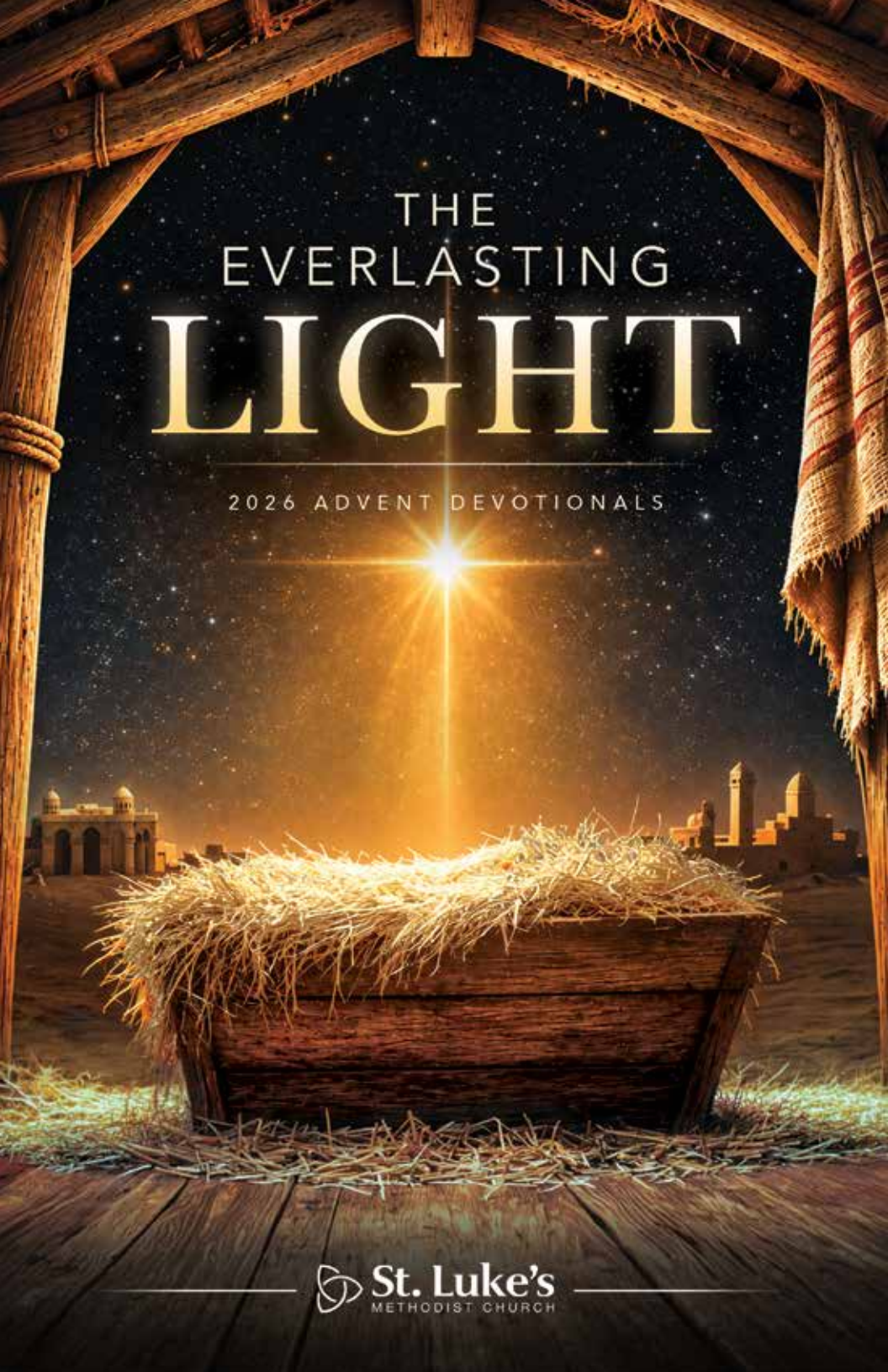
THE
EVERLASTING
LIGHT
2026 ADVENT DEVOTIONALS
St. Luke's
METHODIST CHURCH

Sunday, November 29

One of my favorite things to do during the Christmas season is to drive around and see the Christmas lights. Whether the houses are sporting an all-white theme or multi-colored lights, I like them all. Seeing the lights against a darkened sky is a quick way to get into the holiday spirit. There are several other things that also put me in the Christmas spirit - listening to Christmas carols, reading the birth narrative passages in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and the aroma of traditional holiday treats baking in the oven. But the number one thing that puts me in the Christmas spirit is beginning every morning with a time of devotion. I sit in front of the fireplace where I can see the fire, the Christmas tree, and the Nativity Scene on the mantel. Then I read the St. Luke's Advent devotional for the day, read some of the Christmas scriptures, have a time of prayer, and then finish the time by reflecting upon the different characters of the Nativity Scene. The light from the fireplace and from the Christmas tree illuminates the figures with a soft glow. I have found it is the best way to begin every day, but especially during the Christmas season.

I invite you to join me in morning devotions throughout the season of Advent. Find a quiet place that also has visual reminders of the reason for Christmas - maybe a comfortable chair by the Christmas tree or fireplace. Pick up a St. Luke's Advent devotional or read it online. Have a Bible on hand to read part of the Christmas scriptures each day (I included a way to read through the passages below). Then, spend time in prayer and seek God's presence. This is a great time to light a candle of the Advent Wreath and reflect on how the birth of Christ has brought Light into the world. Throughout this Advent season, let's begin each day with the Everlasting Light!

Dr. Robert E. Long, Senior Pastor

Christmas Scriptures

Isaiah 7:14	Luke 1:38-45	Luke 2:13-18
Matthew 1:1-6	Luke 1:46-53	Luke 2:19-24
Matthew 1:7-11	Luke 1:54-59	Luke 2:25-28
Matthew 1:12-17	Luke 1:60-66	Luke 2:29-35
Luke 1:1-6	Luke 1:67-75	Luke 2:36-40
Luke 1:7-12	Luke 1:76-80	Matthew 2:1-6
Luke 1:13-17	Matthew 1:18-21	Matthew 2:7-12
Luke 1:18-23	Matthew 1:22-25	Matthew 2:13-15
Luke 1:24-29	Luke 2:1-6	Matthew 2:16-18
Luke 1:30-37	Luke 2:7-12	Matthew 2:19-23

For it is the God who said, "let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.
- 2 Corinthians 4:6

Many of the well–known and loved hymns we sing were written from personal life events of tragedy and sorrow. Each Christmas, many churches of varying denominations sing the carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem." The author, Phillip Brooks, penned the words in 1868, three years after a personal sabbatical to Europe and the Middle East. Mr. Brooks embarked on his journey following the conclusion of the American Civil War and the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln.

One of the visits on his trip to the Middle East included Bethlehem, where he sat in the fields where shepherds still looked after sheep, just as they did that very special night many years ago when an Angel summoned them to the Manger. Mr. Brooks later attended the Christmas Eve service at The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. It was noted that the service he attended lasted five hours. I am grateful that today we celebrate Christmas Eve services in five one-hour increments rather than one five-hour service.

Regardless, Phillip Brooks' experience of seeing shepherds in the fields and worshipping on Christmas Eve in Bethlehem inspired him to author the beloved carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem" for the children in his Parish, the Church of the Holy Trinity in Philadelphia, where he was the priest. He tasked his organist, Lewis Redner, to compose the melody for the poem. Mr. Redner struggled for many days to come up with a tune, but alas, in a dream the night before Christmas Eve, he created the tune we are familiar with.

Most of us today, when faced with tragedy or sorrow, probably won't sit down and author a new hymn. With daily toxic news and politics surrounding us, we need to take our own "sabbatical" from the chaos and negativity that spawns so much hate. As another season of Advent and Christmas approaches, we all need to find our Bethlehem and let the peace and magic of that very special and life-changing night in Bethlehem ignite the Love and Peace the newborn Savior came into the world to give us all. While I have no plans to attend a five-hour service on Christmas Eve, I will certainly live in the Light on which the dark street shineth.

Robert Fasol, Organist and Choir Master

Tuesday, December 1

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. - John 3:16

The Christmas Party for the Children's Center staff is always a fun, exciting time of year. This is the time we get to celebrate the staff, give away gifts, and even a little cash.

I enjoy the magic of Christmas: sparkling lights, music, surprises, decorations, and the excitement of receiving a gift. But the deepest magic of Christmas is not found in the things we can buy or the prizes we can win. It is found in the love that makes giving meaningful.

It is the magic of seeing someone smile because they received something unexpected. It is the joy of watching a teacher win a raffle prize and seeing everyone celebrate together. It is the warmth that fills a room when they laugh, encourage one another, and share in one another's happiness.

It is also the quiet satisfaction of knowing that our giving may help make someone's Christmas brighter.

These moments remind us of the spirit of Advent: hope, peace, joy, and love. As we prepare to welcome Christ, we are invited to make room in our hearts for others. We are called to notice the people around us, to appreciate their efforts, and to find ways to bless them.

The staff Christmas party gives us a wonderful opportunity to do exactly that. It allows us to celebrate not only what we have accomplished together, but also the people who made those accomplishments possible.

The games and raffle may provide the excitement; the bonuses and presents may bring the surprises, but the true treasure is the spirit of gratitude and togetherness that fills the occasion.

And when we gather with generous hearts, we create memories that last far beyond Christmas

John 3:16 reminds us that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. The very heart of Christmas begins with God's generosity.

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

Some of my favorite Christmas memories are from my childhood. We were very poor, and our Christmas tree was simple, decorated with popcorn garland, a few shiny ornaments, and silver tinsel placed one strand at a time. An angel always sat on top of the tree.

My mother was a wonderful cook and made special Christmas treats, including fudge and divinity. Our Christmas dinners were something to look forward to, and there was usually an extra chair at the table for someone who might otherwise be alone. Even after we girls left home, we kept going to Mom's to spend Christmas Day together. She passed her love of Christmas on to her three daughters, and I have carried that love forward to my own daughters.

My journey of faith, however, took a little longer. Mom began taking us to church when I was about nine or ten. When I was fifteen, our family went through a difficult time, and we lost our connection to the church. It took years for Mom and me to find our way back to God. In my late twenties, I began searching for a church home. Over time, my faith grew, and I learned to truly trust God. Looking back, I realize He had been with me all along.

Today, Christmas continues to be a time of faith, family, and giving. On Christmas Eve, we attend church, come home for Dennis's father's chili, and watch *It's a Wonderful Life* or DVDs of Christmases past. We also carry on the tradition of helping others by adopting a family, providing toys for children, delivering meals, and taking socks to nursing home residents who have no family nearby.

When I think of the everlasting light of Christ, I am reminded that we may not always recognize His presence in every season of life. Sometimes we have to look back to see that He never left us.

As we enter this Advent season, may we remember that Christ's light shines even in our darkest moments. May we share that light with others through simple acts of kindness, generosity, and love.

Connie Barnett, At Home Congregational Care Ministry

Thursday, December 3

Did you know that Advent is one of the busiest times of the year? Besides travel, there are also holiday parties, shopping for Christmas, family events, church events, and so many other things happening. It often becomes overwhelming. Sometimes we begin to lose ourselves or even lose part of the spirit of Christmas in the busyness.

Yet, contrary to how we often experience the holidays, the best way to know Christmas is to know the still and calm moments. Think of any Christmas movie, carol, or story. The moment when the joy and love of Christmas is realized is when they take a moment away from the busyness of the world and focus on the true message. *Home Alone* features a moment where Kevin sits in a church. *The Grinch* sits and listens to the singing of Whoville. Buddy the Elf's family begins to sing Christmas carols. We all take a moment on Christmas Eve to light our candles and sing Silent Night.

Sometimes, in the busyness of Advent, we feel that we cannot stop for these moments. Pausing means that we get behind on the things we need to do, or that we look lazy to others. Sometimes, I think we are afraid to pause because we fear meeting our Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future. We are afraid to meet the joys of Christmas, because of what we might have to change. But that is also the beauty of Advent. Advent is not just a time just to feel good, but a time to look at what is close to our hearts. Advent is the time that we act on that love of God found in our hearts. But we are only able to do that when we are intentional about it.

This Advent season, be willing to pause the busyness so that you can experience the true heart to Christmas.

Brooks Lambert, Director of Next Steps

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. - Philippians 4:13

Our grandson Luke was born in Havertown, Pennsylvania, where he became best friends with Lily, a little girl who lived on their street. Their two families were raising children at the same stage of life and grew close. Luke was still young when his family moved to Texas, but the friendship endured.

When Lily was 14, she was diagnosed with brain cancer. For more than seven years, she has fought with bravery, toughness, and courage. Her mother says that being a childhood cancer family leads you to some of the most incredible families in the world.

Several years into her fight, Lily met Seana at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Seana was four years older than Lily, and the two quickly became friends, bound together by deep faith. Seana's diagnosis was terminal and unrelenting, yet she never let it defeat her. She started a group text for young adults battling brain cancer and organized Zoom calls where they could share stories and support one another. But it was time in her presence that changed people. Her light spread quietly, and no one near her could help being moved. In January, Seana made her journey to everlasting life. Her legacy lives on in everyone she encouraged and reminded of their purpose.

Lily carries that same light. Through every step of her journey, she has remained faithful, praying for her family's strength and for her healing. While waiting for appointments, she is the one who encourages a frightened, crying child and checks on other patients to see how they are doing.

In *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, we sing:

Yet in the dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

Notice that the song doesn't say the streets weren't dark. Bethlehem was an occupied town, overlooked and unsettled, and the light came anyway. A candle never removes the whole night. It simply shows you the next step, and then the next. That is how Lily and Seana have walked. They knew they were not strong enough to face the darkness on their own. Christ gave them the strength to make it through each day, and in turn they became small lanterns for others.

This Advent, you may be walking through a dark street of your own: a diagnosis, a loss, a season of fear. The good news of Christmas is that God does not wait for the streets to be lit before He comes. He enters the darkness, and the darkness has never overcome Him.

Marsha Long, Director of Hospitality Ministry

Saturday, December 5

Growing up in a small town, Christmas didn't arrive all at once. It crept in slowly. Garland and bows appeared on the light poles along Main Street, the air turned crisp, and hot chocolate warmed our hands at Friday night football games. Each little sign whispered the same thing: *my favorite time of year is almost here.*

If you had asked eight-year-old me why I loved Christmas, I would have told you it was the presents and the parties. But looking back, I know the truth. It was the people. I may not have learned to play the guitar Santa brought me, but I still carry the memories of the people I love, and those have outlasted every gift.

One of our greatest traditions was Christmas in the Park. Hundreds of thousands of lights glowed in the darkness, and we would drive through slowly, pointing out the new displays and celebrating our old favorites. But the night wasn't over yet. We would turn into a neighborhood and make our way down Mac Drive.

That street might not mean anything to you, but to me it was holy ground. Every December, the twelve homes along that road put out their hand-painted signs, each one assigned to a house decades ago, each one representing a day of Christmas. With the windows down, we sang and laughed, racing to finish the twelve days before we reached the end of the street. The houses have changed hands many times over the years, yet still, every year, those neighbors gather to bring light and joy to one small street in Oklahoma.

I know the twelve days of Christmas song doesn't tell the story of Jesus' birth. But when I remember that street, I remember what it felt like to be wrapped in joy, surrounded by glowing lights and the people I loved. And I'm reminded of something deeper: the light that shines in each of us, the Light of Jesus. *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* (John 1:5) Just as those neighbors carried the light of Christmas year after year, we are called to carry His light into the world.

The lights in the park will eventually be unplugged, and the signs will be packed away. But the Light that came to Bethlehem never dims. It is the true reason my heart still feels like a child's at Christmas.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for sending Your Light into our world. Help us to see You in the traditions we cherish and the people we love. May our children remember not only what we did at Christmas, but how it felt: safe, loved, and full of joy. Let our homes glow with Your light, so that they know the true Source of every Christmas memory. In Jesus' name. - Amen.

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

Every family has their favorite traditions in the advent/Christmas season. When we carry these traditions from year to year, they bring more joy as we remember past Christmases with family and friends. In the Poteet family, we have many traditions. Ours start right after Thanksgiving when we watch the Christmas movie Elf with Will Ferrell as we put up our Christmas tree. My wife, Kelly, hangs all the stockings, and the number has grown as our family has grown. There are now stockings for all the spouses of our kids, and of course the grandchildren must have their own stockings.

Another tradition we have involves just my son, Josh, and me. It started many years ago when I would drag this little boy out into the cold to help me hang the Christmas lights on the house. I would climb up onto the ladder, and he would hand me the strings of lights so I could attach them to our home in Norman. For many years, this was how we did it, but as I got older, we switched places. Now Josh climbs the ladder, and I hand him the lights. I still insist that I can climb the ladder, but secretly I know I have no business on a ten-foot ladder. It's funny how traditions evolve. Early on, this was primarily just a task I checked off my Christmas to-do list, and I usually had to coax or threaten Josh to come outside and help me. Now, it is a full-fledged tradition we both look forward to each year. Josh brings his phone and plays Christmas music while we hang the lights, and at the end of the evening, we always step back, and Josh takes a selfie of the two of us with the lights in the background. Ours maybe aren't the fanciest lights on our block, but they are hung with love and laughter as we do our part to light up the night in this Christmas season.

I don't know how many more years I will get to do this, but I am treasuring all our Christmas traditions for as long as I can. Maybe sometime in the future my son, Josh, will have a son of his own and he can drag him outside to hang the lights on their house. Maybe they will continue the tradition.

The church has been sharing the light of the Christ child in this season for almost two thousand years. In this season of darkness, we celebrate the everlasting light that came into the world and changed everything. My prayer for you is that you have wonderful traditions in your family that bring you joy and laughter.

Rev. Dave Poteet, Pastor of Congregational Care

Monday, December 7

This year's Advent has taken on a whole new depth of understanding about waiting for the birth of a baby for our family. Advent is the season leading up to Christmas where we wait with hopeful anticipation for the birth of the Christ child. As I write this, we are getting ever closer to the birth of our own baby boy in our family. By the time you are reading this, it is possible he may have already arrived.

That season of waiting can be tough. There can be so much unknown that can lead to fear, worry, and anxiety. Through pregnancy, you worry if the baby is healthy, if he is growing well, if the mom is healthy, if the house is ready, if you have all the things you need to be prepared for his arrival, and so much more. Sometimes, if we aren't careful, fear and worry about all these issues can overshadow the joy to be found in the journey. In pregnancy, you also get to experience the first moment you see your baby at an ultrasound appointment. You get to feel those first kicks inside the belly. You get to put a nursery together and dream about what the future may hold for this little baby.

Life can often feel the same way. We find ourselves in seasons of waiting for whatever comes next: a new job, retirement, a new relationship, health issues, and the list goes on. In those seasons, it is easy to start to worry and become afraid of the unknown. But the good news of Christmas reminds us that God comes to be with us. It is the gift of Emmanuel – God with us. We don't wait alone. Christ came into the world to be present with us so that we don't have to wait in fear and worry. Instead, we can find joy in the journey.

At Christmas, we are reminded of that light that shines in the darkness. It is an everlasting light that the darkness has not overcome. In those seasons of life when we find ourselves waiting with bated breath for whatever is coming next, we know that we don't wait alone. Rather than fear and anxiety taking control, it is God who helps us to experience hope and joy. Take a moment to take a deep breath, look around at the blessings in your life, focus on the joy that God wants you to experience today, and remember the gift of God's presence with you throughout the journey of life.

Rev. Josh Attaway, Edmond Campus Pastor and CFO

I've been to Bethlehem three times across nearly three decades. Each visit followed the same rhythm: the Church of the Nativity, the Shepherds' Field, and shops full of olive wood Nativity sets.

What I remember most are the tall columns inside the church, their painted saints dimmed by centuries of smoke. Lamps hung in the half-light, and the air was heavy and sweet. Incense comes from the three communities that share the building, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, and Roman Catholic, each swinging censers in its own tongue at its own appointed hour. You might expect a visitor to wish the stone were cleaner. I found the soot added to the experience. Those columns were dark, and they were holy, both at once.

Soot, after all, is what remains when something burns for a very long time. Those columns were darkened not by neglect but by devotion, generation after generation bringing hopes and fears to the same small place. The darkness there is the residue of prayer.

Even the olive wood tells the story. Olive trees live for centuries, and in the ancient world their oil fed the household lamp. The wood that carves the manger and the oil that kindles the flame come from the same tree. Even humble things become holy when given to the light.

And the church teaches humility. You stoop to enter through a doorway so low that every pilgrim must bow, then descend to the small, dim cave where a star marks the traditional place Jesus was born. A star, underground, in the dark. Of course. The Shepherds' Field says the same under open sky: the first to hear the news were shepherds on the night shift, keeping watch over their flocks, and Luke says the glory of the Lord shone around them right there. The Light of the world came low, to a cave and to workers in the dark, to people with no standing to demand it.

Phillips Brooks visited on Christmas Eve in 1865, and three years later wrote of an everlasting light shining in Bethlehem's dark streets, where the hopes and fears of all the years are met. He never pretended the streets were bright. He trusted that the light was stronger. That is the promise of John's Gospel: *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

Maybe you're walking through a dark street this Advent: a loss, a worry, a long season of waiting. Take heart. Darkness is not proof that the light is absent. Sometimes it's evidence of how long it's been burning. Come as you are, soot and all, and let the everlasting light, as Brooks put it, find you.

Chris Lambert, Director, Meals on Wheels Oklahoma City

Wednesday, December 9

I love Christmas music. I do my best not to play these amazing songs year-round, but they are truly some of the most uplifting songs one can hear. Since I sat down today to write this Advent devotional, I thought that was permission enough to begin. My Christmas music is playing, and I am excitedly waiting for our Lord's arrival in Bethlehem. There are so many wonderful songs for this season. We all have our favorites. One song that I have loved since childhood is *Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer*.

Unlike many of the songs we sing in worship, *Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer* began differently. You may remember Montgomery Ward. As a child, I looked forward to turning the pages of their wonderful catalog and dreaming about what Santa Claus might bring. Montgomery Ward helped bring the story of Rudolph to children around the world. In 1939, the department store wanted to give out books to children but didn't want to pay royalties for someone else's story and music. So, they commissioned a story of their own. They asked Robert L. May to help write the story. In the first year of the story being published, Montgomery Ward distributed over 2.4 million copies of the book. Just over a decade later, Robert L. May's brother-in-law, Johnny Marks, turned the original story into the song that Gene Autry recorded in 1949. Originally intended to draw children into the store and shop, the story became an inspirational tale for the ages.

For inspiration, Robert L. May turned to Hans Christian Andersen's story of *The Ugly Duckling*. Like the duck, who becomes a beautiful swan, Rudolph is an odd fellow who eventually finds his place among the other reindeer and in the ongoing story of Christmas. If you recall, Rudolph is an outsider. The others never let him join in their fun. Because his nose was different, they kept him on the outside of the group.

Thankfully, Rudolph's story has a positive ending. The story tells us that Santa needs help on a foggy Christmas Eve. Rudolph's bright, shiny nose and willingness to help are exactly what Santa needs to complete the job. Rudolph saves the evening and finds a celebrated place in the hearts and minds of generations.

Robert L. May knew that each of us struggles with who we are and whether God could possibly use us to make a difference in this world. Rudolph's memorable story reminds us that each of us can share the light of God in this world. We each have gifts to share. We may struggle to fit in. We may feel unique as we compare ourselves to others, but God has created us in love and with purpose.

The Scripture teaches that *we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works…* (Ephesians 2:10) We have received the bright light of God's love through the birth of our Lord on Christmas. As we celebrate this wonderful arrival of the light that breaks the darkness of this world, let us remember that we are called to "shine on those living in darkness." God created us in love, with the purpose of shining the everlasting light of hope in our world.

Rev. Keith King, Pastor of Worship

And the wise shall shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who turn the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. - Daniel 12:3

Christmas morning couldn't come soon enough! As a young child, I knew exactly what I wanted: a miniature tool set. But not a toy tool set. Oh, no. I wanted the REAL deal. A real hammer. A real screwdriver. Real tools, just tiny! I remember explaining this very specific request to my dad, who stared at me as if I had just asked him to build a spaceship. I could almost hear him thinking, "Where in the world am I supposed to find that?" Remember, this was pre-Amazon. No quick search, no two-day shipping. Santa was on his own!

Christmas morning arrived, and I tore into my presents, searching for my special gift. But alas, no tool set. Not even a tiny wrench. My hopes were fading fast. My dad, who was sitting in front of the fireplace, leaned back to stretch. Suddenly, he tilted his head with a puzzled look and exclaimed, "What's this? Something's stuck in the chimney?!"

My eyes grew two sizes. My heart raced as he reached higher and higher into the chimney with his long arm. As if in slow motion, a present emerged, with my name on it. I stopped breathing. Could it be? You guessed it. MY REAL TOOL SET! In an instant, my disappointment melted away, leaving nothing but pure, uninhibited joy. Even after all these years, I still smile when I remember that Christmas morning. Now, as a parent, I appreciate it even more.

As a child, I had no idea what my dad had planned. All I saw was the empty space beneath the tree. Sometimes, life feels that way. We can't see what lies ahead, but Advent reminds us to hold on to hope. Just as my dad gave me a memory I'll cherish forever, we can bring light to others through a kind word, a thoughtful gesture, or simply being there. We never know how much a little light can mean to someone in the dark.

Marji Shelton, Administrative Assistant to Communications Ministry

Friday, December 11

Daylight saving time is here, and like some of you, I grumble about it. The days feel shorter, and evening arrives early. I don't like the dark, whether it's the literal darkness of a long evening or the darkness we carry in our lives.

It's interesting that Advent is a season of darkness, a time of waiting. Advent invites us to sit in that waiting and be honest about where we long for light: the unanswered prayer, the strained relationship, the grief that returns each December because of an empty chair at the table, upcoming medical tests, worry about what lies ahead. Waiting is hard.

However, you and I don't wait alone in the darkness, nor are we people who wait without hope. John's Gospel reminds us: *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* (John 1:5) Not once, not ever. Every candle we light on the Advent wreath is a small declaration of that truth: the darkness is real, but it does not get the last word. Why? Because the light comes. That's a promise.

So, wherever you are as the evenings grow long, whether you're grieving, worrying, or simply weary of waiting, hold on. Trust what you have known and experienced many times: the dawn has always followed the night, and the Light of the world has always kept his promises.

This Advent, light a candle, and let it remind you that you are not alone in the dark. The light is coming. Trust it.

Rev. Linda Harker, Pastor of Connections

I am an avid reader, and for most of my adult life, in my profession, I would read books constantly to my students in my public education classrooms. When I had a few free moments, I would pick up a book and read to them all. As a mother, we have a large array of books in our house. We have board books, seasonal books, leveled-readers, beginner chapter books, complex chapter books, and so on.

During the Advent season, one of my favorite traditions is setting up and making our Christmas books available to read for our family's enjoyment. Every year when we unpack them from our storage, they are a time capsule waiting to be relived. In our collection of Christmas books, we revisit our daughters through all the different stages they have gone through life thus far. We go back to when they were toddlers and were just learning the amazing world of literature through board books. We skip down the road a few years to when our daughters were enamored with princesses and how the various princesses celebrate holidays. Now we have graduated to our oldest daughter being able to read our collection of children's Christmas books to her younger sister.

Most of our Christmas books are centered around sweet baby Jesus being born in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes. I love how there are a multitude of books focused on Mary and Joseph's journey to Jesus' birth, and not one of them is exactly alike. Time and time again, when we read of Jesus' birth, we are reminded of how Mary and Joseph had faith that God would provide for them and His Son. He was there through all their travels to keep their anxiety and fears at bay. Mary may not have planned to have Jesus in a manger, but she found hope and light during that dark time.

In most children's Christmas books, the illustrations show a bright light shining down on Mary and Joseph in the manger. The North Star shines on Jesus Christ as a beacon. Jesus and the manger are illuminated in the midst of darkness. Whatever season of life you find yourself in, remember that Jesus is with you through all your travels. He is there to calm your anxieties and to take on your fears. As a newborn babe, He was the Light, and He is the Everlasting Light, now and forever.

Jocelyn Morgan, Director of Children's Ministries, Edmond Campus

Sunday, December 13

Growing up, my mom and I drove up to my grandparents' house a few days before Christmas and spent the holiday with them. On Christmas Eve, I would write a letter to Santa, put out the milk, cookies, and carrots (reindeer need snacks too!), and rush off to bed. It was the only night of the year I made no fuss about going to bed early, because I knew that overnight, something truly magical was coming. I would lie awake with wishful joy, trying to imagine what I'd wake up to. And it wasn't just for me; it was for everyone! Somehow when I awoke, the letters were gone, food was eaten, every stocking was full, and special gifts were displayed on the mantel. I never saw how the magic was made, but I trusted it would happen.

As I've gotten older, lying awake has more to do with hopes and fear than wishful joy. Maybe you're carrying the burden of sickness, financial struggles, or challenging familial relationships. Maybe you're carrying a hopelessness for our world as it trudges through political, environmental, and religious turmoil. Whatever you're carrying, you're not alone. People of all time and generations have carried those same hopes and fears.

I love the line in "O Little Town of Bethlehem," *The hopes and fears of all the years, are met in thee tonight.* Somehow, all at once, surpassing space and time, the hopes and fears of all the years were met, indeed, at Christ's birth. Each Christmas night, we are reminded of our eternal hope, our everlasting light. Through any trial, any hard season, any lost hope, Jesus, our savior, came to restore. He came humbly; he came poor; he came as the least of these, to welcome the least of these. He came to bring hope to you, to your neighbor, and to your enemy. He came to help carry the burdens of your ancestors, your family, and those who will come after you. He is the common thread that weaves us all together. If that's not magic, I don't know what is.

So, this year, I challenge you. Tap into your childlike faith. In place of writing letters to Santa full of wishes, write to Jesus. Whether on paper or in prayer, tell Him the fears and hopes you carry through this season. Instead of offering milk and cookies, offer your time and your attention to Him. Release those hopes and fears to Him and rest your head. We may never see how His magic is made, but we can trust that His joy will come in the morning.

Ashley Soter, Director of Poteet Academy, Co-Director of Adult Discipleship

Monday, December 14

This year, my father passed away at the age of 90. His death was not unexpected, but saying goodbye was still difficult, and has left an empty place in our family, especially at Christmas.

In his later years, Dad faced many challenges. His mobility diminished, his hearing faded, and macular degeneration gradually took away his eyesight. For a man who spent his life working outdoors, building fences, driving a tractor, reading, and enjoying the beauty of nature, losing his sight was especially difficult. The world he loved became harder to see, until many of its familiar pleasures were no longer possible.

Yet Christmas remained special to him. Although my mother deserves most of the credit for shopping, wrapping, and filling our stockings, Dad had his own important Christmas tradition. Every Christmas morning, he set up his old Super 8 video camera at the bottom of the stairs, pointed its bright strobe light toward us, and insisted that we wait while he prepared the perfect shot. Then, as the light shone and our eyes adjusted, we would finally see the gifts beneath the tree.

For more than 50 years, our family has laughed about those blinding strobe lights and seemingly endless preparations. But beneath the humor was something beautiful: Dad wanted to see our faces. He wanted to experience Christmas through our excitement and joy.

This Christmas, we will miss his presence, his laughter, and his familiar voice. Yet that memory reminds us that even in seasons of loss, light still shines.

The beloved hymn *O Little Town of Bethlehem* speaks of a light shining in the darkness. On that first Christmas, the world did not suddenly become free of sorrow, suffering, or uncertainty. Instead, God entered our darkness through the birth of Jesus. The Light of the World came quietly, bringing the promise of hope and peace.

Sometimes, grief makes our own world feel dark. We miss those who gathered around our tables, shared our traditions, and helped make Christmas meaningful. We may wonder how the joy of the season can shine through our sadness.

The Christmas message reminds us that hope does not depend on a life without darkness. Hope comes from knowing that Christ is present in it. His light does not erase our tears or our memories; it gives us the promise that neither sorrow nor death can overcome His love.

As we celebrate Christmas this year, may we remember those we love and give thanks for the light they brought into our lives.

Like the brightness of Dad's old camera, may the light of Christ awaken us to the wonder of Christmas once again. And when the darkness feels overwhelming, may we hold fast to this hope: *The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* (John 1:5)

Lori Hall, Executive Director of Missions

Tuesday, December 15

Growing up in Ardmore, one of my favorite Christmas traditions was going with my family to see the drive-thru Christmas lights. Every year, we would stop at Starbucks for hot chocolate, then head to see the lights. It was always one of the things that officially kicked off the Christmas season for us. Even now, when I think about Christmas growing up, that's one of the first memories that comes to mind.

I think there's something special about the traditions we carry with us. They might seem like small things at the time, but years later, they're often the memories that bring us the most joy. For me, those Christmas lights weren't just about the decorations or the hot chocolate. They were about spending time together, slowing down, and enjoying something simple.

As I've gotten older, I've realized that life doesn't always feel as bright as those Christmas lights. We all go through seasons of worry, grief, uncertainty, and the everyday stress that life seems to throw our way. And unfortunately, those things don't just disappear because Christmas rolls around.

But I think that's what makes Advent so special. We don't celebrate Christmas because everything in our lives is perfect. We celebrate because Christ came into an imperfect world to bring us hope.

John 1:5 reminds us that *the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* Christmas doesn't promise us a life without darkness, but it does remind us that we never have to face that darkness alone.

These days, my family doesn't pile into the car to go see the lights like we used to. Life has changed, and so have some of our traditions. But I think there's something beautiful about looking back on those memories and remembering the joy they brought. They remind me that even as life changes, the light of Christ doesn't. His hope and love remain the same, no matter what season of life we find ourselves in.

I hope you'll take time to notice the light around you. Maybe it's through an old family tradition, time spent with people you love, or even something as simple as driving through Christmas lights. Whatever it looks like, I hope it reminds you that even in the darkest seasons, the everlasting light of Christ continues to shine.

Schuyler Henderson, Edmond Campus Director of Youth Ministry

Wednesday, December 16

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. - Isaiah 9:2

Every year, our neighborhoods go all-out. We clip colorful bulbs to our gutters, place candles in our windows, and pray that we don't blow a fuse! We love Christmas lights because they bring beauty to the cold, dark winter days and truly brighten our homes.

However, by early January, we've boxed up the decorations and shoved them into the attic. They're wonderful, but they have an expiration date.

I'm so thankful that the light we celebrate at Christmas is completely different. As the carol *O Little Town of Bethlehem* reminds us, "the everlasting light" showed up on a totally ordinary night. Jesus didn't come to be a passing seasonal trend or a flashing lawn ornament. His light is eternal. It guides our steps, warms our hearts, and outlasts every awkward transition, stressful season, or sudden change we'll ever face.

And speaking of transitions, I'm getting ready to experience a big one. After much prayer, thought, and several spreadsheets, I have decided to retire at the end of 2026.

The word "retire" feels a bit like waking up on another planet. For years, my life has been shaped by morning alarms, deadlines, and a very familiar routine. Walking away from this fills me with deep gratitude for the years I've spent on staff at St. Luke's. I'm thankful for the honor and privilege of sharing, growing, and serving alongside so many wonderful friends. My husband and I plan to continue doing so with our St. Luke's family of faith. We're thrilled to have more time for family and travel, and I'm excited to not check my email on Saturdays!

As I close my work calendar, I'm determined to rely on the real meaning of Christmas. The same Everlasting Light that has faithfully guided my career, provided for my family, and sustained me through every season will continue to lead the way into this next chapter.

I pray that you know that the Everlasting Light is always beside you, guiding your steps, providing what you need, and sustaining you through it all. You are never alone on this journey, and you are so deeply loved!

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. - John 1:4-5

Susan Meharg, Executive Team Assistant

Thursday, December 17

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you, and his glory appears over you. - Isaiah 60:1-2

I have a very dear friend named Santa, and every year he hosts a "Hot Cocoa and Cookies with Santa" gathering. It has become one of my absolute favorite traditions to share with my family and friends, complete with festive pictures and sweet treats.

Toward the middle of the evening, Santa gathers all the children around him near their beautiful Christmas trees and reads to them.

He always starts with those classic, familiar lines:

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.

Every single year, hearing those words reminds me of a house that is completely quiet, a rare moment when the toys are finally put away, the screens are turned off, and everyone is nestled cozy and tucked into bed. It is a beautiful contrast to the beautiful madness of holiday class parties, endless shopping, and the general loudness of December.

As the children sit quietly, captivated by the story and its illustrations, Santa always ends his reading time by gently reminding them of the true reason we celebrate Christmas.

He shares that the very first Christmas night in Bethlehem wasn't loud, hectic, or busy. It was a still, quiet night. Most of the world was fast asleep, completely unaware that the greatest gift ever given was arriving in a humble stable.

Jesus entered our world in that exact same quiet way. The Bible calls Him the Light of the World, yet He didn't arrive with a loud crash of thunder or a giant, flashing parade. He came softly, as a tiny baby, to bring God's deep love into a dark world.

This season, every time you look at the glowing lights on your Christmas tree, let them remind you that God is right there with you, shining His love into your heart.

Mandi Coleman, St. Luke's Children's Center Director

You may be familiar with the yellow capsule-shaped characters, wearing goggles and overalls, known as the Minions. These clumsy, comedic, gibberish-speaking, loyal henchmen have been the stars of many best-selling movies from the animation studio Illumination. The Minions have been the official mascots of the studio since they became so popular as the sidekicks in the first *Despicable Me* movie in 2010. Illumination chose the name of their studio to symbolize bringing light, imagination, and vibrant energy to family-friendly entertainment. The Minions have most certainly captured audiences and truly radiated joy and life with multiple movies and are a global pop-culture phenomenon.

The word "illuminate" means to make lighter or brighter, and it can also mean to make clear or free from any confusion. We can both literally and figuratively illuminate anything in the dark. If an actor is in front of an audience in a dark theater, they could be illuminated on a stage. If a student is in the dark about a concept in a math class, a teacher might illuminate a new or deeper understanding. If you are in the dark and feeling lost and alone, an act of kindness can illuminate your worth. The illuminating power of God to bring light to dark places is the very work that God has been doing since the very beginning of the creation of the world. And the birth of Jesus was a way that God brought his light to earth to us to show us the way.

The prophet Isaiah shares about God's promised Messiah. Isaiah 9:2 says *The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.* And then, continuing in verse 6: *For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

What a promise to know that even if we walk in darkness, there is a light that shines. The gift of Christ gives us direction, help, belonging, and peace. Just as silly characters from an animated movie can make the world a brighter place, so much more can the joy and peace that come from the light of Christ to make the world a brighter place. And we are the people who can bring this light to the dark for others. We can illuminate the goodness of God through our words and actions. Follow the example of Christ and be a light.

Amy Givens, Director of Discipleship and Youth Ministry

One of my favorite Christmas traditions growing up was visiting the Garden of Lights at Honor Heights Park in my hometown of Muskogee, Oklahoma. Every Christmas season, they turn the entire park into a Christmas light display you can drive through. It has been happening at the park since 1993, and I have been going with my family for as long as I can remember.

As I got older and became involved in my church youth group, this tradition took on an even more special meaning. Each year, we would pile onto the back of a trailer filled with hay and take a hayride through the Garden of Lights. But before enjoying the lights, we had another important stop to make.

Right before you enter Honor Heights Park is the Veterans Hospital. Each year our youth group would stop there, get off the trailer, and visit different floors of the hospital, singing Christmas carols to patients and their families.

Those hospital visits always made me emotional. Some patients were alone, while others had family members by their side. Some smiled, waved, or even sang along with us. The nurses were often especially grateful that we were filling the halls with joyful music. We couldn't change what those patients and their families were facing, but we could remind them that even in a difficult season, joy can still be found.

Looking back, I think about the difference between those two parts of the evening. We spent time surrounded by beautiful Christmas lights, enjoying the excitement and wonder of the season. Then we would walk into the hallways of the Veterans Hospital and see people experiencing a very different kind of Christmas. It reminded me that the light of Christmas isn't meant to be something we simply admire. It's something we are called to share.

Those evenings taught me that sometimes making a difference looks like showing up, singing a familiar Christmas carol, offering a smile, and reminding someone that they haven't been forgotten.

This year, many people will be facing a difficult season. Some will spend Christmas in a hospital room, some will be missing someone they love, and others may be quietly struggling with things we know nothing about. As we enjoy the beauty and excitement of the Advent season, I hope you will take time to look around for people who might need a little extra light in their lives. We don't have to do something extraordinary to make a difference. Sometimes we just have to show up.

Madison Woods, Edmond Campus Director of Welcoming Ministries

Luke 10:38-42

For most of us, the Advent schedule is filled with activities. These weeks are consumed by indoor and outdoor decorating, parties, dinners, programs, events, kids' activities, and holiday services. It seems like finding a quiet moment is next to impossible.

In Luke 10, we find the story of two sisters, Mary and Martha. Martha, the Scripture tells us, is a woman whose life is filled with activity. She always has something to do. She is a lady with a long task list. She is a worker bee who is constantly in motion.

In the midst of all this activity, she has graciously chosen to welcome Jesus and the 12 disciples into her home. And this decision has only added to her ever-expanding task list. Obviously, she has too much to do.

While we're not there, I'm confident that it was her desire for everything to be just perfect for her guest. After all, Jesus was a significant figure at this point in His ministry. He's been speaking to crowds, healing the sick, and feeding the poor. Clearly, He is a man of great influence. You can almost see her scurrying around, making sure everything is set, the food is perfect, and her guests are well cared for and impressed.

At some point during her business, she enters the room and finds her sister Mary sitting at Jesus' feet. Immediately, she is frustrated that she is doing all the work while her sister simply sits. It's in this moment that she blurts out these words, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?"

"Lord, do you not care…" How many of us assume that Jesus is impressed or moved by our busy schedules? Our lives may not be perfect, but we choose to make up for it by doing more. We assume that if we fill our lives with enough activities, service, and good things, then the Lord will care. He will somehow be impressed with our business.

It is the response of Jesus that reminds us that there is a better way to live. Jesus isn't impressed with her activity or task list. Instead, He simply says to Martha, "Mary has chosen the better thing." Mary has chosen to sit at the feet of Jesus. She simply chose to spend her time with him. The other things could wait. They would still be there when Jesus left.

Maybe this Advent season there is a need to slow down. Perhaps all those parties can wait. No doubt the task list will still be there on December 26. Could it be that all of us need to choose a Mary Christmas!

Dr. Scott Peterson, Pastor of Facility and Stewardship

Monday, December 21

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." - John 8:12

In December 2006, I lived in Santa Monica, California. It was my favorite time of year, but I wasn't feeling the joyous Christmas Spirit. There were decorations and lights around town, but it wasn't the same feeling I had growing up in Oklahoma.

One evening, I was headed to meet some friends near Palisades Park on Ocean Avenue, which runs along the coastline. The traffic was extra crazy, and of course I was running late. I realized why the traffic was so bad as I got closer to the picturesque, scenic lookout of Palisades Park. I saw this sign that read, "Santa Monica, City of The Christmas Story." I had no idea what this was, but I was mesmerized by the life-size nativity scenes, lit up and on display. The ocean and palm trees made a beautiful backdrop for these scenes. I had never seen anything like it. It was my light in the dark.

I quickly rearranged our plans to meet there. We were all transplants and homesick, so this festival made us feel more at home. We sipped hot cocoa and took our time stopping at each scene. I don't remember us talking; we just walked in silence and took it all in. There were fourteen life-size nativity scenes from fourteen different churches. Each church depicted a certain scene from the story of Jesus' birth and the events surrounding it. The traditional scenes included The Annunciation, Joseph's Dream, The Visitation, Caesar's Decree, No Room at the Inn, Rest Along the Road, Peace on Earth, The Nativity, Herod's Court, The Three Wise Men, Presentation at the Temple, Joseph's Warning, Flight to Egypt, and The Return to Nazareth.

This tradition in Santa Monica began in 1953, when a Hollywood actress approached the Chamber of Commerce about the idea of a nativity scene in the park. The mayor immediately embraced the idea, and local businessmen set out to gain community support. They then collaborated with local churches to make it happen. The entire city embraced Santa Monica as the "City of the Christmas Story." That phrase was even on the patches the policemen used to wear on their sleeves. This became a huge celebration in the city of Santa Monica for the next 59 years. They closed off Wilshire Boulevard and held a parade that marched all the way to Palisades Park.

Santa Monica's Nativity Scenes were a rich tradition that brought hope and joy when I needed it most. I was meant to be in traffic that night. God was my beacon, and He knew exactly what we needed by filling our hearts with love and light.

Jamie Williamson, Edmond Campus Director of Administration

My grandparents had a lamp that sat squarely framed by the picture window at the front of their house. It wasn't a very attractive lamp; it was a brass lamp with a brown and cream Early Americana lampshade that resembled a skirt. Early every evening, they turned it on and left it on till the next morning. If the lamp was on, they were home. Anytime we went to drop in on them in the late afternoon or early evening, I would peer out the car window as we came down their street to try and make out if the lamp was on.

There were a few occasions that the heavy curtains were closed - a sure sign that they were not at home, and I would be incredibly disappointed. But on most occasions, as we drove toward their home, I could make out a warm glow shining in front of the house that grew in its intensity until the lamp came into view. Sometimes the lamp illuminated my grandparents sitting in their chosen chairs on each side of the lamp. But even if they weren't right beside the lamp, I knew that they were there because the light was on. The lamp might not have been much to look at, but the light let me know that two of my favorite people were close at hand. The light still shines in my memories and fills me with loving gratitude for my grandparents. The light was special because it meant my grandparents were there.

The Christmas star was special because it meant the Christ Child was there. The wise men had been studying and preparing for the star for generations. And when they finally looked up and saw it shining, they knew what it meant. The Savior had been born; the Messiah was there.

When they followed the Star to the place where He lay, they found the Child. They found a child who looked like other children His age; there is no indication that the child they met was any different than any other child, either in His looks or His actions. How did they know that the child was THE Child? It was the Light that meant that the Savior was there.

During this Advent Season, look for the Light all around you: the light that shines in the love of your family and friends, the light that radiates in acts of mercy, the light that is seen in the candlelight of Christmas Eve. The light announces Emmanuel, God with us. The light reminds us that Christ is there - and present with us.

Rev. Wendy Lambert, Senior Executive Pastor

Wednesday, December 23

Christmas is one of my favorite times of the whole year. I love the lights, the weather, the decorations, and the music. However, one of my favorite things during the season is the Christmas movies. I love any movie that features the Grinch or Scrooge. However, I often think we miss the point of these stories. Often, we watch *The Grinch* and learn that we should be more loving! Or maybe we watch movies like *A Christmas Carol* and learn that we should not hold our wealth higher than love. While both are true, neither is the true story.

For many of us, Christmas is usually a joyous, loving time, but for some, it's hard not to be a Grinch. For some, Christmas reminds them the world is cold and they are alone. For the Grinch, Christmas was when all the children made fun of him most. For Scrooge, it was when his loved ones died, and he was shunned. Their hearts were hardened, not because they were evil, but because the world became dark to them.

But the part that redeems them both is that one day they had the light shine near them. Cindy Lou helped the Grinch to see that Christmas could be something more than things and the pain he knew. Scrooge was shown the beauty of Christmas and that he had a life of love ahead. The light of Christmas isn't found in LEDs and fun presents, but instead in the love that is shared during this season.

During this season of Advent, I invite you to take time to be the light for those who need a reminder of the love given to them.

Brooks Lambert, Director of Next Steps

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. - Matthew 5:16

Before the star of Bethlehem shone over the place where Christ lay, God's great plans for Him were hidden. Christ was not announced to all men when he was revealed to Mary. He lay unseen until the time of revelation was at hand. In fact, it is said that even the angels in heaven did not know of Christ while He was within Mary's womb. It was not until a light appeared in the heavens that Christ was brought into the sight of all creation. It was then that they would begin to see His good works. We then should also be in quiet and humble preparation for the time when we are called to shine our light for the glory of our Father in heaven.

We are often eager to shine, to serve, to speak, and to be seen doing good. That's the part that is gratifying and exciting! Yet God also calls us into the quiet places of our hearts, where things remain unexamined. In those hidden places, we may find resentment we have justified, pride we have mistaken for confidence, or fear that keeps us in hiding. We may also discover gifts left unused, forgiveness waiting to be offered, or a calling we have been too timid to pursue.

The Christian life is not simply about shining brightly for others to see. It is about allowing Christ to illuminate every corner of our lives. We cannot reflect His light fully while insisting that certain rooms of our hearts remain dark. Bringing these things into His light is not meant to condemn, but to transform us. Whether they are gifts or struggles, it is always challenging to illuminate what we wish not to see in ourselves. But rest assured, His grace sustains us as we examine our hard truths, and the warmth of His love melts away our fears and objections as we fully see ourselves. It is safe to step into His light. It is our calling to reflect that Light and welcome others into His overwhelming grace and love.

Take time to be still with God. Ask Him to reveal what you have kept hidden, what you have neglected, and what He is preparing to bring forth in you. What things, good or bad, are ready to be brought into the light in your life?

As the star of Bethlehem pointed the world toward Jesus, may our lives point others toward Him. Let us welcome His light into our darkness, trust Him in seasons of preparation, and shine in such a way that others see not our own glory, but the glory of our Father in heaven.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, Light of the World, search my heart and reveal what needs Your light. Give me courage to face what I have hidden, grace to surrender what must change, and faithfulness to use the gifts You have given me. Prepare me to shine Your light so that others may see You and glorify our Father. - Amen.*

George Soter, Director of Poteet Theatre, Co-Director of Adult Discipleship


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