THE MOST IMPORTANT GIFT



St. Luke's METHODIST CHURCH | 2025 ADVENT DEVOTIONALS

Special Advent Events

Our campuses are ready for the most wonderful time of year with events for your family and friends to enjoy. For more details on these and additional Advent events go to stlukesokc.org/Christmas.

Nov. 30 Family Advent Festival ..... 11 a.m. Downtown
Nov. 30 Family Advent Festival ..... 4 p.m. Edmond
Dec. 7 Christmas Worship Concert ..... 9 and 11 a.m. Edmond
Dec. 7 Children's Christmas Musical ..... 12:30 p.m. Downtown
Dec. 7 Church Christmas Party ..... 5 p.m. Edmond
Dec. 10 A Symphony of Christmas Concert ..... 7 p.m. Downtown
Dec. 14 LifeLight Christmas Worship Concert ..... 9:30 a.m. Downtown
Dec. 14 Children's Christmas Musical ..... 3 p.m. Edmond
Dec. 14 Church Christmas Party ..... 5 p.m. Downtown
Dec. 21 Angel of Hope Worship Service ..... 5 p.m. Downtown
Dec. 24 Christmas Eve Candlelight Services
Downtown Campus: Noon, 2, 4:30, and 6:30 p.m.
Edmond Campus: 11 a.m., 4, 6:30 and 11 p.m.
Online Campus: All services available at stlukesokc.org/live
Dec. 24 Christmas Eve Worship - TV Special ..... 10:35 p.m. KFOR-4
Dec. 25 Christmas Eve Worship - TV Special ..... 5 a.m. KFOR-4



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.

Early this past summer, Marsha and I took a trip to Europe. One of the places we visited was Brussels, the capital of Belgium. The picturesque buildings were all beautifully lit at night, and they reminded me of the ceramic village scenes that people use to decorate at Christmas. What struck me was how much I liked seeing each building lit up at night.

There is something captivating about light in the darkness. It captures our attention and draws us in. Perhaps what isn't surprising is that a star was first to proclaim the birth of Jesus. The light of the star was probably so bright that it was visible long before nighttime and the magi had known to watch for the sign that would lead them to the King of the Jews. Many scholars believe that the magi who came from the east were descendants of the Jews who were taken into captivity by the Babylonians.

The first chapter of Daniel recounts the story of King Nebuchadnezzar laying siege to Jerusalem and sending the brightest young Jewish men to be instructed in the ways of wise men of his kingdom. God was with Daniel and the others and gave them wisdom beyond that of the Babylonians. It makes sense that God gave them insight to things that would matter to the Jewish people.

That wisdom would be passed down as part of the education of future wise men. Throughout the centuries, they were taught about the light and the importance of what it represented. How it must have thrilled them to finally see the star that would lead them to the King of the Jews. The light of the star was distinctive and probably caught the attention of all the people throughout the region - but the wise men understood what it meant.

Throughout the Christmas season, look for the light and see how it is most radiant in the darkness. From the lights on the church campuses, the homes that are decorated, to the lights on your Christmas tree - make time to appreciate the light that celebrates the Light of the World.

On Christmas Eve, I hope you are able to attend one of our Candlelight Services. Whether you worship with us online, in the Downtown Sanctuary, in the Edmond Worship Center, or as part of our television service - please be sure to have a candle to light. When it comes to the time of candle lighting, pay special attention to the light and what it represents. A baby born in Jerusalem is the Light of the World. Christ is the most important gift as it gives us the light we need to see; it gives us hope; and it shines in the darkness to remind us that we are not alone.

Dr. Bob Long, Senior Pastor

Monday, December 1

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree… It's that wonderful time of year again, time to visit the tree farm for our annual Christmas tree! Our family loves this tradition: the scent of fresh pine, the beautiful wreaths, and the joy of running through endless rows of fir trees.

On the first Sunday after Thanksgiving, we head out after church to pick the perfect real tree. By then, the air is crisp and chilly, and the tree farm always has hot chocolate and warm apple cider waiting for guests. Our boys absolutely love it!

This tradition prepares my heart for the season ahead. It's something Candace and I began before our boys were born, something we cherished together that naturally grew into a beloved family tradition. I love our boys' joyful cheers when we find our Christmas tree. Once it's chosen, the workers strap it to the top of the car, and off we go!

Getting the tree into the house is always an adventure, ha-ha! We clear space in the front room; we love for the tree to shine through our front window. We set the tree stand in place, with a towel underneath, and pour hot water in the base to warm the sap so the tree can drink and stay fresh as long as possible. The boys help however they can, they're wonderful little helpers!

Then comes the great tree wrestling match! We cut the twine, haul the tree off the car, and carry it inside. Our cats go wild sniffing it, and by the time it's standing tall, there's already a trail of needles from the driveway to the front room.

I'll usually put on some old Christmas vinyl records, or Candace plays carols on the piano, I play too, just not quite as well as she does! These moments are the heart of who we are. Together, we prepare our home for the joy of Christmas, setting up a decorated evergreen tree as a symbol of everlasting life and hope in the darkness of winter, and placing a star on top reminds us to tell our boys the story of the star over Bethlehem.

God bless you and your family as you live out your old traditions and make new traditions. May the joy and warmth of the season find its way into your heart, and may you be a beacon of hope and love for those who need it most. Merry Christmas!

Logan Fish, Director of Arts and Edmond Hospitality

Advent means the arrival; it is the time before Christmas that leads to when we receive the most important gift, Jesus Christ, on Christmas Day.

Our society loves data. We love to quantify almost everything, including countdowns to certain events. Each and every one of us who has a cellphone has a hand-held calendar. My family has calendars, upon calendars. I love my digital calendar on my phone, which alerts me to activities, events, and things I need to remember, which happens daily. I also love my paper planner that I have on my desk. I love being able to write deadlines down and look at the upcoming months when planning events for St. Luke's. Our children at school are taught basic data tracking in preschool and kindergarten. They learn the days of the week, followed by the months of the year. They are taught to plan for assignments, upcoming activities, and holiday breaks.

In Christian life, we have a few large events we count down to each year. Christmas is one of the biggest celebrations of the year. We celebrate the birth of our Savior. We have an entire month that is devoted to preparing for the ultimate birthday party of the year.

One of the easiest ways for kids to count down to the arrival of Christ is with an Advent Calendar or a paper chain. When I was growing up, we didn't have all the fancy Advent calendars we have now. If you search Advent Calendar on Google, a plethora of Advent Calendars pop up. Any kind you can think of. Some are for kids, some are marketed for families, and some are strictly just for adults. These Advent Calendars may include small gifts; some include small books, and some include getting to build a small Lego creation each day. The variety of calendars is so interesting and intriguing, but they all have one thing in common. They each provide a tangible way to count down to Jesus Christ's birth.

I really enjoy making an Advent paper chain and try to include this craft during our annual Advent Festival at the Edmond Campus to kick off the Advent season. It is enjoyable to have an active visual of your paper chain or Advent calendar and see how each day, we are closer to celebrating the King of Kings' birth.

The month of December always has so many events, activities and to-do lists that we all try to complete and attend in a timely manner. Take time each day in December to remember why we have all these celebrations and activities that we tend to get overwhelmed by. Jesus will be born. This sweet, innocent babe is the reason for the season.

Jocelyn Morgan, Director of Children's Ministry Edmond Campus

Wednesday, December 3

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. - Romans 15:13

Losing a job, going through a divorce, facing health problems, or witnessing someone you love struggle with illness can all make you feel hopeless. When we experience traumatic events, which everyone does, it's easy to lose sight of the hope we have in Christ. Focusing on our problems instead of on God's presence and support can lead to despair. I've been there both ways: trying to handle things alone or leaning on God for help. Trust me, it's much easier with His help! The scripture above from Paul's letter to the Romans reminds us that when we lean on Him or trust Him, we will experience joy and peace. When we have joy and peace, we overflow with hope. Wouldn't it be a wonderful Christmas gift to yourself to experience joy, peace, and hope?

We're entering Advent, the four weeks leading up to Jesus' arrival. In the Old Testament, Immanuel means God with us. The New Testament sees this as a prophecy fulfilled by Jesus. So, Jesus is God with us, He is our Immanuel!

How can we experience this hope and God's presence? It starts with intentional time spent with Immanuel. A daily routine of prayer and scripture reading is a wonderful way to begin. When we draw near to Him, we will feel His joy and peace. Reading His word guides our decisions and offers words of comfort.

You may be facing something difficult right now! If that's the case, dive into His word and spend time in prayer. It truly is the best way to get through it. If you're not going through anything tough, celebrate God's goodness by spending time in His presence, giving thanks for His blessings, and enjoying His word.

Prayer: *Immanuel, thank you for your presence with me. I want to know You more deeply. Help me set aside time daily to be with You, and to experience joy, peace, and hope!* - Amen

Susan Meharg, Executive Assistant to the Executive Team

Preparing for Advent is a season of intentional waiting, a time when we align our hearts with God's purpose of sharing love and bringing hope to a world in need. For those of us entrusted with the care of children, especially in the unique environment of a Children's Center, these words are not just precious; they are our calling.

As the Executive Director of three centers, I understand that our mission extends beyond daily care. With children in our care for up to 11 hours a day, the opportunity to instill hope is profound. Our weekly Chapel services are a time dedicated to growing in our faith and helping the children understand the miraculous gift of the baby Jesus.

This is not just about decorating a tree or opening a calendar door. It's about spiritual readiness. It's about creating an environment where we have hope. How do we, as leaders and caregivers, prepare our own hearts so that we can share it with the children?

We must prioritize presence over perfection. In the busy rush of the season, our most valuable gift is our focused attention. Taking a moment each day to pray about the true meaning of Christ's birth allows us to be fully present for the children, modeling patience and grace.

The message of Jesus' birth is powerful, and we can use Advent as a time to retell the story with fresh eyes. In our centers, perhaps this means simple craft activities that emphasize the manger, the star, or the shepherds. These tactile experiences help young minds grasp the reality of God's love. Each activity, each lesson, is a purposeful act of bringing hope into their world.

We must remember our own "why." Why do we do this demanding work? We do it because we believe in the transformative power of God's love. Advent reminds us that hope is not a fleeting feeling; it is a person, Jesus Christ. Our focus is to give children an understanding of their inherent worth and the boundless love of their Creator.

Let this Advent be a season of intentional preparation. May your heart be filled with a renewed sense of purpose, making sure that the hope you bring to those around you is genuine, lasting, and reflects the true light of the world.

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

Friday, December 5

Many of you are likely familiar with Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages*. While I had heard of the concept in my adolescence, I really dove into the book 10 years ago during premarital counseling with my husband, Taylor. After completing the assessment, I wasn't surprised to learn that my love languages were words of affirmation and acts of service. Truly, just *tell* me that I'm doing a good job, and then take something off my plate to *show* me you appreciate how good a job I'm doing, and I'm a happy girl!

The surprise came in learning that my husband's primary love language was receiving gifts.

Gifts? Yikes! This was not my forte. I'd always seen gift-giving as practical at its best, frivolous at its worst. You want to get me a gift? Perfect, I'll send you a link to something I'd planned to buy for myself anyway. If I weren't already planning to buy it, then I likely don't need it and will struggle to find a place for it.

I remember one Valentine's Day, I'd noticed that Taylor's undershirts were starting to show signs of wear. I took my practical self to Nordstrom Rack, purchased two packs of white undershirts and a new pair of dress socks, wrapped them up, and gave them to my husband as a gift. The look on his face said it all. I'd made a grave mistake.

It was a few months later when Taylor's parents returned home from a trip that I really began to understand their tradition of gift-giving and the meaning behind it. They brought me back a beautiful bracelet from a vendor in the Cayman Islands. This wasn't something that I'd asked for, certainly not something I expressly needed, but still, I loved it. I could imagine them strolling along a row of shops and talking about each of their family members whom they cared for so dearly. That bracelet was selected just for me, as a way for them to tell me they'd thought of me while they were away.

As we move through this Advent season, I am working to focus my attention on the gift that was given to each of us when God sent His son to walk among us here on earth. That gift carries so much hope, as it brought with it the promise of life eternal for each of us.

Morgan Jones, Associate Director of Meals on Wheels Oklahoma City

Nikolaos of Myra was born on March 15 in the year 270 to a wealthy Christian family in modern-day Turkey. We believe both of his parents passed away when he was still a young boy. It was his uncle, a bishop in the Church, who raised him. As a young adult, he would spend some time in the Holy Land before returning home. He had a deep devotion to his faith and was eventually named a bishop like his uncle.

Though he had received a great inheritance from his parents, he chose not to just sit back and live an easy life. Instead, he saw this as an opportunity to use what was given to him to be a blessing in the world. Nikolaos started to develop a reputation as someone who lived his life trying to take care of those who couldn't care for themselves, particularly children and orphans. He loved giving gifts to kids and became well known for it.

Nikolaos lived such a life of kindness towards others that he was later declared a saint. We know him today as "Saint Nicholas." His life of kindness inspired others to participate in that kindness as well. The tradition of giving gifts to children soon became a Christmas tradition that we still carry on to this day.

During this Advent season, we are at work preparing our hearts and lives to receive the most important gift God has ever given us. It is because of that gift of God's love, given to us in the form of a baby in Bethlehem, that we know hope. I believe the reason we still carry on the tradition of giving gifts at Christmas, nearly 1,700 years after Saint Nicholas, is because there is something about giving to others that does our souls a lot of good. It helps prepare our hearts for Christmas.

This Advent, take the time to find an opportunity to bless someone's life. Give a gift to someone who isn't expecting it and can't pay you back. Be a blessing, not because of what you will receive in return, but because it's the right thing to do. It's one of the best ways to prepare your heart to receive the most important gift from God.

Rev. Josh Attaway, CFO and Edmond Campus Pastor

Lord, help me spread Your fragrance wherever I go. Flood my soul with Your Spirit and life. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that my life may be only a radiance of Yours. Shine through me, and be so in me that every soul I know will feel Your presence in my soul. Lord, help me spread Your fragrance wherever I go. Let them look up and see no longer me, but only You. Amen. We recently performed a song using this text at the Edmond Campus. I found myself reading the words over and over; they were so beautiful and so poignant. I was especially touched by the idea of letting your life be a "radiance" of God.

It reminded me of a social media page I follow called SB Mowing. This is a lawn care service out of Wichita, KS and the founder, Spencer, started mowing lawns with his brother when they were kids. He wanted to do something to help people, so he offers free lawn care for people with overgrown lawns. Spencer started making YouTube videos of these lawn transformations, and his viewership grew and grew. He now has over 40 million followers across his social media platforms.

A few months ago, Spencer had an interaction with an elderly lady named Beth. Beth lives by herself and has struggled with her health. Her lawn was overgrown, so Spencer knocked on her door and offered to mow it for free. Beth was overwhelmed with gratitude, but while they were talking, Spencer noticed that Beth's house needed much more than lawn care. There were repairs needed, and with Beth's declining health, she needed accessibility updates to allow her to access certain parts of her house. After posting the video, people kept asking what they could do to help Beth. Spencer set up a GoFundMe page to allow people to contribute, and today that page has raised $900,000. Spencer helped her get improvements started on her house and helped set up a trust for Beth. Their relationship has continued, and Spencer has kept in touch with Beth, visiting her in the hospital, and continuing to make sure she knows that she is loved.

When Spencer first told Beth that people had heard her story and wanted to help her repair her house, she started crying and asked him, "Why?" He told her, "Well, your community just came together and wanted to help you out." Much like Spencer and his community gave this gift to Beth, when we receive God's grace, we sometimes wonder, "why?" The beauty of our faith is that we know God's gift of love for us is free. We don't have to earn it, but we are called to share that love with others, to radiate His love through the way we treat others.

This Advent season, let us prepare our hearts for the birth of Jesus by seeking to spread the fragrance and the essence of God in all that we do. "Let them look up and see no longer me, but only You."

Dr. Candace Fish, Director of Traditional Worship, Edmond Campus

This Advent is a new experience for our family. It will be the first Christmas that our Lambert family Christmas doubles to become the Lambert and Gono family Christmas. The same number of people will be there, but since our daughter's marriage to Bryan Gono, she has become Hannah Gono, and Bryan has moved from Hannah's fiancé to our son-in-law. The old wedding adage of not losing a daughter but gaining a son is true, but doesn't fully capture the depth of the change. Before, we were connected to Bryan through Hannah, but now, we are all legally connected directly to him. Chris and I have a son-in-law; Brooks has a brother-in-law. Because Hannah and Bryan fell in love with one another, we all have gained a new relationship.

That is the gift of God's love. Love is not a diminishing entity that divides or subtracts; people aren't forced to choose sides or be excluded by love. The very nature of love is to grow. Love expands as it unites people and creates new relationships.

The baby in Bethlehem was born as the living representation of God's love. Angels proclaimed His birth, shepherds were invited to see Him, and wise men came to worship Him. From a manger in Judea, the gift of love has spanned the world and 2,000 years of history.

One of the things that Hannah wanted for her wedding was to have her family walk her down the aisle. And so, with Chris on her right and Brooks and I on the left, we escorted Hannah to meet Bryan at the front. I loved the symbolism of Hannah becoming part of Bryan's family and Bryan becoming part of our family. The wedding was for Bryan and Hannah to be married, but it also highlighted the numerous family and friend connections that were blessed through the union. Love doesn't remain static; it continues to grow beyond its borders to bless others.

This Advent, celebrate the most important gift of love, the gift that keeps on giving.

Rev. Wendy Lambert, Senior Executive Pastor

Tuesday, December 9

Christmas is the season when thoughts often turn to gift-giving. Our family is scattered across the country, literally. My son and his sweet family (with our two precious grandkids) are in Washington state. My awesome parents and family are in Oklahoma, while my husband's wonderful family is in the New York City metro area. We do our very best to be part of everyone's lives, but gift giving can be overwhelming for this crew. I'm always grateful when any one of them takes the guesswork out and tells me specifically what they would like.

I think of God's immense family spread across the world. And yet, He was able to give one gift that fit each of us perfectly: the gift of His love through His son, Jesus. No matter what we are navigating in our lives, illness, raising kids, job loss, or something else, the gift of God's peaceful love remains constant. It is available to us anytime and on any day.

Before Jesus' birth, I wonder if anyone reached out to God with a specific request for the gift of a baby born in Bethlehem? My guess is no. His was an unsolicited gift because He saw our need. God knew this gift would bring peace and hope in a world filled with darkness. He offered us the most important gift we didn't even know we needed.

St. Luke's mission statement is clear, simple, and incredibly powerful: Sharing God's Love and Bringing Hope to the World. Each one of us has the power to reflect God's gift of unlimited love every day. That is exactly what Jesus modeled for us. He shared love and kindness with those He encountered in moments, such as the story of the Good Samaritan and washing of the disciples' feet, a beautiful and humble act of servant leadership.

He gave us the blueprint to follow when we come across the one who doesn't move as quickly as we would like or the driver in front of us who sits a little too long at a green light. If we slow down, take a deep breath, and truly see the person, we can be the ones to give the gift of God's love.

The power of our actions is mighty. As we journey through Advent, let us be the ones who share love with and bring hope to each person we come across.

Tisha Tate Garcia, Hospitality Team

The summer between my senior year in high school and my freshman year at TCU, I was invited to serve as a counselor with the Texas Boys Choir on their trip to Mexico for summer camp. The camp took place at the University of the Americas, located in San Andrés Cholula, near Puebla. The weekdays were spent in rehearsals and workshops, but on the weekends, the camp counselors got to travel to different sites and villages. The villages were fun to explore and buy souvenirs. On one such trip, we visited an onyx factory with a nice gift shop. I remember purchasing a small elephant carved from white onyx stone. It was such a unique piece, and I enjoyed having it on display in my home.

Two years later, I was appointed organist at the First Christian Church in Arlington, TX, and was excited to be on a church staff and attend my first staff Christmas Party. The staff memo stated it would be a White Elephant gift exchange. Not knowing at the time what that was and thinking it unusual, I was relieved that I did indeed have a white elephant to exchange. I nicely wrapped my treasured white onyx elephant souvenir from Mexico and took it to the party. The recipient of my gift was our church's building and maintenance supervisor, an elderly gentleman from China. He was ecstatic to unwrap an actual white elephant, and the rest of the staff humorously educated me on the real meaning of the gift exchange (at least I got the used gift correct). Many white elephant gift exchanges involve regifted objects and sometimes give the receiver a nice gift to reuse.

Every Christmas, Christians around the world are given the opportunity to "regift" the greatest gift we could ever possess. Take time this Advent Season to not only give, but also receive the Greatest Gift given to us by God: His Son, Jesus, Savior of the World. On Christmas Day, many will open gifts from family and friends. We will also have joy in giving gifts as well. The excitement of gift giving and exchanging fades after time, but the Greatest Gift stays with us forever. It is a gift that is just as joyful to receive as it is to share with others. It never fades, and it never has to be returned. To quote the glorious oratorio of *Handel's Messiah*: *"For unto us a child is born. Unto us a Son is given."*

Robert Fasol, Organist and Choirmaster

Thursday, December 11

There are so many things to look forward to as Christmas and Advent approach. Many of us will wait excitedly at the front door for distant family to arrive. Some will find themselves entranced with the smell of food and desserts that show up only at the holidays. Others can barely wait for the songs of Christmas to begin as soon as Halloween is over. And most children have already written and are waiting to mail their list to Santa, hoping to receive most, if not all, their presents on Christmas Day.

Yet, as Christians, we see Advent as more than music, food, and presents. We see this as the season of hopeful anticipation. It is the opportunity to rejoice and celebrate the coming of Christ in the form of a child into our world. It is the quiet confidence that God has come and will come again. It is the belief that the child who transformed the world will transform our lives. Thus, we show up to services each week believing that God will speak into our circumstances, doing His life-changing work in us.

That was the case for Israel. They had waited for 400 silent years, the time between the Old and New Testaments, for God to speak once again. The wait was long and arduous. I'm certain there were times of question and doubt during the silence. Multiple generations had come and gone since God had last communicated with His prophet Malichi. Now He was inexplicably speaking to a young teenage girl (Mary) and would shortly begin to proclaim the words of repentance through the voice of a 30-year-old man (John the Baptist). All of this seemed strange, I'm sure, but God was once again speaking in odd and unique ways.

It seems like God always uses the least likely of people and the most interesting moments in preparing the way for the season of hopeful anticipation. I'm confident that is still the case. God still speaks and proclaims in ways that we never dreamed. As you prepare for the season of Advent, I hope you are preparing for God to do something extraordinary in and with you. Who knows, you may be the voice of hopeful anticipation for someone. Or it could be that just when you least expect it, God would choose to speak to you.

I want to encourage you, don't just wait for family to arrive and holiday niceties to unfold like years past. This year, look and listen for the voice of the God who still speaks even after all these years. Hopeful anticipation is speaking into your life and mine once again.

Dr. Scott Peterson, Pastor of Facility and Stewardship

I've always loved Christmas. The lights, the music, and all the little traditions that make this season so special. But one of my favorite parts has always been the gifts. I love finding the perfect present, wrapping it carefully, and watching someone's face light up as they open it.

Growing up, my parents made Christmas feel magical. It wasn't just about what was under the tree, but the feeling in our home, the warmth, the laughter, the excitement of being together. There was a sense of wonder that went beyond the lights and music, something deeper that I couldn't quite name as a kid. Now, I realize that what made it feel so special was love. The love my parents showed us reflected the same love that began in a manger, the love of Jesus Himself.

Every year, I'm reminded that all our giving and celebrating point back to something far greater. The reason we give is because God gave first. Long before there were Christmas trees or stockings, God gave the most extraordinary gift the world has ever known, His Son, Jesus.

Jesus didn't arrive in shiny paper or colorful bows. He came wrapped in swaddling cloth, laid in a manger, humble and small. Yet through Him, God offered us everything we could ever need: love, grace, forgiveness, and eternal life. The arrival of Jesus reminds us that God is with us. He didn't stay distant or detached; He stepped into our world to bring hope and healing. His presence reminds us that God is still active in our lives today.

That truth changes how we live. The story of Christmas inspires us to reflect God's grace and love to others, to live with peace when the world feels divided, to choose joy when life feels uncertain, and to offer hope to those who need it most.

That same magic I felt as a child, the warmth, joy, and love, is really the light of Christ shining through. And that's the greatest gift of all.

Schuyler Henderson, Edmond Campus Youth Director

Saturday, December 13

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." - Luke 2: 10-11

My favorite holiday has always been Christmas. I'll admit, when I was young, it was my favorite for material reasons. Now, as an adult, I truly just enjoy the beauty of the season: the music, the lights, the sweet treats, the feeling in the air around this time, and the joy on my kids' faces as they experience the holiday.

As a family, we have always had several Christmas movies that we are required to watch throughout the season. The one at the top of our list is the classic *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. In the movie, Charlie Brown is frustrated with the overwhelming commercialism of the Christmas season, and the story shows him trying to figure out what the holiday really means. It comes to the point where he finally throws up his hands, saying, "I guess I really don't know what Christmas is all about," and that's when his friend, Linus, calmly steps in and shares the story of Jesus' birth.

I'm sure we can all sympathize with Charlie Brown's frustration. I know when I sit back and really think about it, there have been several holidays in the past when I have allowed myself to get consumed by the world's presentation of Christmas, rather than focusing on the true gift that was given to us around this time 2,000 years ago and the incredible meaning that gift holds for us.

God essentially came down to earth in the form of an infant and lived amongst us, teaching us how to live faithfully and providing the humble and meek example of what we are called to be in this life. The event of Jesus' birth laid the foundation for our salvation by giving us a Savior and providing the means in which we can have eternal life with God and never be separated from Him. That is ultimately the gift, the blessing of eternal life with Him.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke detail the beautiful event of Jesus' birth, and shamefully, I don't think I have ever read those accounts during the actual Christmas season. So, I am going to challenge myself to take some quiet time each day to read and study those scriptures throughout Advent, and I hope that you will as well. I pray that we will all feel closer to Him during this busy season.

Jessie Parker, Director of Childcare Administration

When I was about six years old, I remember wanting one thing for Christmas more than anything: a Baby Go Bye-Bye Doll! To me, that doll seemed like the best gift ever, and I talked a lot about getting it. I am certain that I saw a commercial where Baby Go Bye-Bye rides in this glorious Volkswagen Beetle, and she waves and moves and rides around in circles and figure eights all over the place.

I know I launched quite a campaign to make sure my parents knew I wanted this very special, very particular gift. I wrote my annual list to Santa, outlining my worthiness and listing Baby Go Bye-Bye as my first priority for presents. I know I talked a lot about this doll with my mom and dad, too. Most of all, I imagined all the joy and fun she would bring if I could just get this one gift on Christmas day.

Despite making my hope known, I was still surprised and overjoyed when my sister and I ran down to the living room and saw Baby Go Bye-Bye sitting in her car right under the Christmas tree. I remember her pink and white outfit, her little ponytail, and most of all, the car that allowed you to manually configure a driving pattern so she could ride all over the room. That doll truly brought hours of fun.

Eventually, though, she found her way to a box in the closet or up in the attic, and I no doubt moved on to another treasured toy. I recently found her again in a box of things my mom had kept. I put her on a shelf in my house, along with the car. It looks well-loved, and even though I need to pare down and get rid of things at my house, I can't bring myself to toss out Baby Go Bye-Bye.

Do you have a Christmas gift memory like that? Most of us can remember a tangible something that we really wanted, and hopefully, we also have a memory of that dream being fulfilled when we received that special gift.

As we lead up to Christmas Day, I pray that you will hope for, campaign for, and dream about the best gift of all. Then remind yourself that we received that gift in the form of a baby born long ago, sent to be a tangible reminder of love, hope, and joy. The gift of Jesus truly is the best gift and one that doesn't ever wear out, need to be boxed up and tossed out; it's one we can keep in our hearts forever.

Lori Hall, Executive Director of Missions

Monday, December 15

During this second game of the baseball World Series this year, the Jonas Brothers were asked to perform between the fifth and sixth innings. It was all a part of the Stand Up To Cancer tribute in which players, coaches, fans, and even the Jonas Brothers held up signs honoring loved ones who have had cancer. Almost two million Americans will be diagnosed with cancer this year, and most of us have been affected in one way or another by this terrible disease.

Major League Baseball is a partner with Stand Up To Cancer, which raises money for cancer research. All this sounds like a very worthy cause for the MLB to showcase during the World Series. Unfortunately, not all fans saw it that way. Many complained on social media about the Jonas Brothers performing during a World Series game. One fan said, "Sorry, this isn't the Super Bowl. There is no halftime show. So ridiculous." Another person wrote, "You stopped the game for a performance?" It's hard for me to tell whether these fans didn't understand the message or just didn't care. Helping to find cures for cancer is the best gift we could support.

It reminds me of the birth of Jesus and the message the angels sang about that first Christmas Eve… *Be not afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people.* The angels sang of good news… the greatest gift the world could receive had just been delivered in Bethlehem. But many people either didn't understand or rejected the message outright. King Herold wanted to destroy the child who was coming into the world.

How often do we not take the time to truly understand the messages we are hearing? Are we too preoccupied to really listen and understand when we hear the good news. This Advent Season, don't be a grinch when you are presented with a gift that might change your life for the better and perhaps even change the world. Make sure you unwrap the gift and accept the love that came down at Christmas.

Rev. Dave Poteet, Pastor of Congregational Care

When I think of Christmas and gifts, I always think of my mom. She loves giving, all year round. There was a time when she'd show up with something for me whenever we were together; it became a running joke, she was so consistent! For Christmas, she always makes sure everyone is accounted for and that everyone receives an equal number of gifts. It brings her so much joy to give to others. Her abundant giving is never about obligation or expectation; it's purely about love.

Sometimes, the beauty of her generosity makes me want to scramble to do better. I'd think, "I should've done more," or "What I gave doesn't measure up." Though I never feel guilty because of her, I was putting that pressure on myself. It's something I've thought about in comparison with our relationship with God.

God gave us the most important gift of all: Jesus. Not because we earned Him, or could offer something in return, but simply because He loves us. John 3:17 says, *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.* The gift of Jesus is pure grace, freely given, with joy.

Still, we can sometimes respond the way I do with my mom's gifts. We think, "How can I ever live up to this?" or "I need to do more to deserve this kind of love." But those thoughts miss the heart of the gift. They keep us from experiencing the fullness of God's love. Jesus didn't come to add pressure to our lives. He came to bring peace, joy, and rest for our souls.

There's no expectation to match God's generosity, no obligation to earn His love. Jesus is a gift we're invited to receive, not repay. He already cares for you just the way you are. When we let go of that pressure and simply receive Him with open hands, we experience the true beauty of Christmas. Like any good gift, the joy isn't in proving we're worthy of it; it's in allowing it to bless us, change us, and remind us we're loved.

So, this Christmas, I invite you to let go of any pressure to be good enough or to prove anything to God. He already delights in you. His greatest joy is simply to give, to offer you Jesus, the most important gift of all.

Prayer: *God, thank You for the gift of Jesus. Help us to receive Your love without pressure or fear. Free us from the need to measure up, and fill our hearts with the joy, peace, and grace that only You can give. In your precious name. - Amen.*

Ashley Carr Soter, Director of Young Adult Ministries

Wednesday, December 17

The Christmas season is filled with gifts. We make gift lists, we shop for or even create gifts, we wrap gifts, we give gifts, and we open gifts. We also find many ways to celebrate these gifts, in our family gatherings, our get-togethers with friends, and in our times of worship at church. We know that not every gift in our lives can be wrapped up and tied with a bow. Many of the gifts we experience from others are the gifts of presence and companionship, of acceptance and understanding, or of comfort and healing. And truly the best gift of all is the love of God, through Christ Jesus, our Lord. God's love shows us grace, gives us life, and leads us to purpose.

In the gospel of John, there's a story about an interaction between Jesus and a woman from Samaria that He meets at a well. Jesus asks her to get Him a drink from the well, and her initial response is to acknowledge their differences, as Jews and Samaritans did not associate with one another. Jesus then responds, *"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."* (John 4:10)

The woman didn't know or understand just yet who Jesus was, but Jesus was about to bring a huge revelation of truth to her. Of course, the woman is intrigued by this idea of this living water, a water that would quench her thirst in such a way that she wouldn't have to continue to come back to this well. Jesus knows about her past and her life, and the woman is amazed and acknowledges that Jesus must be a prophet. Their dialogue in this scripture passage ends with Jesus sharing that He is the Messiah that she and others have been waiting for. What an amazing message for this woman to hear!

This story shows us the grace and acceptance of God through Jesus' interaction and revelation with this woman, whom many others would not have wanted to associate with, much less reveal something so amazing about who Jesus is. This message is available to anyone and everyone. And the good news is that Jesus is the living water who refreshes our spirit and gives us eternal life and wholeness in a way that nothing else on this earth can do.

John continues the woman's story, showing that she goes and tells others about Jesus. Many believed because of her testimony, and they also sought Jesus out and urged Him to stay with them a couple more days. Jesus did, and many more became believers in knowing that Jesus truly was the Savior. The gift of love and grace gave purpose to this woman. It led her to become an evangelist to tell others her story and to share the life-giving truth of Jesus, the Messiah.

God's love shows us grace, gives us life, and leads us to purpose. As you reflect on this most important gift, may you also experience grace, drink from the living water, and share the story of who Jesus is and what He has done for you with many others. Let this season of Christmas be filled with giving thanks for all of the gifts that God has given you.

Amy Givens, Director of Youth Ministry and Discipleship

As Christmas approaches, our attention naturally shifts to the countless gifts under the tree, the anticipation, the wrapping paper, and the joy of seeing a loved one open something special. Yet, even amidst the seasonal sparkle, we know the real story centers on a single, unmatched gift: the infant King, Jesus, born in Bethlehem. This gift is not just historically significant; it is the ultimate expression of God's profound, unwavering love and grace for us. But what difference should receiving this greatest gift make in the way we live the other 364 days of the year?

The Christmas story inspires us because it is fundamentally a story of divine, unmerited generosity. God didn't wait for us to earn His favor; He gave His Son freely, while we were still distant. This is grace in its purest form. When we truly grasp this astonishing gift, that the Creator of the universe humbled Himself and stepped into humanity for us, it should elicit an overwhelming response of gratitude and joy.

This is why I find it so jarring to reflect on a survey I once read, where people who grew up in church cited the dour, humorless attitude of Christians as a main reason they stopped attending. Dour? How can those who have received the greatest gift ever offered be characterized as anything but joyful?

That perception stands in stark contrast to the life we share here at St. Luke's. Whether you are at the Downtown, Edmond, or Online/TV campus, joy is visible and infectious. You walk into our lobbies and immediately see people genuinely laughing, visiting, and connecting. When you see our teams volunteering for Meals on Wheels or serving at the Community Market, they do so with smiles and enthusiasm. This visible, year-round love for neighbor and active service is exactly why so many people are drawn to become part of the St. Luke's family, because our joyful community is the clearest evidence of the gift at work.

The story of Christmas empowers us to live a life that perfectly reflects God's grace because joy is the natural overflow of gratitude. We are not called to be grim; we are called to be generous, loving, and grateful. The way we treat others, the laughter we share, the service we offer, all of it becomes a visible, tangible response to the grace we received in that manger long ago. This Christmas, let us continue to be a community known not for being dour, but for overflowing with the light and love of Christ, proving year after year that we understand the depth of our eternal gift.

Chris Lambert, Director of Meals on Wheels, Oklahoma City

Friday, December 19

So, here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life - and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. - Romans 12:1-2 The Message Bible

As we enter the Christmas season, there are no more appropriate, challenging, and prophetic words than these: *Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.* The season of Christmas is the one holiday when we are at greatest risk of adjusting to the culture… letting our culture dictate our calendars, our stress levels, our budgets, and even the unrealistic expectations of what Christmas should look and feel like. We are bombarded with ads that tell us: if you buy this or do that, you are guaranteed to have the perfect Christmas. And if you are at a loss as to what to buy, with only a few clicks of the mouse, you can go online and find thousands of sites, all designed to help you find that perfect gift that will assure a perfect Christmas. They promise: if you buy one of our gifts, you will put a smile on the face of that special someone.

Our culture places a lot of pressure on us to make the Christmas season perfect, almost like something out of a Norman Rockwell painting, but the reality is most of our Christmases are probably closer to the one portrayed in the movie *Christmas Vacation* starring Chevy Chase. It's a parody about the false expectations that are often built around the traditional family Christmas experience. Many of us probably identify with the character Clark Griswold, who does everything within his control to give his family a perfect Christmas. From a road rage Christmas Tree incident to wrestling with strands of Christmas lights that don't work, the Griswolds continue to face experiences that cause many to think: "Been there, done that!"

As a parent, I remember trying every year to have everything just right. I wanted our children to experience a wonderful Christmas. Of course, I went overboard because I wanted them to have something I didn't experience growing up. While I still struggle, I've learned that it's impossible to have the perfect Christmas, because the most important thing about Christmas isn't creating something perfect; it's celebrating the most important gift: Immanuel, God with us. God became one of us, taking the form of a baby named Jesus. There are many gifts that Jesus brings into our life, but personally, the promise of His presence with us in every season of life, during every difficult challenge, is the greatest gift, the most important gift. May you experience the joy of His presence.

Rev. Linda Harker, Pastor of Connection

I am the Type A-Prepared Mom. I have extra clothes, wipes, snacks, water bottles, first-aid kits, you name it. I plan every day down to the minute. Birthday parties are planned to the smallest detail, and Christmas lists are pre-planned by October. I write everything down in a running note and reminders in my phone. With two children, there just is no other way to survive the never-ending busy season.

Advent is such a busy season, compounded by the stress of producing the perfect Christmas. As the Prepared Mom, I lean into being the one who orchestrates flawless experiences, from coordinated Christmas cards to a perfectly decorated home. My energy is spent on managing the external: the gifts, the schedule, the aesthetic. This pursuit, although driven by a desire for celebration and fun, can ultimately leave us and our families feeling exhausted and empty.

Advent is a sacred invitation to switch our focus from external perfection to internal preparation. It's not about creating the perfect holiday but preparing our hearts for the perfect Gift. This practice of Advent is less about what we do and more about what God is doing within us.

As the Type A-Prepared Mom, I have been asking myself how I can practice and prepare for Advent. Instead of checking off a list of holiday tasks, I can focus on simple, intentional activities that draw my heart closer to God.

First, practice silence. In a season filled with constant noise, from jingles to social media, intentionally create moments of quiet. During dinner, before bed, or while driving, turn off the distractions and talk about the biblical story of Christmas. I can ask my children what they are most excited about and gently guide the conversation back to the reason for the season.

Second, embrace scripture. Instead of a daily dash to open a calendar window, start a simple Advent devotion. Hang a paper chain with daily Bible verses and read one together as you prepare for bed. This simple ritual reminds everyone of God's unfolding promise.

Third, let go of the pressure. The world pushes unreasonable expectations for the holidays, but Advent invites us to release them. If the wreath is a day late or the decor is less than perfect, it's okay. Focus on cultivating your family's hearts, not just the house. Your children will remember your peaceful presence far more than a perfect presentation.

This Advent, let's trade the stress of the Type A-Prepared Mom for the peace of a waiting heart. Your practice can become a light for others, showing them that true preparation is not in the busyness, but in the quiet, hopeful waiting.

Mandi Colman, Director of St. Luke's Children's Center, Downtown Campus

Sunday, December 21

If you've ever seen the movie *Miss Congeniality,* you might remember the moment when all the pageant contestants give the same predictable answer to the question, "What is the one most important thing our society needs?" And with a bright smile, they all respond, "World peace!"

It's a funny and iconic moment because it highlights how often we talk about peace without really understanding what it means or where it comes from. In the movie, world peace sounds like a nice wish, but not something anyone truly expects to see.

At Christmas, though, we celebrate the arrival of someone who made that idea, real peace, possible. In Luke, when Jesus was born, the angels announced, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.*

That baby in the manger is more than a symbol of peace; He *is* peace itself. Jesus didn't come to give us temporary calm. He came to bring peace between God and humanity, to restore what was broken, and to offer hope to a sick and drowning world.

Because of Jesus, we can have peace with God, we can have peace within ourselves, and we can work toward peace with others by loving people the way Christ loves us.

So, when we hear people talk about "world peace" this Christmas, maybe we can smile, just like in *Miss Congeniality*, but also remember that true and lasting peace isn't found in a pageant answer, a holiday slogan, or a quiet night. It's found in a person: Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Taylor Easttom, Downtown Campus, Director of Children's Ministries

A few years ago, during Advent, my dad and I volunteered for a wonderful organization called *Santa's Cause*. There are various ways to serve: donate gifts, "shop" using children's wish lists, or deliver the gifts. They have one requirement: volunteers must wear a Santa suit to deliver the toys. My dad had plenty of practice playing Santa when I was a child, so I didn't hesitate to sign him up for that job! When the day came, we picked up as many bags as our car would hold, got the address list for the families, and started on our journey to deliver these gifts.

We quickly discovered that these were children who probably wouldn't wake up to any gifts under the tree on Christmas morning. Or perhaps they didn't even have a tree at all. I was hit with an incredible realization of my own privilege and naivety. What an honor it was to offer a little joy in their lives, especially at such a special time of year.

We delivered the bags of gifts, one by one, driving to the different neighborhoods. At our last stop, we walked up to a seemingly vacant house, knocked on the door, but no answer. We waited quite a while, but then a neighbor explained they had to move a few weeks back and didn't have a forwarding address. It was so disappointing not to be able to deliver the final bag to this family. As we made our way back to the car, a man pulled up next to us in a truck. He noticed us delivering gifts to the neighbor kids and asked if we had any extras. He had three daughters at home whom he desperately wanted to give Christmas gifts to. My father and I looked at each other and exclaimed, "Yes!" simultaneously.

It's hard to describe the feeling of witnessing my own father's joy as he played Santa for three young girls, having raised three daughters himself. I watched him absolutely beam at their smiling faces, as they jumped up and down each time he pulled another item from the bag. The mother of the young girls stood next to me in total shock, tears in her eyes, thanking God for this miracle. We were all blessed beyond measure in that moment.

Of course, it's not about the presents or Santa or a tree. It's about God putting us in places to love others, a chance to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, to offer joy and hope, to share His love, our Father's love, with all.

Marji Shelton, Administrative Assistant, Communications

Tuesday, December 23

You are my beloved child; with you I am well pleased. - Mark 1:11

In the earliest centuries of the Church, Christians celebrated Christ's birth and baptism together in a single feast called *Theophany,* which means the "manifestation of God." It was a celebration of divine revelation: the Son of God made known in the flesh at Bethlehem and made known in the waters of the Jordan. Only later did the Church separate these mysteries into two feasts, Christmas (December 25) and Theophany (January 6), but their shared meaning remains, God revealed among us, and within us.

St. John Chrysostom, who served as the Archbishop of Constantinople in the late 4th century, was one of the most influential preachers and theologians of the early Church. Born in Antioch (modern-day Turkey/Syria), his name *Chrysostom* means "golden-mouthed," a title given for his extraordinary eloquence in preaching. In his preaching about the birth and baptism of Christ, he defended this unified celebration, saying, "At His birth, the star revealed Him to the Magi; at His baptism, the Father's voice revealed Him to the world. Then He was adored by wise men; now He is proclaimed by the Most High. What was seen in the flesh at Bethlehem is now declared openly in the Jordan, *'This is My beloved Son.'"*

His words show how the Nativity and Baptism were understood as two aspects of the same divine unveiling: one quiet and hidden, one public and cosmic, but both centered on Christ's sonship. The same Spirit that overshadowed Mary and descended upon Jesus now rests upon all who are baptized in Christ. Christmas, then, is not only the celebration of His coming into the world, it is the reminder that His life has entered ours.

When we look at the Christ child, we see more than a humble beginning; we see the One through whom our own sonship is revealed. The Father's voice over the manger is the same voice that echoes over us in baptism: "You are my beloved child." We, too, have been named and claimed as sons and daughters of the Most High.

So, this Advent, as we draw near to the cradle, let us also remember the waters. The light that shone over Bethlehem shines now in our hearts. The voice that spoke over the Jordan speaks still over us. In Christ's birth and baptism, this great manifestation of love, we find our identity restored. We are beloved, chosen, and made new in Him.

George Soter, Director of Young Adult Ministries

For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. - John 3:17

In December of 2017, Santa and Mrs. Claus paid a visit to our home, and our son Paul, Christa, Olivia, and Cameron were there with us. Olivia was seven, and Cameron was four. It was only a few days before Christmas and their excitement was high!

We were all thrilled that Santa and Mrs. Claus could clear their schedule to make time for us, and we prepared a few special "treats" for their visit. It was such a joy to make this memory with our family, truly a day to remember, as these two little ones were able to meet Santa and were asked about their Christmas wishes. Santa even brought a few small gifts that day, and Olivia and Cameron shared their treats for them to take along on their journey. It was a magical moment indeed!

Mrs. Claus told Santa that they were going to have to leave and go see some other children. Santa started saying goodbye and getting up. Olivia asked him, "Santa, could I tell you something?" Santa sat back down and said, "Yes, Olivia, come sit beside me so I can hear what you have to say." We could tell that something important was on her heart. She sat beside Santa and, in a very serious tone, Olivia asked, "Santa, you know, on Christmas Eve when we leave cookies on the counter for you, and you don't eat them all? Well, I sneak into the kitchen during the night and eat them... every one of them! And Santa, you remember when we leave chocolate milk for you, and you don't drink it all? Well, I drink the rest of the milk… all of it! I just can't help myself!" She looked into Santa's eyes to see what he would say. Santa was very kind and told her that he couldn't possibly eat and drink everything from every home that he visits, and assured her that it was OK. Olivia's whole demeanor changed, and it was a weight lifted off her shoulders to know that Santa still loved her. She gave him a big hug and a smile and said, "Thank you, Santa!"

When we think of all the things we have done, we fear that we have disappointed God, but then we realize that God has sent His Son, a baby to be born in Bethlehem, so we are reminded that we are still loved and forgiven. We come before the manger to get honest and experience the acceptance of our Heavenly Father. It feels good to be able to say, "Thank You, God."

Marsha Long, Director of Hospitality

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
5 a.m. Christmas Day News Channel 4

Online Campus

All services available at
stlukesokc.org/live

STLUKESOKC.ORG/CHRISTMASEVE

St. Luke's
METHODIST CHURCH

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