

Society of St. Andrew's Ministries

Gleaning Network—A hands-on mission program for all ages, getting healthy food directly from fields and markets to the hungry people who need it most. The *Gleaning Network* brings together farmers with excess produce, volunteers to glean (pick, dig, or gather) that produce, and agencies feeding the hungry. People in need glean alongside people with plenty in this community-based program, that engages individuals, congregations, and civic organizations in service.

Potato & Produce Project—A produce salvage program, providing direct food relief to our nation's poor, while addressing one of the major causes of hunger: food waste. The *Potato & Produce Project* salvages and distributes hundreds of tractor-trailer loads of fresh fruits and vegetables to food banks, soup kitchens, and other feeding agencies each year.

Seed Potato Project—A self-help program, providing seed potatoes purchased by Society of St. Andrew to impoverished rural communities, where people have access to land for gardening. Families plant, cultivate, and harvest their own crops, realizing a yield of about eight pounds of potatoes per pound planted.

Harvest of Hope—A hunger-focused work/study mission program. Participants glean and distribute produce remaining in fields after harvest each morning and learn about the realities of hunger each evening. Bible study and dynamic worship round out days of Christian community and service, providing a basis for on-going commitment to ending hunger. *Harvest of Hope* offers middle school, high school, and intergenerational events throughout the summer and fall, as well as *Alternative Spring Break* programs for college students.

In 2013, the Society of St. Andrew distributed more than 97 million servings of nourishing food to hungry people in the United States.

*Society of St. Andrew, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit,
a grassroots, ecumenical and interfaith ministry, has been
working toward a world without hunger since 1979.*

www.endhunger.org

Readings, Reflections, and Prayers for the Days of Advent 2014



And he will
be called ...
Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

prepared for you by

Society of St. Andrew

GLEANING AMERICA'S FIELDS ~ FEEDING AMERICA'S HUNGRY

3383 Sweet Hollow Road • Big Island, Virginia 24526 • 800-333-4597

www.endhunger.org

Advent is the name given by the church to the four weeks leading up to Jesus' birth. It is the beginning of the church year and marks a new beginning in our lives, as we join the faithful through the centuries in waiting, hoping, and praying for the coming of a Savior.

For our first-century brothers and sisters who envisioned their Savior as a mighty warrior coming to overthrow the kingdoms of the world by force, a baby born in a barn to an unmarried teenager seemed an unlikely Messiah. Yet Messiah Jesus was, and is, unleashing not military might, but boundless love; overthrowing not kingdoms, but hatred, and offering peace and wholeness in this world and the next.

The theme for our devotions this year is "Prince of Peace," a title the Prophet Isaiah ascribed to the promised Messiah. We asked our writers to reflect on one of these questions, and we invite you to do the same throughout this Advent season:

- (1) Where do you need Jesus to come as Prince of Peace in your life?
- (2) How can you / do you exhibit Christ's peace in the world?
- (3) How would your corner of the world be different if God's kingdom of peace, shalom, or wholeness were brought near?

This booklet contains scripture, reflections, and prayers for each day of Advent, from November 30 to December 25. Make time each day to seek the Prince of Peace, that his peace may reign in our world and grow in your heart..



As part of your Advent journey, we also invite you to share a monetary gift with Society of St. Andrew, to further our nationwide gleanings and food distribution ministries.

Perhaps you will collect your pocket change each day at day's end; or perhaps you will set aside a particular amount of money each day. (It only takes 2¢ to put a serving of nourishing food on the table!)

You might give an amount equal to what you spend on a gift for a co-worker, a friend, or your child's teacher; or you might even set aside a tithe of your Christmas budget to provide healthy food for our hungry neighbors through Society of St. Andrew.

Please give generously, as you are led and as you are able. Thank you for partnering with Society of St. Andrew in reducing food waste and feeding the hungry.

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Thank you for journeying with Society of St. Andrew through Advent using these daily devotions. We invite you to support the Society of St. Andrew in feeding spiritual and physical hungers, through a financial gift. Your donation, in any amount, will nourish those most in need.

You may make your Advent gift directly to Society of St. Andrew by going online to: www.EndHunger.org/donate.htm; you may mail your gift to: **3383 Sweet Hollow Road • Big Island, VA 24526**. Or you may give to Society of St. Andrew through your congregation, by designating your check or envelope to **Society of St. Andrew**. Through your partnership in this ministry, you demonstrate our Savior's special concern for the last, the least, and the lost, by reducing food waste and feeding our neighbors in need.

You may also pledge to continue supporting Society of St. Andrew's work in the year and years ahead, as a member of the St. Andrew Club.



St. Andrew Club

Be part of the miracle of feeding the hungry! Join the St. Andrew Club and feed hungry people all year long, for just pennies a serving. Simply complete and return this form or our online form at www.EndHunger.org/sac.htm. We will send a 'call' letter twice each year (spring and fall) inviting you to send a gift in the amount you have pledged. It's that simple!

Yes, I/we want to help feed hungry people and prevent food waste as a member of the St. Andrew Club. I/we agree to respond on call, twice a year, with a gift each time of:

_____ (Each dollar you give will provide 50 servings of food)

\$50.00 (2 gifts/year will provide 5,000 servings of nourishing food for individuals and families in the US at greatest risk for hunger)

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Sunday, November 30

For God So Loved the World

Scripture: John 3:16a

Advent is a season of preparation. We look forward to the coming of the Christ child, the promise of peace for the world. Where is our focus as we prepare for Christmas?

Where is our focus as we prepare to celebrate this unfathomable, inconceivable gift, this unsurpassable generosity? How narrow are our concerns? Is our focus on ourselves? Our tree decorations? Our gift buying? Our family circle and orbit of friends? Where is the peace?

Several years ago, my oldest son called attention to the glut of gifts the ten of us shared at Christmas. We stopped purchasing so many gifts, focusing instead at Thanksgiving, as Advent begins, on how our family would use its resources to bless others. Since then, Advent has become a more spiritual, other directed, time for us. At Christmas, our focus is on the love-child gift.

Can we step back and re-examine our Christmas preparations and traditions? Does what we do during Advent focus on the need for *shalom* for the whole world? Are we preparing to share our resources for the good of God's whole world? What do our Christmas gifts say about our Advent focus?

"God so loved the world," offering love and shalom. We are called to do the same.

Prayer: May what we plan to give and share reflect our belief that "God so loved the world." Amen.

Youtha Hardman-Cromwell
Washington, DC

Monday, December 1

Standing for the Prince of Peace

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7

Several years ago I took a group of young people to a performance of Handel's *Messiah*. As custom dictates, we stood for the *Hallelujah Chorus*. One of the younger members of the group asked an older one, "Why are we standing?" He responded, "Didn't you hear the song? We are standing

for the Prince of Peace.”

Though he may have had the reason for the custom wrong, he got the spirit right. We stand when a judge walks into a courtroom, when a wedding party comes down the aisle, when the president or governor or mayor walks into the room. We stand as a sign of respect and honor. We stand in allegiance with the people.

What does it mean to stand with the Prince of Peace? Maybe it means to stand for justice for the underpaid worker. Maybe it means to stand for opportunity for the youth born into poverty. Maybe it means to stand for sharing the world’s resources with all those who are in need.

Jesus stood for and with the poor, the oppressed, the sinful, the scorned. He stood to offer them hope, forgiveness, a second chance, and the gift of himself—peace.

This season how will you stand with the Prince of Peace?

Prayer: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, we stand as you enter into our lives this Christmas. By the power of your Spirit, help us to stand with your children everywhere. Amen.

Michael Henderson
Florence, SC

Tuesday, December 2

#GIVINGTUESDAY™

How Respect Brought Peace

Scripture: John 14:27

When I came as pastor to an inner-city church, we surveyed family needs in the community. Our survey indicated interest in a food pantry and a Bible study at the church. We were taken aback when, at our first food distribution, the clients were pushing and shoving to be first in line, afraid there would not be enough food.

In our Bible study we stressed the concepts of dignity and respect for all persons. Our staff made a point of learning the names of all the clients and spoke to each by name. As we focused on the dignity of each person, a sense of God’s peace settled upon the clients, who quickly came to realize there was enough food for all. Soon they were calling each other by name and greeting each other with joy.

We also invited them to help, rather than just waiting in line. Some

tall buildings in a single bound! Of course his father and I played along because it was wonderful and fun to see him use the gift of his imagination. But we knew all the while that the time would come when his zeal would wane and something else would capture his attention.

Fortunately the zeal of God never fades away. As beloved children, God’s enthusiasm for us is amazing—especially in view of how often we fail to be the people God has made us to be. We need to be saved, often from ourselves, as we wound one another by our words and deeds.

But God didn’t send a “caped crusader” to our rescue. Instead of a towel, God wrapped authority around his son’s shoulders: authority as the Prince of Peace, to heal our wounds and restore us to a right relationship with God and each other. Yes, justice and righteousness started with an innocent newborn laid in a manger, continued with a sinless human being lifted up on a cross, and remain to this day and into eternity in our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Thank you wondrous God for your everlasting zeal and love revealed to us in the gift of your Son Jesus Christ. May we draw ever closer to this Prince of Peace that we might be found more faithful to his authority in our lives. Make us living witnesses to all he has done for us. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Chris Suerdieck
Emmitsburg, MD



Wednesday, December 24

Shalom to You!

Scripture: Philippians 1:2; 4:7-9

*Shalom to you now, shalom, my friends. May God's full mercies bless you, my friends. In all your living and through your loving, Christ be your shalom, Christ be your shalom.**

In a church I pastored, we sang “Shalom to You” after the benediction as we held hands. Most people sang facing forward, as a hymn, or with eyes closed, as a prayer, until I suggested that we should turn to our neighbor and sing it to each other as a blessing. Their initial reluctance was quickly overcome, as we all began to see the hymn as a way of asking God’s peace for one another.

This is very much as we read in Paul’s epistles, as he offers his readers, “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Imagine what would happen if, during the Advent season, we were to offer such words to those we meet: “May God’s full mercies bless you, my friends, Christ be your shalom.”

Shalom can be a greeting, a farewell, a desire for peace and wholeness, in a personal or global sense, and a wish for wellness and prosperity for the person we greet. “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Shalom to you, my friends.

Prayer: May God’s shalom be yours as we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace. Amen.

Sam Ramirez
Lakeland, FL

*Shalom to You, words by Elise Eslinger; ©1989, The United Methodist Publishing House.

Thursday, December 25

Zeal Revealed

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7

When our older son was quite young he insisted on wearing a towel tucked into the the neck of his t-shirt to form a cape. Instantly he was transformed into a superhero, fully believing he was capable of leaping

began to help fill the food bags. Within a year clients were bringing friends and paying their first \$2.00 for a bag. They found dignity in being asked to give back as they received their food, and gradually a mutual sense of respect grew between the staff and clients.

That corner of the world became God’s kingdom of peace, as we learned to work together.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, this Advent season help us see all people as your children, and help us develop relationships in which everyone receives and everyone gives. Help us bring peace to all our activities by treating each other with dignity and respect. In the name of your son, the Prince of Peace, we pray. Amen.

Nora Ramirez
Winter Haven, FL

Wednesday, December 3

God is Here

Scripture: Psalm 73:23-24

In this Advent season, as we are getting ready to celebrate Jesus’ birth once again, thinking of all that Jesus did for us is overwhelming. His birth, his life, his teaching, his healing, his friendships, his suffering and death, his resurrection—it’s almost too much to consider. What I know is that God is here, with you, with me, with each of us. Whether I am writing or shopping or fixing dinner or chairing a meeting or watching TV, God is with me. Now that’s what I call peace.

Jesus was born as a human child, and he was called Emmanuel, meaning “God with us.” He was here in the flesh for 33 years. But that wasn’t the end. He said he would send his Spirit to be with us always, every day, everywhere, in every situation. To me, that is peace. I’m never alone, never making decisions on my own, never traveling alone. God is always here. Hallelujah! Amen.

Prayer: Living God, I thank you that you aren’t in some far, unreachable space. Thank you that you are here today and forever. Amen.

Ginny Greer
Moneta, VA

Thursday, December 4

Calming Our Storms

Scripture: Philippians 4:6-7

Relaxing outside for the first time in months, I reflected on recent life changes and challenges. Our close-knit family experienced a tremendous void when our only son moved out-of-state to attend graduate school. Within 13 months, both of my elderly parents passed away, so my role as daughter and caregiver to them ended abruptly. Preparing to sell their house and disposing of their possessions was emotionally taxing. And in the midst of all those challenges, keeping our business afloat during the economic downturn was a huge concern. Normally my husband would have helped me through all of this, but he, too, was in need of my care, with chronic health problems that worsened each month. Facing so many challenges had been overwhelming!

Then that welcome feeling of peace—the only thing that sustained me daily through three difficult years—once again filled my heart. By God’s grace alone, we had made it through those trying times! My daily prayers for God’s guidance and for the ability to stay calm through our storms were answered time and again.

How thankful I am that the Prince of Peace guides us, quiets our anxiousness, and provides serenity during life’s trials, and will forevermore.

Prayer: Lord, may the peace only you can provide fill our hearts and sustain us, through the trials and challenges we face each day. Amen.

Julie Erickson
Shawnee Mission, KS

Friday, December 5

Jesus, You are Invited

Scripture: John 14:27

I asked my youth group this question during Advent last year: “If Jesus were to be present, in person, at your family’s Christmas celebration and take part in it with you, what would he think?” It was a difficult question for young people to answer, but they gave some very humbling answers. Most of them agreed that Jesus would simply shake his head and say, “No,

Prayer: Dear Father, may we always know that peace starts with us through your son, Jesus Christ. We thank you for the Society of St. Andrew and ask that you bless them for they are a blessing to so many in a hungry world. Amen.

Stella Carson
Big Island, VA

Tuesday, December 23

Sweet Peace, the Gift of God’s Love

Scripture: Isaiah 48:18

I sit here in a straight-backed, not-too-comfortable wooden chair, gazing at my much-loved 14-year old, nothing-special cat. Without invitation, this once-stray cat, now called Simba, arrived at our house while my wife and I were at church and greeted us on our return, saying nothing more than, “Here I am, love me.” Today, Simba is sleeping on a very comfortable upholstered chair—curled up, totally at ease, well-fed, dry, and warm. He feels safe, secure, trusting, and totally unbothered by the world’s problems and concerns. Simba enjoys and exemplifies sweet peace, the gift of God’s love.

How I wish that I could live like that! The truth is, I can. So why don’t I? Simba knows his master is going to meet his every need. I have that same assurance. My Master has provided me with an abundance of food, clothing, shelter, transportation, loving companionship, and friends. My Master knows my every need and plans for it before I am aware of the need. I simply need to remember that sweet peace, the gift of God’s love is mine.

P.S. Don’t ever think that you can feed a stray cat enough that he will go back to where he came from. It just won’t happen.

Prayer: Lord, help us to walk with you, trusting totally in your unfailing love, knowing that your grace is sufficient to meet our every need. Lead us daily to your sweet peace. Amen.

Fred Fauber
Lynchburg, VA

turmoil. Seeking peace, on a personal or global scale, is a noble calling.

Those living with hunger may find peace when they have food on their tables. The Society of St. Andrew works constantly to make this possible. To relieve hunger is to make peace in the spirit of the One whose birth we celebrate in this season.

Centuries before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah foresaw the Messiah to be “Prince of Peace.” Jesus said “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Jesus wept for the city’s failure to know what made for peace. We pray Christ will show us paths of peace today, including peace of mind and heart.

Peacemakers are needed. How can you be a peacemaker today?

Prayer: “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.” (*Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi*)

Hasbrouck Hughes
Williamsburg, VA

Monday, December 22

May Christ be your Shalom

Scripture: Romans 12:18

Paul tells us: “Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible.” It can be a challenge to exhibit Christ’s peace in the world during this busy season. How will you manifest the love of our Prince of Peace in your actions today, toward your spouse, family, co-workers, and strangers?

May our actions today and every day show love, patience, kindness, generosity, and forgiveness. May we offer hope, for as Christians, we know there is hope through Jesus Christ.

Another word for peace is *shalom*, reminding us that peace is more than simply getting along with others. Living in peace means embarking on a journey toward wholeness of creation, working toward a time where the earth and everything in it will live in unity as God intends.

But how can our neighbors with empty breadbaskets and hopeless hearts experience such peace and wholeness? The Society of St. Andrew embodies Christ’s Shalom as it finds abundance and brings together adults and children, churches and organizations, farmers, wholesalers, truckers, and feeding agencies like soup kitchens, shelters, and food pantries. Feeding the hungry is certainly part of Christ’s shalom.



Show your love this Christmas!

*Send Society of St. Andrew
Alternative Christmas Cards
to everyone on your list:*

*Co-Workers • Neighbors
Friends • Teachers*

Pastors • Shut-ins • Relatives

Give a gift from the heart. Your gift of \$12.00 or more, in your friend or loved one’s honor, will put 600 servings of nourishing, healthy food of the tables of the hungry!

Your honorees will receive this beautiful Alternative Christmas Card, designed exclusively for Society of St. Andrew by Texas artist Jerry Malzahn. The full color 5” x 7” card features original art for this Christmas season and an inspiring verse that conveys God’s love *and* reminds your honoree that they hold a special place in your life. This unique card announces your generous gift to feed the hungry in your friend or loved one’s name.

We’ll also send a card to you, with our thanks and confirmation of your gift order.

Alternative Gift Cards from Society of St. Andrew are an ideal way to show your love, while putting good food on the tables of our brothers and sisters in greatest need.

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Send ____ cards TO ME for personalizing and mailing.

OR Please personalize and mail the following cards on my behalf:

In the blocks below, please indicate how you want each individual card signed.

Attach additional sheets, if needed, to complete your list.

In honor of _____ Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Sign this card	In honor of _____ Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Sign this card
In honor of _____ Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Sign this card	In honor of _____ Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Sign this card

is something missing in our hearts or souls. This empty place or missing piece grieves and troubles us; it may even cause us fear. All too often, we rush about, trying to find something—anything—to fill it. But new experiences, wisdom, excesses, and worry seldom fill the hole, even though they may temporarily cover it or distract us from our incompleteness.

One day, when Jesus speaks to his disciples (who are often troubled and afraid,) he offers them peace, his peace that is different from the world's peace. The peace that Jesus offers is *shalom*. This Hebrew word means wholeness and completeness. Jesus offers to the disciples—and to all who follow him—shalom, or the peace of wholeness and completeness. Jesus is the missing piece. Jesus fills the hole in our hearts perfectly. So, when Jesus is offering his peace, we become whole and complete persons in Christ. When we are complete, our distress and discontent subsides like the waves of a storm, and we do not let our hearts become troubled and afraid.

Prayer: Precious Lord, thank you for coming into our hearts, completing us with your perfect peace. With your presence we do not need to be troubled or afraid. Amen.

Andy Brock
Greenwood, VA

Sunday, December 21

Praying for Peacemakers

Scripture: Matthew 5:9

Writings I enjoy most are biographies of notable people. For example, life-stories of Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King, Jr., Woodrow Wilson, and Albert Schweitzer are inspirations to me. These have at least one thing in common, having been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In their own way, in varied circumstances, they were peacemakers. They sought peace and justice. Their objectives differed, their success was not always measurable, and their efforts were frequently controversial.

Today's world needs peacemakers—among war-torn people, in city streets, in homes, workplaces, sports arenas, and classrooms. Violence, discord, and strife take many forms: armed conflict, terrorist attacks, family abuse, playground bullying, human trafficking; and mental or spiritual

Now each person's name and age were read and a candle lighted in their memory. 131 people from our state had died homeless, the youngest just four months old. Friends, family, or caseworkers briefly shared remembrances of some before prayers and music closed a humbling and meaningful service.

Following the service I sat at dinner beside a young man who had once been a guest at this church's shelter when he was newly released from prison and unable to find a job. Tonight, having made a fresh start, he was here as a witness to the difference food, housing, and people who care can make in the lives of those who have lost their way.

It was a powerful reminder to me that Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, walks with each of us in our darkest moments. He is the One who knows and cares for all who suffer. He is the One who encourages those who advocate on behalf of others. Let us long and work for the day when housed and homeless, suburban and urban, released prisoners and oppressed, those with plenty and those with little, will all sit together, feasting at Christ's great banquet table.

Prayer: Gracious God, during this Advent season draw near to all who work for justice, as we await your coming. Amen.

Audrey Benjamin
St. Paul, MN

Saturday, December 20

Complete in Christ's Peace

Scripture: John 14:27

One of my favorite activities with my grandchildren is working on jigsaw puzzles. Sometimes we open a box and put together a puzzle, only to discover that that a piece or two is missing. We then go to great lengths, searching to find the missing piece, but sometimes we have to admit defeat. The piece is simply gone. We end by staring at the incomplete picture, grieving over the empty place, the missing piece, and our inability to complete the puzzle.

In some ways our souls are like jigsaw puzzles. We are made up of pieces of genetics and pieces of experience. But when we take time to examine ourselves, we may discover that we are incomplete, that there

no, no! This is NOT what I had in mind!" They quickly acknowledged that Christ's desire is for our hearts to be focused on Him during this holy season; rather than on ourselves.

It surprised me a little to learn that what these young people loved most about their family Christmas celebrations was bringing family together and sharing a common meal. This year, let's invite Jesus to our Advent preparations and to our Christmas Day celebrations. Let's give away love, have more family meals, invite more guests to our tables, and keep Christ in our midst. Let's give Him some gifts: our time, our service, and our talents, so that we may bring hope, peace, and wholeness to God's Kingdom here on earth.

Prayer: Holy God, Prince of Peace, during this Advent season, we commit our hearts, our minds, and our actions to you, so that we may bring peace to our homes and our communities. We invite you to join us at our tables and in our lives. May our tables, our homes, and the love we share with others honor and glorify you. Amen.

Tianna Durbin
Purcellville, VA

Saturday, December 6

Who is Running My World?

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7

In our prayer group, we have been practicing *lectio divina* or divine reading. As we read Scripture, we try to open ourselves to listen for God's message, selecting one word or phrase for further meditation. One of the strategies suggested is to use that one word in a cinquain, a five-line poem. The word that captured my attention in Isaiah 9:6-7 was "authority," so I wrote this:

*Authority | Powerful, Benevolent | Leading, Loving, Guiding
One who Rules Peacefully | Prince*

Isaiah proclaims, "For a child has been born—for us! ...He'll take over the running of the world ...Prince of Wholeness." (*The Message*)

The authority of Jesus is characterized by peace, justice, righteousness, and wholeness. I know I need the guidance and leadership of the Prince of Peace during the busy-ness of Advent more than ever. Asking myself questions such as these help ground me in my faith and keep me focused

on the Savior whose birth we await:

- As I do my Christmas shopping, which gifts would Jesus have me give?
- How does Jesus want me to share my talents with others during Advent?
- Whom does Jesus want me to visit?
- What messages do my Christmas decorations convey?

These questions lead me to deeper ones: “Who is the ultimate authority in my life?” and “Who is running my world?”

Prayer: Loving Lord, please keep me close to you during this Advent season as I seek to discern your direction for my life. I pray for those in authority throughout the world, that they will be touched by your love. May your Kingdom increase! In the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, Amen.

Dodie Fauber
Lynchburg, VA

Sunday, December 7

In Seasons of Bleakness

Scripture: Psalm 13

Throughout the Bible, and particularly throughout the Psalms, God’s people cry out, “How long, O Lord?” It’s one thing, as a pastor, to point others toward such scriptures and help them see that God allows those questions and accusations without sending lightning bolts down on the Psalmist’s head—or ours. Yet it seems entirely another thing to find myself identifying with the Psalmist’s lament.

Through a series of difficult circumstances recently, I’ve found *myself* begging the Lord to look on me and answer—even as another part of me tenaciously affirms that I trust in God’s unfailing love. I need the Prince of Peace to counsel my unquiet heart and remind me again of the joy his birth brings to all the world. I need to remember that great joy is for me, too—and not just at Christmas but also in the bleak seasons when I cry out, “How long, O Lord?” My foes—even if they are only my own doubts and questions—will not overcome me. The zeal of the Lord will accomplish it. (Isaiah 9:7)

Prayer: Lord, even as the angels return to heaven, the shepherds return to

Peace and Wholeness

Scripture: Luke 2:10

In Luke, the angels are messengers of Good News. Ironically, as they tell folks, including Mary, of the coming of the Prince of Peace, they must first reassure them: “Don’t be afraid.” Fear appears to be the opposite of peace. But opposites are part of the Christmas story.

Israel felt it had been promised a warrior king, but received a helpless baby instead. Joseph and Mary are “of the household of David” so Bethlehem is overflowing with their kinfolks, yet this expectant couple must sleep alone in a barn. Israel wants a king that will overthrow the Roman government, but receives a Savior who overturns the world instead.

For me peace is more than the absence of war, although that is always my prayer. I am touched this time of year by the video clips that men and women serving in the military, far from home, send to their friends and family. To me, peace is “normal time,” when families are together. Peace means we are not stressed to the point of panic; we can move without pain; our heart is not sick with sadness. That is the peace I long for this year. Yes we need all wars to stop, but we also need all to be fed and loved, healed and made whole. No army does that; only the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Prince of Peace, remove all fear from us, allow us to assist you and serve those who need to be fed, loved, healed, and made whole. May your peace reign. Amen.

Gil Hanke
Antioch, TN

Friday, December 19

Believers and Peace Seekers

Scripture: Matthew 25:35-40

Last year on December 19, the longest—and one of the coldest—nights of the year, I sat with others in the sanctuary of an older inner-city church that shelters homeless men and women, every night of the year. We had marched from the government center downtown to the church, carrying placards with the names and ages of those who had died homeless during the past year.

need only call upon your name, and you will bring us your peace. Amen.

Robert Brooks
Fredericksburg, VA

Wednesday, December 17

The Kingdom of God is Within You

Scripture: Luke 17:20-21

There is a wonderful exercise in Rami Shapiro's book *Perennial Wisdom for the Spiritually Independent* that has helped me this year in dealing with the death of several people close to me. The exercise has to do with using a piece of rope as a metaphor for God and tying knots on the rope to represent a few of the people we love and care about, both those who have died and those newly born. Yes, even a knot for baby Jesus.

The exercise goes like this. Tie one knot representing yourself, another as you remember each loved one who has died or been born. Now untie the knot representing one of your losses. Knotting and unknotting the rope does not change the presence of the rope. The rope is always there even when the knot is gone. The same is true of God. Through our joys and sorrows, God is always present.

In this season of Advent, let us claim our own knot on that metaphorical rope, our place in God's Kingdom. Let us commit ourselves anew to serving others. As we celebrate the joy of Jesus' birth, we join ourselves to every other person on the ropes of life. May we be ready to listen for God's call to love, serve, and share with others; disciples together in service to our Lord.

Prayer: Lord, as we remember and grieve loved ones who have left this earthly life and as we rejoice over those new lives that have joined us, grant us your peace. Remind us of your presence through all our joys and sorrows. Teach us to be your servants throughout all our days. In Christ's name, Amen.

Leslie Green Huffaker
Coronado, CA

their flocks, and the magi return to the East, even then let me never stop singing your praises. Amen.

Joseph Phipps
Fairfield, IA

Monday, December 8

A Unique Gift: A God Impression

Scripture: Colossians 4:5-6

Sitting down to dinner, we admired the beautiful, foot-high sculpted angel in front of each place. After dinner, our host announced that the angel at our place was a Christmas gift to us from her. She had asked an artist friend to design and craft these angels so they would be a work of art and a gift of love, each as unique as its recipient.

Just like those angel sculptures, each of us is unique. Each of us has a story. Each has a ministry that offers the chance to leave a lasting impression on others.

Joni Eareckson Tada writes: "A 'God impression' is a way of pressing your life up against someone else's for a brief moment so that, when you peel away, you've left a God impression on that person."

Our right response in every situation is a unique God impression, just as the unique angel sculpture gift left a God impression on all who received them. What God impression will you leave on others today?

Prayer: Lord, help us live wisely and make the most of every opportunity to leave a God impression on others. May we be a unique and special gift, the right response for others, as you have been for us.

Larry Davies
Lynchburg, VA

Tuesday, December 9

Instrument of Peace

Scripture: Luke 1:78-79

When I listen to the news, I wonder if peace is possible in the midst of such earthly confusion and chaos. Then I recall the words of a song that

asks for peace to come on earth, saying, “Let it begin with me.”

Alone I cannot bring peace between nations, warring street gangs, employers and employees, various government bodies. I can, however, work for peace in my family and circle of influence. It is within my power to speak words of encouragement, answer anger with love, provide friendship, grieve with those who mourn.

Through my actions and words, it is possible for me to demonstrate Christ’s peace to others, peace which is not simply the absence of hostility or suffering. Rather, it is knowing Christ’s presence in all of life’s situations, good and bad.

One by one and working together, those of us who claim Christ as Lord can bring his peace to our corner of the world.

Prayer: Lord, during this season of Advent may I be an instrument that shines your light of peace into a world crying for relief from war, cruelty, loneliness, and sin. Amen.

Anne Ownbey
Black Mountain, NC

Wednesday, December 10

Soul Stuffing

Scripture: Proverbs 17:1

Have you ever stuffed a Christmas stocking (and yourself) with goodies? Have you ever stuffed your Thanksgiving turkey and then kept on stuffing your days and nights with the demands of your “must do” list until December 25? Stuffing stuff can wear you out.

We often skip the quiet, reflective aspects of Advent and start celebrating Christmas even before Thanksgiving. Let the buying and selling, partying and celebrating begin! We’ll keep going at warp speed until we drop in exhaustion on Christmas morning, surrounded by presents, but asking like Dennis the Menace, “Is that all?” I suppose it is good for the economy, but is it good for your soul?

Instead of experiencing the peace and joy Jesus Christ brings, we may suffer a season of family squabbles, anxiety over credit cards, and exhausting indulgences, culminating with frustrated dreams and sad despair that our lives do not match all the false, media-hyped fantasies of happy holidays.

This Advent, rather than promoting shaky, “peacekeeping,” why not focus on the kind of peace that Jesus intended, peace making? Why not focus on Jesus, who brought peace to a corrupt world and offered a kingdom built on sacrifice, humility, and cooperation? Why not embrace the Savior who came as a tiny baby but who died as a man upon the cross? Following Jesus is the only way to make peace.

Prayer: Holy God, we long to feel your peace and to experience it with others. Help us to give genuinely of ourselves, rather than subduing our own voice or that of another. Teach us to make peace, so that your kingdom might come upon the earth. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Jacob Sahms
Midlothian, VA

Tuesday, December 16

Peace for Troubled Hearts

Scripture: John 14:27

My 97-year old mother lay in the hospice bed, resting quietly. She was scheduled to have a medical procedure, and I was filled with anxiety.

I tend to be a worrier, and my anxieties turned to questions about the day ahead. Would my mother be in more pain or become more disabled? Would she have a stroke? If she died today, what was heaven like, and who would be there? I found myself praying, “What happens next, Lord?”

“My peace I give to you.” The room took on a new dimension, as I felt a warm, calming presence joining my brother and me at the bedside. Now amid the silence, I knew the Prince of Peace was there with us, easing my worries and stilling my racing mind.

My mother died, one difficult week later. Yet I will never forget the feeling of serenity when Jesus joined us, filling me with his love and peace. Though I miss my mother, I am comforted in knowing she is in heaven, worshipping the Lord alongside so many of our departed loved ones. As we watch and wait for the coming of the Christ child in this Advent season, let us invite the Prince of Peace into our lives, allowing him to take our fears away and quiet our troubled hearts.

Prayer: Dear Lord, when we are anxious and afraid, remind us that we

when we live in the dark. Frightened and blinded, we don't see what's coming next. Fear can paralyze the best of us.

It's easy to feel God's blessings when all is good. But the same God that reigns in the light also reigns in the dark. Isaiah 54:10 tells us that even if the very earth is destroyed and the mountains crumble to the ground, we can be assured of God's love and peace. When our eyes adjust to the darkness, when enough light creeps in so that we can see beyond ourselves, we will know that God has been there with us, all along.

God gave the Israelites this promise through the prophet Isaiah hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, but one quiet night in Bethlehem, the reality of that promise burst upon creation like never before. God was working in the dark to bring us the incredible light of Jesus Christ, sent to show us the way to the Kingdom of Heaven. Though we still may find ourselves in the dark at times, we have the promise of God's eternal, unfailing love, peace, and compassion. And when our eyes adjust, we will see Jesus in the darkness with us.

Prayer: Lord, help me to know that you are with me always, in the light and in the dark. Amen.

Sue Mink
Leesburg, VA

Monday, December 15

Make Peace

Scripture: Matthew 5:9

The world puts a premium on keeping the peace. On a global scale, the United Nations sponsors peacekeeping missions, and on a personal scale, often family members and friends are urged not to disagree with one another in the name of "keeping the peace." But in the Beatitudes, Jesus says nothing about "keeping the peace," an effort that often seems false and shallow. Instead, Jesus tells his hearers that they are blessed when they make peace.

Peace makers show how to cooperate instead of competing or fighting. It's not about one side pushing the other into the background or preventing another's voice from being heard. It doesn't mean that the two sides don't disagree or that there isn't ever any friction. But Jesus' message is about creating a safe space where people can find comfort, be challenged, and grow.

This Advent, call a time out! Just for today, slow the season's mad rush with moments of quiet reflection. Silence the phone; light a candle. Write a poem; sing a carol. Walk the block; take a nap. Remember to give thanks and pray. Steal away to Jesus and, for this day, enjoy peace in the Good News.

Prayer: Sweet Jesus, fill my soul with your peace, as full as my Christmas stocking is with candy. Teach me that a "time out" can be good for your children, whatever their age. Amen.

William Wade
Strasburg, VA

Thursday, December 11

Receive the Gift

Scripture: Acts 20:35b

His name was Doris. I will never forget him, because he is the only man I have ever met named Doris. Just days after arriving at my first pastoral appointment to three small country churches, I visited Doris, whose wife had recently died. I was surprised at how easily he accepted me as his pastor and amazed at how I experienced the power of the Holy Spirit at work as we talked and prayed that day.

When it was time to leave, Doris offered me two big heads of cabbage from his garden. Initially I considered refusing the gift, since I am not very fond of cabbage. But the Holy Spirit prompted me to accept his gift as a sign of grace and peace. Had I refused, I would have robbed both Doris and me of this blessing. The book of Acts reminds us that it is more blessed to give than receive, but sometimes, it truly is more blessed to receive.

The season of Advent reminds us that God gives Jesus, the Prince of Peace, to us. As we receive God's gift of peace we are then able to share God's peace with others. In the act of giving and receiving, we are blessed.

Tackle Hunger

on Superbowl Sunday (February 1)
by taking part in Souper Bowl of Caring

www.souperbowl.org



The Military General of Peace?

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7

Brutality, conniving, ruthlessness, and infidelity were the names of the game. Whatever it took, whether violence against indigenous peoples or against their own, the Roman generals were on a tear to rule. They crucified revolting slaves in a 240-mile line of crosses. They butchered Germanic villages of old men and woman, children, and toddlers, along with their animals. Within this culture of brutality and violence, Caesar Augustus finally won the undisputed title, *divi filius*, “Son of God!”

Little did Augustus know that prophets foresaw, during his reign, the rise of another son of God. This One would be “the Son of the Most High” of whose “kingdom there will be no end.” His name would be called the “Prince of Peace.” The Hebrew word Isaiah uses for prince, *nagid*, means ruler, leader, or captain. Isaiah envisions a military figure—but one like none other. Isaiah tells us this coming One is a general of peace!

In striking contrast to the barbarous Roman generals, this promised child is not about violence, coercion, and cruelty. This ruler is a prince of peace, peace like the world has never seen—undercutting violence at the heart by re-establishing friendly covenants between God and individuals, restoring peace in every human relation, and giving soundness of spirit and body.

This Advent, receive the coming prince’s offer to you of peace: peace with God, peace with others, and peace of mind and body!

Prayer: Dear Savior, give me peace with you, with others, and in mind and body. Amen.

Tom Thomas
Forest, VA

Knowing Peace in the Dark

Scripture: Isaiah 54:10

Life can be cruel. Economic circumstances can crush dreams. Sickness can debilitate us. Loved ones can betray or disappoint us. Although God’s world offers us brilliant flashes of beauty, hope, and joy, we all have times

I was glad I learned this lesson early in my ministry, not to refuse a gift.

Prayer: Giving God, you invite us to receive your son Jesus, the Prince of Peace, so that we in turn, may give this great gift to others. Help us never pass up an opportunity to accept or share your gift of peace. Amen.

David Lord
Moneta, VA

Peace, When Your World Crumbles

Scripture: John 14:27

The Prince of Peace, where can he be found? Where do you need Jesus as the Prince of Peace in your life? These have become deeply personal questions to me over the past year, as my life has been changed by living with Parkinson’s Disease. The most important change, to me, is that I have grown closer to God.

We all get so busy as we try to navigate life through the lenses of what we feel that we “have” to do. It is only when we pause—or are stopped by circumstances—that we realize God is in control. I have spent a lot of time worrying this year, and I’ve had many sleepless nights. My future was uncertain, and I felt I needed to be in control. What would I do? How could I prepare for the unknown? I finally concluded that I could not solve my situation by myself, that I had to give it all to God.

Through prayer and time spent with God, I have come to the true peace in my life—the peace that passes all understanding. Jesus gave his life on the cross for the world’s sins. So when the world comes crashing down at our feet, we need to seek the true Prince of Peace, Jesus.

Prayer: Dear God, let us remember, when the world seems to be crumbling beneath us, that you are in control, and you are the true source of peace. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.

Scott Pearl
Lynchburg, VA