

YOUTH IN THE CHURCH

Growing in Faith & Service

Advent/Christmas 2020

READINGS AND PRAYERS

Stories, a bit of humor 'cause we learn by laughing, and prayers



It's more than a Christmas Pageant...

I'm thinking most of you were in the Christmas Pageant – in fact I know some of you were because I watched you right here at St. Mark's. I remember Maya being the lion one year and Marly being our most stylish Baby Jesus, Carter graduating from angel to narrator, and Elizabeth K., you and your friend Camden were the first same gender couple to portray the Holy Family – but not the last as we saw in 2019 when Katelyn, Katie and their daughter Kingsly accepted our invitation to participate. Most of you were in the pageant when you were younger and dressing up like a sheep or a shepherd seemed like fun. And I hope you remember it as fun. Having a good time in church is important, sharing the gospel with joy is what it's all about.

But this pageant story – you know it doesn't exist as a single narrative in the Bible. When you read over the beginning of the four gospels, you'll notice that Mark and John don't mention Jesus's birth at all. And in Matthew and Luke the story is well, different. So, what' up with this play we do every year?

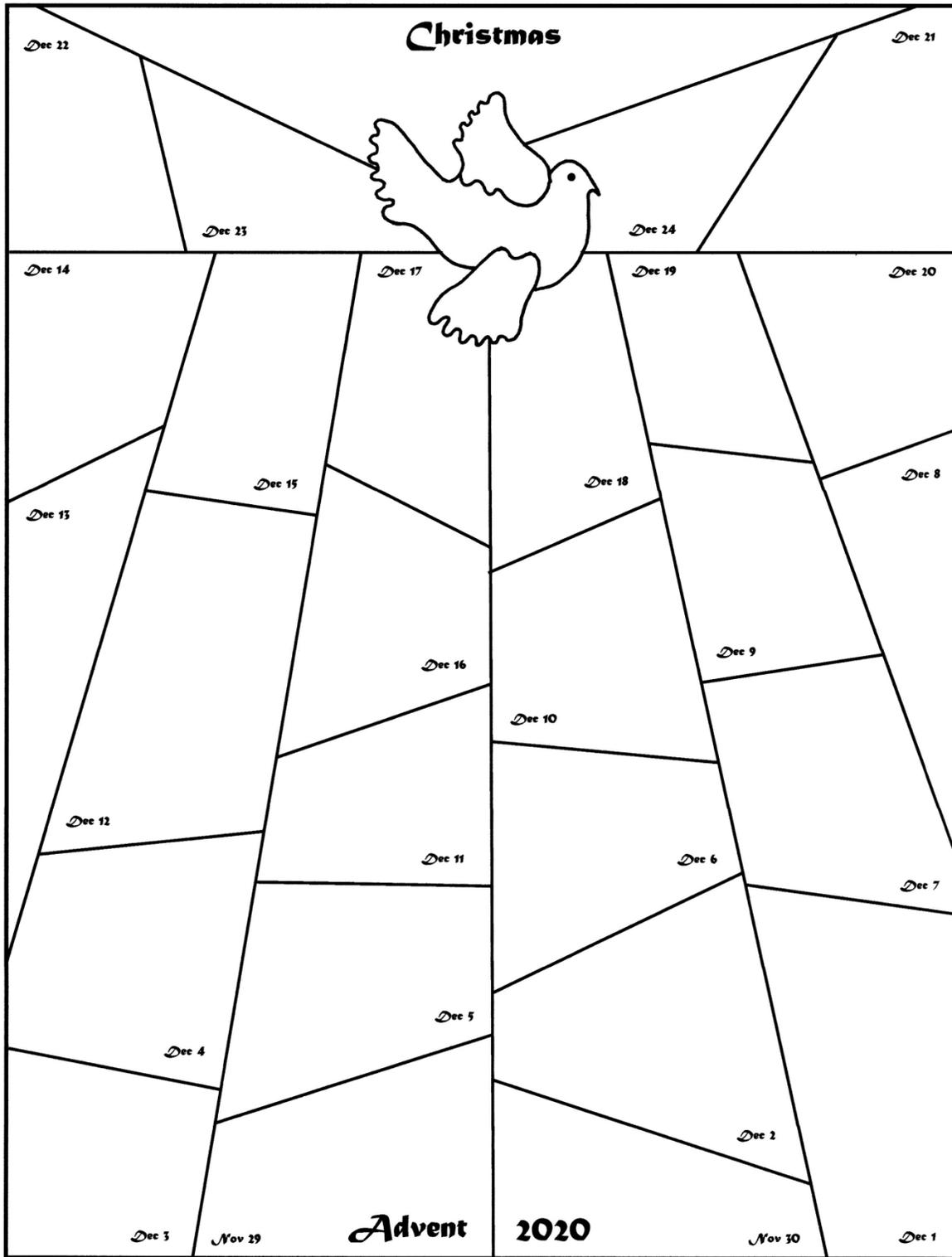
It began with St. Francis. In the 1200's he ministered to poor people, people he knew could not read and even if they could, books were so expensive that only the rich could afford one. So, he decided that the best way to teach them about the birth of Jesus was to put on a play. Everyone could watch and listen and learn. And what he wanted them to learn was that Jesus was born poor – a poor child born to poor parents – just like the people St. Francis ministered with. Jesus was like them. And they could be like Jesus. Kind of makes sense doesn't it. And this is where we get our pageant from, this is the story it teaches about the son of God – born vulnerable but beloved. As are we all.

Be kind to yourself – this has been a long difficult year of missing what we would normally be doing. Be patient with yourself and with those around you. The virus has in many ways shut down our lives, keeping us from fun with friends and families, vacations, and probably now our holiday gatherings and traditions. I do not want to add to your work or your stress. I want to give you my support and love even though we cannot be together. Maybe this Advent and Christmas just say a few simple prayers over the days – use them to calm you and remind you of the love that surrounds you. Use them to look forward to a day when we can be back together.

God our Father, you see us growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show us that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help me to take failure, not as a measure of my worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give me strength to hold my faith in you and to keep alive my joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our loved. *Amen.*

Adapted from the BCP, page 829

Father God, we are grateful for the gift of another day. You gave us another chance to serve you. You have given us another chance to be your children. Give us rest now, Lord. Keep us safe through the night, and we will honor you in the morning. *Amen.* The Book of Uncommon Prayer.



Write down something nice about yourself every day



WHAT DOES THIS SEASON MEAN?

ADVENT

Though Advent appears at the end of the secular calendar year, it is the beginning of the Christian year. The deep darkness of the natural world around us is an echo of the nurturing darkness of the dawning of Creation. It is in this holy space we begin re-telling our Sacred Stories. The word “Advent” comes from the Latin *adventus*, which means “coming” or “arrival.” Advent prepares us for, and leads us to, Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem. Churches are often decorated in sarum blue during Advent, a color that honors Mary the mother of Jesus - an outward sign of our hope and expectation as we await, with her, the coming of the Christ. Sometimes royal purple is used in Advent as well. Advent is a season of waiting, wondering, and faithfully living in the in-between

time: the time between remembering that God has already walked as one of us and God's full in-breaking once again.

THE ADVENT INVITATION

"Every time I go into the darkness, I return with fistfuls of jewels"

The four Sundays in Advent invite us on a journey. As the days grow shorter each week, we are invited to draw closer and closer to the light of Christ. We are invited to open our hearts a little wider each week to God With Us. In her book *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, Episcopal priest Barbara Brown Taylor writes: "...new life starts in the dark. Whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb, or Jesus in the tomb, it starts in the dark." Advent is an invitation for rest and growth before a new beginning. What will you discover as you are nurtured in the darkness this year?

READ

Luke 1:46-55 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."



WONDER

The tradition of the Advent Wreath dates back to the Middle Ages. The four candles of the wreath symbolize the four weeks of Advent and our growing hope as we near the day of Christ's birth. There are many ways to create an Advent wreath using what you already have at home. It can be as simple as four candles on a plate. Some use a fifth candle in the middle of the wreath, representing the light of Christ. If you have birthday candles, tea lights, or electric candles, use those. If you feel inspired to decorate it further, you might gather greens, pinecones, or sticks from outside, or use other items that remind you of waiting, hope, and the dawning of a new year. Each Sunday of Advent, light a candle on the wreath; first one, then two, three, and finally four. Hold silence. Name a hope. Offer a prayer. Even if you don't create a wreath, you might honor silence and a time of prayer each Sunday. The fifth candle is lit on Christmas Eve, welcoming and celebrating the light of Christ.

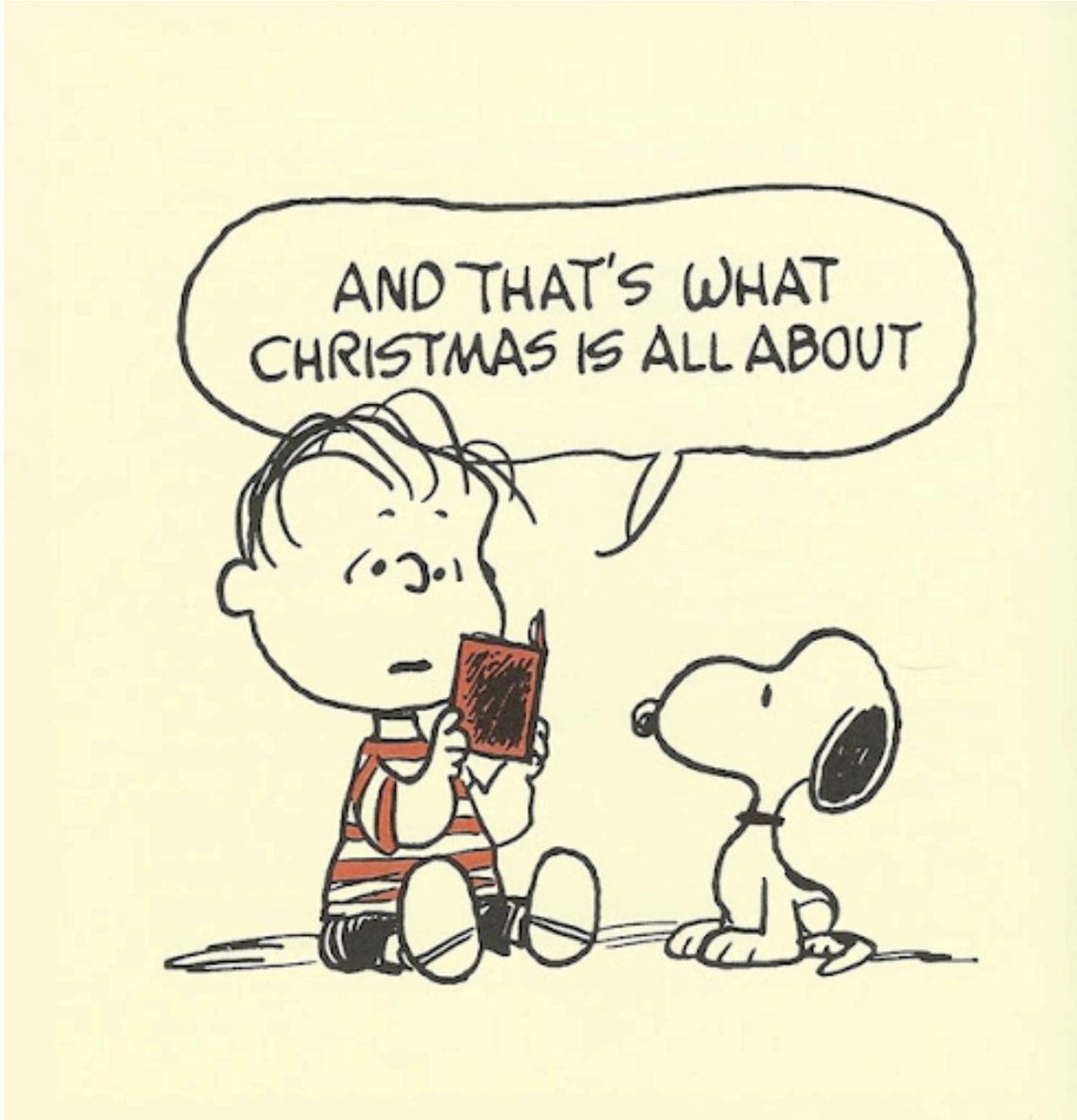


PRAY

God of grace, your eternal Word took flesh among us when Mary placed her life at the service of your will. Prepare our hearts for his coming again; keep us steadfast in hope and faithful in service, that we may receive the coming of his kingdom for the sake of Jesus Christ, the ruler of all, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Book of Common Worship, Westminster John Knox Press, 2018, p. 179.

Borrowed with gratitude from Building Faith, VTS, Barbara McAfee



Love and prayers for you always! Malinda, Bill, Ryn, and Kent