommy brought them to Cleats for Kids where both received the equipment they needed.

Tommy's daughter earned the opportunity to play basketball at the University of Oklahoma. His son was offered the opportunity to play at the collegiate level but chose military service. Their success in athletics is to be celebrated. Perhaps the real achievement is that Tommy's children were the first in their family to graduate high school. His daughter is the first to attend college. This was made possible partly because of the positive experiences sports brought to their lives. Through sports, coaches become mentors, and success on the field teaches students they can be successful in other parts of life. Cleats for Kids helps make this possible.

Since 2011, over 285,000 Oklahoma kids have received free shoes and equipment from Cleats for Kids. Just this year, 54,000 kids, from Idabel to Guymon, have the chance to compete. By receiving these shoes and equipment, students who want to be involved will have the resources they need. Cleats for Kids is helping to kindle the passionate fire of athletics for students who otherwise would not have the opportunity to live out their dreams. C4K and St. Luke's are bringing light and life to athletics and to the lives of students across our great state.

Cleats for Kids - Learn more at cleatsforkids.org

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy. - Psalm 96:11-12

After Jeff and I were married, we lived in Edmond in a house I had lived in since 2004. We remodeled the house, installing new carpet and tile and re-painting all the walls. We tore out the kitchen and installed beautiful cabinets with glass windows. I had my dream of two ovens, which made cooking for Thanksgiving and Christmas for many people much easier.

My youngest daughter, Mandi, had been looking at houses in Guthrie and was interested in one. She asked me to go and look at it with her, and we both drove what seemed like for miles out into the country to look at the house. I really loved it, and when I found out it was not on their list of houses to purchase, I asked Jeff to come and look at it with me.

Jeff had grown up in Guthrie and was only too happy to look at this house. We drove out to the house, met the realtor, and Jeff loved the house as much as I did. We told the realtor we wanted to make an offer on the house and asked her if she would be willing to list our house in Edmond.

In a matter of four days, we sold our house in Edmond and bought a new house in what I perceived as the country. I was very apprehensive about this move, but it was a new beginning and a new house that was ours.

We moved to our new house in October 2015. Jeff worked tirelessly through the winter months, landscaping, moving dirt, and installing our pool. When spring and summer arrived and the weather started to warm up, we were able to go into our backyard and hear all the wonderful sounds of nature. I believe it was the most peaceful I have ever been in my life.

Being that close to nature and having an acre of land has been such a blessing to us. Each summer, we look forward to having all our family over and enjoying the outdoors without neighbors being inches away. I don't believe I could ever live in the city again. During the pandemic, it was such a great space where we could be together as a family and still have distance between each other.

I encourage you to find a place where you can go to experience all of God's wonderful creations and be at peace.

Gabrielle Moon, Executive Director of St. Luke's Children's Centers

One year during the holiday season, my mother introduced my sister and me to one of my favorite Christmas movies, *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. We giggled and joked about all the crazy things the Herdman children said and did! *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* was the opposite of Peace on Earth, Goodwill to All. The Herdmans were like a pack of wild animals and only came to church because they were told they could get all the free desserts they wanted. Somehow, these chaotic brothers and sisters managed to be cast in all the main leads in the church's Christmas program. The only problem was that these children had never heard the story of Baby Jesus from the Bible, and boy, did they have questions: What does "with child" mean? What's a manger? What did they do with the wadded-up clothes? Why didn't they have room for baby Jesus?

These were all very valid questions, but the other children rolled their eyes at them. They felt they were more deserving of the lead parts, so they made fun of the Herdmans. But that didn't stop the Herdman children from putting everything they had into their characters for the play.

At the end of the play, a memorable part was when Mary removed her oversized earrings and swaddled baby Jesus with so much love, but just when she thought no one was watching. A Herdman child playing the part of the Angel came running down the aisle with a great deal of excitement as she led the shepherds to see the baby and yelled at the top of her lungs, "Baby Jesus is here!" One of the Wisemen, another Herdman sibling, decided to replace the gift of frankincense for baby Jesus and instead gave Him a ham that the family had received from their social worker.

While these behaviors seem absurd to those of us who have been in church all our lives, the Herdman children retold the story by giving it everything they had to the best of their ability! What a lesson for all of us! When we're preparing for Christmas, Jesus doesn't want a perfect Christmas tree, a beautifully decorated house, gifts with elegant wrapping paper, or lavish meals. He wants the best thing we can give Him, and that's our hearts. If we strive for that, we will find peace in this world of chaos and be able to truly enjoy celebrating the birth of a baby in Bethlehem, and there is true beauty in that!

Taylor Easttom, Director of Children's Ministry

Peace is a word that encompasses the story of Jesus' birth. When the angels announced the good news of the birth of Christ to the shepherds in the field, they gave glory to God and proclaimed peace on earth. One of the beautiful prophecies about Jesus was that He would be called *Prince of Peace*. (Isaiah 9:6). Truly, the birth of Christ is good news because we have many times of conflict and trouble in our lives, our relationships, and throughout our world.

One story in the gospels that demonstrates Jesus' power and ability to bring peace is when Jesus performs the miracle of calming a storm. Jesus and His disciples were on a boat when a storm arose, and the waves were crashing against the boat. The disciples were afraid, but Jesus was with them in the middle of that storm. Jesus said to the wind and the waves, "*Peace, be still.*" The wind died down, and it was completely calm. The disciples were amazed at this demonstration of power over nature.

We also have storms in our lives - conflicts in our relationships, troubles that surround us, and we feel uneasy because of the problems in the world. Even busyness can bring chaos that crashes in and leaves us feeling unbalanced. Jesus has the power to calm and bring peace to all of these times as we trust and follow Him. But trusting in Jesus doesn't mean that we will live without conflict from this day forward. In fact, Jesus says, "*In this world, you will have trouble, but take heart because I have overcome the world.*" (John 16:33)

Jesus is bringing more than just release from conflict. Our world is not without sin and the consequences that sin brings. Jesus came to earth to bring reconciliation to God and to bring redemption from sin. The Hebrew word for peace is shalom. Shalom is best defined as being complete or whole. The good news of the birth of Christ is that God entered the world to make us whole. His name is also Emmanuel, which means God with us. Even in the middle of the storm, when chaos and conflict surround us, Jesus is present. We can find peace in our hearts because we know that Jesus has overcome. We can trust in the promise that we are made whole and live in a kingdom where Jesus rules as Prince of Peace.

Amy Givens, Director of Youth Ministry and Discipleship

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. - Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

This year, I decided to join a running club. Before this, I hadn't run more than three miles by myself, so the thought of training for a half marathon felt daunting. Each week, our mileage increased, and I found myself getting stronger, both physically and mentally. The real turning point came during our first seven-mile run. As I ran alongside my fellow club members, I felt a revelation: the strength found in numbers is powerful. With each mile, I realized I was capable of much more than I had ever thought possible. The encouragement of those running with me made a significant difference. Their presence pushed me to dig deeper, to keep going even when I felt like slowing down.

This journey has been a beautiful reminder that we are not meant to do life alone. Just like in running, our lives are enriched by the community around us, including our family of faith. God created us for connection - with Him and with each other. We find strength and support in our relationships, reminding us that we are stronger together. Now, I'm up to ten miles, and by the time you read this, I will have accomplished my goal of completing my first half marathon, 13.1 miles! This achievement wouldn't have been possible without stepping out of my comfort zone to try something new and connect with others. It shows how much we can accomplish through God and the support of our community.

As we prepare our hearts for Advent, let's reflect on how we can embrace community. Who can we reach out to for support? How can we encourage those around us? By stepping out of our comfort zones and being open to connection, we can discover new strengths and possibilities.

Dear God, thank You for the gift of community and the strength we find in one another. Help us to reach out, support each other, and walk together in faith during this Advent season. May our connections reflect Your love and bring peace to our lives. - Amen

Ashley Carr, Director of Young Adult Ministries

In late September, I got to check off one of my bucket list items. My wife, Kelly, and I had the opportunity to visit Iceland and prayed we might get to see the Northern Lights in all their glory. The colors of green, yellow, and purple light streak across the night sky to form a tapestry that leaves you speechless. I had never thought of visiting Iceland until my oldest daughter, Jessica, moved there a few years ago. It is a land of unmatched beauty. There are also simmering volcanos, giant glaciers, towering waterfalls, and black sandy beaches.

But perhaps the top attraction is the Northern Lights. Lately, the light shows have expanded to include locations as far south as our own home state. Typically, you must travel north of 60° latitude, close to the Arctic Circle to see them. Countries like Norway, Finland, Iceland, parts of Canada, and Alaska are the ideal places to see them in all their splendor.

One evening, my daughter told us the conditions were optimal for the phenomenon to appear. We drove north out of Reykjavik, away from the lights of the city. Very few clouds were in the sky that night and the stars shone so brightly. Apparently, everyone in Reykjavik had the same information because there were cars parked bumper to bumper in this remote area. We got out of the car and soon the sky began to light up green. It was so cool, but it was nothing compared to what was to follow. In a matter of moments, the lights exploded and began to dance across the sky, showing off all sorts of colors. I can only explain the feeling I had in terms of gratitude for God's creation. Our eyes were wide open like we were kids once again on Christmas morning. I couldn't stop smiling while others cried.

This whole experience lasted no more than a few minutes, and at one point, I had a random thought. These lights from the heavens that covered the night sky must have been akin to what the shepherds saw that first Christmas Eve when Luke tells us, *"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!'"*

The shepherds also lived in a world of chaos like we do, and in the midst of that, God broke through with a message of goodwill when the angel said, *"Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*

That night, God sent a sign from the heavens that changed everything. It was a beautiful message in which God proclaimed, *"Emmanuel... God with us."* Maybe you won't see the Northern Lights, but the next time you gaze up at the stars, recall that on that first Christmas, God filled the sky with light and voices singing. Try to imagine the awe the shepherds felt at the sight and give thanks.

Dave Poteet, Pastor of Congregational Care

One of my favorite things to do with my son is read books. It's a great way for him to learn new things and explore his imagination. It also provides a wonderful opportunity for this tired Mom to sit down for a few minutes, so it's a win-win situation for both of us.

There is one book that I particularly enjoy, and I like to read to him often, *You Are Special* by Max Lucado. The story is about a community of wooden creatures called Wimmicks that spend each day walking around town, giving each other stickers. The talented, good-looking Wimmicks get gold stars, and the not-so-favorable, not-so-talented Wimmicks receive gray dots. The main character, Punchinello, is viewed by his friends as the latter and is only given gray dots.

One day, he meets a unique Wimmick named Lucia. What makes her special is that she doesn't have any gray dots or gold stars - any time someone tries to give her a sticker, it just falls right off. Punchinello is fascinated by this and wishes he could be the same way. So, he asks her, "How do you do it?" She replies, "It's easy. Every day I go visit Eli, the woodcarver," and she encourages Punchinello to go visit him.

The story goes on with Punchinello going to see the wood carver. Eli already knows Punchinello's name and gives him a warm welcome. Punchinello asks him about Lucia and why the stickers don't stick to her. He responds with, "She has decided that what I think (her Maker) is more important than what they think, and I think you are special. The stickers only stick if you let them." Punchinello doesn't fully understand this, but Eli assures him that he will over time and encourages him to just continue coming to visit. It ends with Punchinello agreeing to do this, walking out the door, and a gray dot falls off of him as he does.

What a message! Every time I read this story to my son, I think I get more from it than he does. I can't help but feel Punchinello's relief that he is in the presence of someone who genuinely loves him, flaws and all, and the overwhelming sense of peace that brings. It is a warm reminder that we are called to regularly spend time with Him – for so many reasons. With Advent upon us and as we are all immersed in the holiday scramble of events, gift-buying, etc., it's important to remember that peace and rejuvenation are found when we stop, take a step back, and go visit Him.

Jessie Parker, Director of Childcare Administration

Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. - Isaiah 40:26

I have always loved the beauty of sunrises and sunsets, but as the years have gone by, I have realized how deeply my soul is touched by the majestic nighttime sky. For centuries, the stars have helped to light up the sky at night and have been used to help travelers find their way. They symbolize hope, guidance, and eternity. The moon is beautiful and mysterious. Just as the moon goes through phases from a crescent to a full circle, I am reminded that we, too, go through changes and growth. The moon is the brightest natural light we can see in the dark sky, so often, it represents a quiet sense of awe and wonder.

The nighttime sky is the most beautiful when we are out somewhere away from the city lights, and we can gaze upon its beauty with wonder. I love to look into the sky when we are in the mountains, at the ocean, or anywhere we have a wide-open view of the sky. But we need to remember that, even in the midst of the city lights, the beauty is still there. God's everlasting love is constant.

There is a park across the street from our home, with large trees lining its perimeter. The very placement of the trees creates, for me, a sacred space in the middle that helps block some of the lights of the city. There are nights that I have felt troubled or overwhelmed, and I tell Bob, "I'll be right back," and head out the front door for a few minutes. He knows that I'm going outside to look at the moon and the stars. He also knows that wherever I am in the world, this spiritual practice brings me comfort and peace. It is there I feel stress and anxiety melt away, and my soul is filled with peace in the present moment.

As Isaiah calls us to lift our eyes to the heavens, we are reminded that we are not alone and that God's everlasting love for each one of us will endure forever. I hope that you will take time this Advent season to slow down enough to enjoy this spiritual practice, look into the heavens, and find peace in His presence.

Marsha Long, Director of Hospitality Ministry

When I learned this year's Advent theme is *Peace on Earth, Goodwill to All*, I couldn't help but smile. As I write this, it's mid-October and 85° outside. In case you weren't aware, St. Luke's begins planning for Christmas long before Starbucks breaks out the pumpkin spice. With All Church Christmas parties at both campuses, concerts, blizzard boxes, Advent Festivals, children's choirs, and many, many, many services, there seems to be little peace until the last candle is extinguished and the final chorus of *Silent Night* fades away.

Peace, a word often associated with tranquility and harmony, is a precious gift that we yearn for. In the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, losing sight of this essential quality can be easy. The stress of gift-giving, the pressure to attend countless parties, and the demands of family and work can leave us feeling overwhelmed and anxious.

Yet, the true spirit of Christmas lies in the simple message of peace on earth and goodwill toward all. It reminds us that even during chaos and uncertainty, there is hope and a path to inner peace where we can find solace, strength, and clarity. Cultivating inner peace requires intentional effort, but the rewards are immeasurable. By practicing mindfulness, gratitude, and forgiveness, we can create a peaceful haven within ourselves, no matter our challenges.

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, came into the world to bring us a message of hope and salvation. His birth was a moment of profound peace and joy, a beacon of light in a world shrouded in darkness. As we celebrate His birth, we are invited to reflect on the gift of peace that He offers us.

Peace is not merely the absence of conflict or turmoil; it is a deep-seated sense of well-being and harmony that comes from within. It is a state of mind that allows us to embrace life's challenges with grace and resilience.

As we approach the Christmas season, let us take time to cultivate peace in our hearts and minds. We can do this by practicing mindfulness, gratitude, and forgiveness. We can seek solace in prayer and meditation. We can reach out to others in need and offer them a helping hand.

By embracing the spirit of peace, we can experience the true joy and meaning of the Christmas season. We can find solace amid life's storms and discover a deeper sense of connection with ourselves and others.

May this Christmas season be a time of peace, joy, and renewal for you and your loved ones.

Chris Lambert, Director of Meals on Wheels

The average pair of eyeglasses in the United States costs between \$200 and \$300. If you live on a limited income or have more than one person in your house who needs glasses, this cost may be more than you can afford. Glasses, new clothes, and food are needs that a person cannot avoid, and the cost of these things can overwhelm the working poor among us.

Since 1968, Skyline has been serving the people of Oklahoma City. Skyline exists to serve at-risk children, youth, and adults by providing the basic resources a person needs. Skyline provides food to working families and individuals who otherwise might spend days and nights waiting for their next payday. At Skyline, there is a style shop where the community can shop for 10 free, gently used items to help clothe each person in their household.

Jessica is a single mom of two teenagers. She works full-time but still needs help with groceries from time to time. She often visits Skyline on the third Saturday of the month when they are open for those working weekdays. Jessica shared her gratitude for the big help she and her family have received from Skyline, "I want to give a sincere thanks to all the Skyline donors because, without you, my family and other families would have seen a lot more hungry days. I only come in when I'm in need, but I know that when I do, you are there. Thank God for you all and everything you do!"

Skyline is working to bless so many people in our community. Just over 54,000 people have come through their doors this year to shop in the food pantry, find fresh vegetables harvested from the urban garden, receive help with eyeglasses, or shop at the style shop. The number of people coming through their doors has significantly increased in the past two years. St. Luke's is proud to work alongside the incredible team at Skyline to help feed the hungry, bring sight to those in need, and clothe people who are working hard but need a little help. Skyline is a ministry partner of St. Luke's, and together, we are the hands and feet of Christ to our community.

Skyline - Learn more at okcskyline.org

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." - Matthew 25:35-40

When I think of showing goodwill to all, I immediately think of our Meals on Wheels chef, Augustina Aviles. She arrives at our St. Luke's Asbury Campus kitchen each weekday at 6 a.m. to prepare several hundred meals for homebound seniors. She carefully selects a menu that will provide both nourishment and joy to our clients. We frequently receive feedback from meal recipients about just how much they love and appreciate Chef Auggie's cooking.

In addition to her job with Meals on Wheels, Augustina co-runs a nonprofit organization with her mother called Bagz of Luv. Founded in 2020, Bagz of Luv is a mobile street outreach organization that provides food, survival gear, clothing, medical supplies, pet food, clean water, and more to unhoused individuals. They take time to listen to the stories of those they serve and do their best to meet their needs, big and small.

Through her social media pages, Augustina involves others in the community with her organization. She frequently posts updates asking for donations of specific items needed that particular week. Additionally, she shares content that challenges the perceptions many of us carry about individuals experiencing homelessness.

Augustina's work with the unhoused population of south Oklahoma City is an example to us all. She encourages me and others daily in the ways she lives out God's calling in her life, truly showing goodwill to all.

Morgan Jones, Associate Director of Meals on Wheels Oklahoma City

When I think about Advent, I always think about showing goodwill to others. I think the verse that best says this for me is Luke 6:38. *Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure, you use it will be measured back to you.*

I have always wanted to find a way to give back to those most in need. Last year, an opportunity presented itself that allowed me to help children who did not receive toys at Christmas time.

Over the last two years, as a hobby, I started a small side business selling Star Wars toys and collectibles. I was amazed by the number of people who started buying from me and watching my live auctions. I thought if I could get this much attention online, I should use it for a good purpose.

About mid-October of last year, I started a Toy Drive for the Children's Hospital, and I called it "Packages for Padawans." I reached out to my customers, friends, and family and asked for donations. I also offered kid-friendly Star Wars toys for people to purchase and donate to the Toy Drive. I collected toys and donations until December 17 so that I could purchase the items from the Children's Hospital Wish List and get everything boxed up. I delivered the toys to the hospital on December 20 and it was one of the greatest moments I have ever experienced and made my heart full.

The volunteer who came with a large cart to get the toys out of my truck asked me what I was dropping off. I opened the back of the truck, and her eyes opened wide. She asked me if all that was for the hospital, and I said yes. The volunteer called in to the building for them to bring more carts out to my truck.

We filled three large carts with boxes of Star Wars toys, stuffed animals, baby dolls, etc. I couldn't tell who was more excited about the toy drop-off, them or me. I have experienced goodwill being given to me throughout my life, but I feel like sharing goodwill with others feels a lot better. The Toy Drive will now be a yearly tradition, and hopefully, it will continue to grow to spread goodwill to as many kids as possible.

Jeff Freshour, Director of Facilities

There is an abundance of songs about peace, many of them written and composed around the message of Christmas. They have beautiful melodies and lovely harmonious accompaniment. Every year during the Advent season, we hear and sing well-known songs with the message of peace. Songs such as *Silent Night, Still, Still, Still, I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day, Let There Be Peace on Earth*, just to name a few. In the great oratorio Handel's *MESSIAH*, there are references to peace and goodwill to all. In the chorus *Glory to God* (from *MESSIAH*), we hear "*Glory to God and peace on earth and goodwill to men.*"

Allow me to reference another song that invokes the message of peace: it has no melody, instrumental accompaniment, or lyrics. This song is available only in an environment of silence. It is best heard out in the country, far from the sounds of traffic and city life. Imagine sitting under a black sky with multiple bright, shining stars and listening to the sounds of nature. This beauty in silence is a glorious song all on its own. I picture a night much like the one when Christ entered the world: quiet, still.

Peace is present even when strife and turmoil are all you see. In this current cultural climate, it is difficult to feel peace. It is challenging for us to be ambassadors of goodwill when our surroundings are clouded with strife and turmoil. When I need to find peace, I go out to the country. Since I live in the city, my country alternative is to be still in silence, devoid of the clamor of a busy life.

One of the best places to find peace in an otherwise noisy world is in God's House, a place where you can rid all the deafening sounds of turmoil and strife. It is then that peace will take over, and the desire to bring goodwill to all will fill your spirit. This season, sing and hear the glorious fanfare and sounds of Christmas, but always make time for a *Silent Night, Holy Night*. Peace!

Robert Fasol, Organist and Choirmaster

Working for a church during Advent is one of the most rewarding experiences I've had. Being part of a community that brings hope and joy to others during such a meaningful season is truly special. I get to witness firsthand how the services, music, and traditions touch people's hearts and draw them closer to Christ. There's a deep sense of fulfillment in knowing that I play a small part in creating these sacred moments for others. Yet, in the midst of the preparations, services, and celebrations, it can be challenging to carve out moments of peace for myself. With the constant flurry of activity, finding stillness can feel elusive. But every year, I make it a point to set aside time to simply sit and allow myself to feel Christ's peace.

One of my favorite moments is during the 11 p.m. Candlelight Service at the Edmond Campus. There's something so serene about this late-night gathering. By this time of night, the world around us feels like it has finally slowed down. Stores have long since closed, roads are quiet, and even our phones are silent. The quiet stillness feels sacred, as if the world has taken a deep breath and paused in reverence.

For me, the most powerful part of this service is when we light our candles and sing *Silent Night*, a cappella, as one church family. At that moment, with the soft glow of candles illuminating the sanctuary and voices rising in harmony, I feel the overwhelming peace of Christ wash over me. It's a peace that moves me to tears nearly every time, a reminder that no matter the busyness or chaos, His peace is always available to us.

As we journey through Advent, I encourage you to find your own moments of peace - whether it's in a quiet service, a still morning, or a simple tradition that helps you connect with God's presence. Remember, peace isn't just the absence of noise or activity but the assurance that Christ is with us, offering His calm in the midst of our busy lives.

Heavenly Father, in the midst of the busyness of this season, help us to pause and seek Your peace. Calm our hearts and quiet our minds so that we can feel Your presence. As we reflect on the gift of Your Son, may we be reminded that true peace comes from You. Teach us to slow down, be present, and rest in the assurance that You are always with us. Let Your peace fill our hearts and guide us through this season and beyond. In Jesus' name, we pray. - Amen.

Madison Woods, Edmond Campus Director of Welcoming Ministries

El Sistema Oklahoma (ESO) has been impacting the lives of students for over 10 years. One of those students started ESO when she was in 5th grade. Her grandparents were raising her, and although she was highly intelligent, she struggled with anger. She was so shy that she would rarely talk. She had such a fear of failure that if she made a mistake playing her instrument in front of others, it might take her a week to pick up the instrument again. For the first couple of years, she struggled, but the strength of the ESO program is that it meets the students where they are. Over time the ESO staff witnessed the young woman gain confidence playing her instrument, and even said she liked it.

ESO encourages students to show respect and kindness for one another, and this student embraced those values. She began helping around the site, volunteering to come in and spend additional time assisting the younger children. When she entered high school, she expressed an interest in teaching, and when she reached the age of 16, the leadership of ESO offered her a paid position as a teaching assistant. She thrived in the position and made it her goal to give other children the confidence and opportunity that she had found at El Sistema.

Through the money she earned from her ESO job and a second job she had taken, she saved enough money to purchase her own car. She was also excelling at school. She was first chair in her high school orchestra and did well in many musical competitions around the city and state. Through support from ESO and her school, she applied for financial aid and enrolled at UCO as a music education major. Upon her graduation from high school, ESO gifted her a new instrument.

To this day she continues to teach with El Sistema and uses the money to support herself through college. She has completely paid for college on her own without support from her family. From the painfully shy 5th grader who couldn't look someone in the eye, she has now grown into an incredibly strong woman who wants to make a difference in the lives of children.

Next year will be her final year in college and she says that without El Sistema, she has no idea of where she would have ended up. She loves El Sistema as her family and is forever grateful for the program, the staff, the volunteers, and the support that has changed her life. Her transformation represents the mission of El Sistema Oklahoma: to serve the community by engaging children within an ensemble-based music program so they can share the joy of music-making and grow as responsible and productive citizens.

El Sistema Oklahoma - Learn more at elsistemaok.org

Every Christmas Eve, I am amazed by the physics of light. In non-scientific terms, light always wins. Many people think that there is always a cosmic struggle between light and dark, that they are equal in power and balance. However, a simple candle's light can show the truth. When you light a candle, the darkness that once existed in that candle's space is gone. There is no struggle, and the light wins every single time. Now, a single candle might not light up a large room well enough to read a book, but if you are in a large, dark room and a candle is lit - you will see it. Think about that for a moment.

If you are in one corner of a dark room, so dark that you can't see your hand in front of your face, and someone lights a candle in the opposite corner - you will see it. You might still be standing in shadows in your corner, but you will be able to see your hand because the light comes to you. Of course, we aren't surprised by that, but there are theological correlations to be made. The candlelight completely shines in the space where it is lit - darkness doesn't prevent it from being seen. In addition, it radiates out to meet you where you are. You can see the light from your darkened corner.

Christ came as the Light of the World. There is no moment where He shines just 50% of the time. Where His light is, darkness is no more. And you can see His light even when it appears you are standing in shadows. If you look, you can see that His light is shining into your life, even when it seems that everything is still dark. The Light of Christ is His love, which permeates the earth.

This Christmas Eve, pay attention to the light. When all the lights are extinguished, you will still be able to see the flame of the Christ candle. And then the light of the Christ candle is used to light the other candles. The light of Christ is passed from person to person until the entire space is filled with His presence. The beauty of the family of faith is found in the passing, receiving, and illumination of the light of Christ.

Seek out the light of Christ each day. Begin with a devotional time - reading the Bible, St. Luke's daily devotional or other readings, and a time of prayer. Bask in His light so that you can radiate it to the darkened areas of the world. For the initial beauty of the light of the Christ Candle is exponentially multiplied when it is shared with others in the room. So too, the love of Christ becomes infinitely more beautiful as it is shared.

Again, Jesus spoke to them, saying, *"I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* John 8:12

Rev. Wendy Lambert, Senior Executive Pastor

Christmas Eve

CANDLELIGHT SERVICES

Downtown Campus

222 N.W. 15th Street, Oklahoma City, 73103

Noon Traditional Candlelight Service

2 p.m. Traditional Candlelight Service

4:30 p.m. Family Candlelight Service

6:30 p.m. Traditional Candlelight Service

Edmond Campus

900 N. Sooner Road, Edmond, OK 73134

11 a.m. Family Candlelight Service

4 p.m. Family Candlelight Service

6:30 p.m. Traditional Candlelight Service

11 p.m. Midnight Candlelight Service

Local Television Services

10:35 p.m. News Channel 4

Online Campus

All services available at
stlukesokc.org/live

STLUKESOKC.ORG/CHRISTMASEVE



Downtown Campus

222 NW 15th St.
Oklahoma City, OK 73103
(405) 232-1371

Edmond Campus

900 N. Sooner Rd.
Edmond, OK 73034
(405) 285-2002

Online Campus

All services are
available live at
stlukesokc.org/online

stlukesokc.org