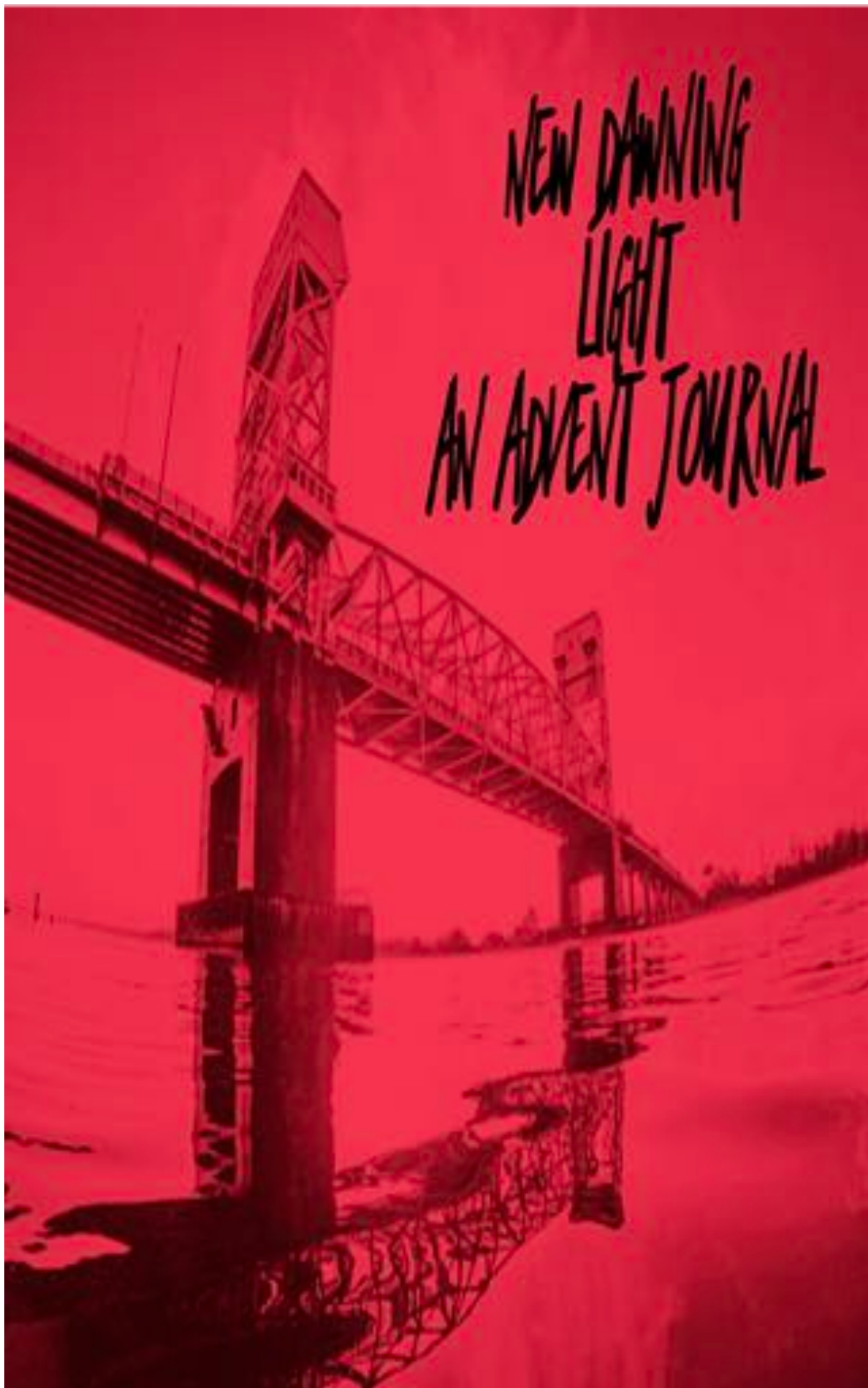


NEW DAWNING  
LIGHT  
AN ADVENT JOURNAL



## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Forward.....	2
<b>HOPE</b> .....	4
Thoughts on Hope.....	5
Day 1 Hugh Hollowell.....	6
Day 2 Alexia Salvatierra.....	7
Day 3 Tucker Kelly .....	8
Day 4 Jamie Thompson .....	9
Day 5 James Howell .....	10
Day 6 Amy Williams.....	11
<b>LOVE</b> .....	12
Thoughts on Love.....	13
Day 7 Grace Hackney.....	14
Day 8 Brock Meyer .....	15
Day 9 Melissa Browning.....	16
Day 10 Spencer Burke.....	17
Day 11 Jason Mitchell .....	18
Day 12 Sus Long.....	19
<b>JOY</b> .....	20
Thoughts on Joy.....	21
Day 13 D.L. Mayfield.....	22
Day 14 Brian Combs .....	23
Day 15 Beth Hood .....	24
Day 16 Suzanne Castle.....	25
Day 17 Jesse James DeConto.....	27
Day 18 Laura Wittman .....	28
<b>PEACE</b> .....	29
Thoughts on Peace .....	30
Day 19 Christine Adams Lee .....	31
Day 20 Christina Turner.....	32
Day 21 Cleve May .....	33
Day 22 Robert Wright Lee IV.....	34
Day 23 Edgar A. Vergara Millán .....	35
Day 24 Jason Darden.....	36
Day 25 Jonathan Wilson Hartgrove .....	37

# INTRODUCTION

As I think of the birth of Jesus, it's hard to not imagine the typical scene of a beautiful family gathered in a manger with well-behaved animals and a trio of wealthy men. This is the scene that has been dictated to us for many years, and if anything, it has caused a false sense of security. I would imagine the individuals look a lot more like someone you would pass in downtown, or see at the on-ramp holding a cardboard sign reading, "Homeless Need Help" or "No Room In The Inn." The Savior of the world came to us in a barn with no air circulation, feces from various animals, and without proper healthcare. If you look hard enough, you might see that exact same scenario in your city, town, or county. This season I challenge you to embrace the poverty we all have. The poverty that comes in the form of fear, insecurity, uncertainty, and the lack of self-worth. Each individual that contributed to this journal has something important to say. As you read through it, write notes, draw pictures, and reflect on these words.

THIS IS FOR YOU!!!

I love you all and wish you the Grace and Peace of Christ!

Randy Evans

Walking Tall Wilmington

# FORWARD

“What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” (John 1:3-4 NRSV)

Methodists are well-known for a few things. First and foremost, we’re known for being, well...methodical. No surprise there. We’re also known for songs. From the earliest times, Methodists have written songs to both classical and popular tunes (even bar songs), and we have used those songs to teach and express our theology. And that leads to a third thing we’re known for: our theology (or the way we think about God). Whenever Methodists have talked about God, there has always been a heavy emphasis on grace. Grace is God’s free gift offered to us, reaching out for us, even when we don’t have a clue. To take it one step further, God’s love is universal, meaning that it was offered for all.

All this comes together in “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing,” one of the many popular hymns written by Charles Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist movement. In the final verse he writes:

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all he brings,  
risen with healing in his wings.

Light and life to all he brings. God’s love is universal, offered to all, but does everyone get it? In the original Christmas story, it seems like only a few truly get the great Gift offered to us. Mary, a poor girl who realizes that in choosing her, God has “lifted up the lowly.” The hard-working shepherds, “keeping watch over their flock,” who hear the revelation of the angels. Even the Magi, foreign star-gazers who were open to what God might show them, recognized the kingship of the little child in Bethlehem. Who did not get it? Those who were too busy, too preoccupied, too focused on themselves. The light and life is brought to all, but not everyone sees or experiences it.

That’s why we have to tell the story: to make sure as many hear it as possible, because it’s good news! In his “Directions for Singing” John Wesley says this: “Sing lustily and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sung the songs of Satan.” Light and life to all he brings: this is the message we have to proclaim. I hope that as you move through this season of preparation for the coming of the Christ-child, you will be reminded of the light and life that is ours.

Then, I hope that you will tell of it, even sing it out “lustily and with good courage.”

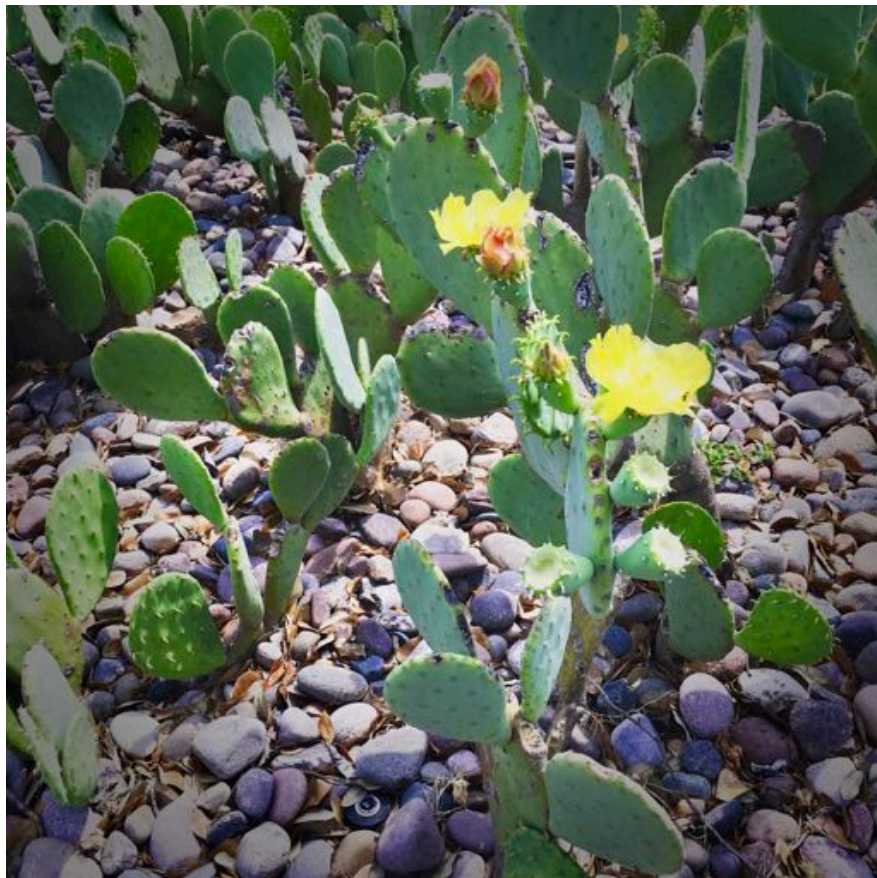
Prayer: Jesus Christ, Light of the world, we draw near to renew our light in you, that our lives may brightly reflect your love. Fix our gaze on Christ, that we may brightly shine as we carry out your purposes. We celebrate the light of Christ which shines in the world with ever-increasing glory as God’s Kingdom grows.

Amen.

*Shawn Blackwelder*

*Pastor of St. Paul’s United Methodist Church in Carolina Beach Founder of Cape Fear Beer and Hymns*

# Hope



“This image was taken in Fort Worth, Texas, after I thought these cactus were dying. After a month of some love, I came out one day and they had started to bloom.”  
*(Image from Suzanne Castle)*



## DAY 1

All you have to do is open a web browser or newspaper: wars consume the planet, leaving destruction in their path. Corrupt politicians line their pockets at the expense of the poor. The hungry starve while the rich feast at overflowing tables. The very earth is groaning from the havoc we have wracked on it.

The future looks bleak.

That doesn't just describe today, but also first century Palestine, the land where Jesus would be born. The most powerful government the world had ever known had kicked people off their family's land, subjected them to crippling taxation, and took every possible resource from this once great people.

In the midst of that, they still dared to dream of a better world. A world where things would be made right, a world where Jesus's mother would dream that God "has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly." (Luke 1:52 NRSV)

Mary had hope: hope in a better world than the one she lived in, hope that a good God had a plan to bring that world about, and hope in the one who would be sent. In this time of Advent, may we know the sort of hope that Mary did.

*Hugh Hollowell*

## MY THOUGHTS

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## DAY 2

Rene August, an Episcopal priest in South Africa says that the difference between a sprint and a marathon is how you breathe. Pablo Alvarado of the National Day Laborers’s Network says that giving birth requires breathing and pushing. Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Nobel Peace Prize Winner, winks and says that we are resurrection people.

I live in a world where families with undocumented immigrant parents and US citizen children are separated by detention and deportation daily – even if they are law-abiding and actively contribute to our churches and communities. I struggle with my role as a Pastor trying to teach terrified children the discipline of hope, trying to help them understand the meaning of the word hope in their situation.

What do we hope for? I am “Luthercostal.” I believe that God does miracles – sometimes miracles that are obvious to anyone and sometimes miracles that are invisible, felt like a soft whisper, if at all. Some resurrection miracles are right here in this world, foretastes of the feast to come, and some are only going to happen in an undetermined future when “all will be well and all will be well and all manner of things will be well” (Julian of Norwich). To be a Christian is to live in that tension, trusting in the love of Jesus. Trust is a matter of leaning in, like a child leaning into the arms of her mother, taking ragged sobbing breaths until you can breathe deeply and sleep.

*Alexia Salvatierra*

## MY THOUGHTS

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DAY 3

Think of the worst possible thing that could ever happen. Now think of the way you would get through it. What is the one thing that you would hold onto?

Hope. The very word that can get us through anything that comes our way. Sometimes we lose hope. But that's because we hope in things that will only last a short moment. The hope I'm talking about is the hope that Jesus has given us. Which is an everlasting, never-ending, life with our Father in Heaven.

Jesus says, "When the Father sends the Advocate as my representative - that is, the Holy Spirit - He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you. I am leaving you with a gift - peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. Remember what I told you: I am going away, but I will come back to you again. If you really loved me, you would be happy that I am going to the Father, who is greater than I am. I have told you these things before they happen so that when they do happen, you will believe." (John 14:26-29 NLT)

I promise you, if you accept this gift you will be accepting freedom. And with that freedom, you will be able to hold onto a hope that will get you through anything.

*Tucker Kelly*

MY THOUGHTS

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## DAY 4

It seems mighty weak. It feels frail in comparison to what it has to stand up to. Why can't we have weapons? Something intimidating? Something that the world will recognize? Something that will cause evil to shake in its boots?

After all, it's a war out here. Nothing close to a fair fight. Every day is a scrap for employment, food, housing, happiness, and health. People judge, money comes up short, and self-blame weighs heavy.

And somehow, we're expected to face it all - with hope.

What was God thinking? Of all the things that could have been, we get a Savior born as a helpless baby. Out of all the ways that God could speak, we get whispers and silence. Out of all the ways that God could show up, we get angels disguised as strangers that we are left to welcome and trust. Out of all the ways God could overcome the darkness, we get candles and a song. Out of all the ways God could defeat death, we get an unjust execution by a crooked system and eventually an empty tomb.

Most everything is upside down in God's kingdom.

And so, it is vulnerable and quiet, it flickers and hums, but hope does endure. While it certainly seems weak, God has promised that when we are weak, then we are strong.

*Jamie Thompson*

## MY THOUGHTS

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## Day 5

The Bible says, “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts.” (Romans 5:3-5) I might wish I needed a little less character and endurance, but I thank God for hope. What makes us different from dogs, giraffes, or cockroaches is that we always care about tomorrow, next week, and next year. The uncertainty of it all can make us anxious, fearful, or just plain cynical.

Hope keeps us fresh and keeps love alive. Hope isn’t wishing. Hope isn’t optimism either. Optimism glibly believes tomorrow will be better, and it depends on us getting our act together and making tomorrow better. Hope is very different. Hope is trust. Hope doesn’t depend on you or me doing better. Hope depends on God. Hope clings to God – and realizes God is clinging to us and won’t let go. Hope can weather another bad day, and hope isn’t squashed if things get worse. Hope believes in God, in God’s good future for us, and all of creation. “Why are you cast down, O my soul? Hope in God.” (Psalm 42:5)



This image was taken at a worship event. In this prayer station, we were invited to bring light to the darkest places of our world and our lives. We broke open glow sticks and lit up the space for worship.

*(Image from Suzanne Castle)*

*James Howell*

my thoughts

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## DAY 6

“And so, Lord, where do I put my hope? My only hope is in you.” (Psalm 39:7)  
 Poverty. Racism. Natural disasters. Trauma. Violence. Death and loss.

When we look at the condition of the world today, we often find ourselves asking, “Where is the hope?” We are constantly bombarded with news that breaks our hearts. We are consumed with social media posts constantly reminding us of how frail our humanity is. We walk among people whose faces reflect the condition of their hearts that are in turmoil and need healing. We see division everywhere we go - divisions among race, genders, class, and religion. And as the holiday season approaches us, we hope to see our world come together in kindness but we are often greeted with greed, loneliness, and apathy.

And yet, there is something so deep within all of us that pursues and looks for hope like a game of hide and seek. We crave it. We hunger for it. We need it.

But how do we find HOPE in the midst of all that comes for us like a semi-truck rolling directly at us at full speed and whose brakes have given out?

We embrace the One WHO IS Hope. The one who was God but came down as man in a time of hopelessness to become hope to us. He was born in a time of racism, violence, and trauma. He was born into poverty. He experienced what we see now - but HE WAS HOPEFUL because He knew of His purpose AND that this world is our temporary home until we are with our Father in Heaven. We cannot put our hope in man or this world. Our only hope is in the grace, love, and promises of God - and our hope is a sure thing!

*Amy Williams*

## MY THOUGHTS

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# Love



This photo was taken during one of my speaking engagements where I invited everyone to write LOVE on their arms as a reminder that not only are we called to embody love to the world, sometimes we need a reminder that God's love is written all over us, in every circumstance.  
*(Image from Suzanne Castle)*



## DAY 7

I am a pastor in North Carolina. For eleven years, I served churches in rural communities and was the guest at more breakfast, lunch, and dinner tables than I can count. Church people love to eat. But as I came to know the communities in which I served, my eyes began to be opened to the sin of our tables. While church folk were grazing at tables full of fine food, there were people in our community who were hungry. When our congregation was invited to join other congregations to feed the homeless in Hillsborough, I was convicted that something was wrong. Why were we giving handouts rather than sitting at the table with our neighbors? And why did we serve the cheapest, most convenient food when we are called to love our neighbors? Love is more than filling an empty stomach; to truly love is to give not only the best food we have to offer, but to also give of ourselves.

The prophet Isaiah begs for God to tear open the heavens and come down. If you read the rest of this chapter, you will find that Israel is actually asking God to come and shake things up; to show the world that God will not be pleased with the pretense of love; God desires us to love deeply.

And so, Love was born in a manger. I smile when I think about the story of the birth of Jesus. Of all the places Jesus could have been born, he was born in the feeding trough of animals! God came down as food for all the creatures of the world!

When Christians receive Jesus as food in Holy Communion, we are changed. We are bound together to feed love to the world. Because God is love, and because love has come down to us, we cannot do anything to harm our neighbor. When we know our neighbor is diabetic, we do not put pound cake in front of him! A friend of mine has said, "Food is God's love made delicious." God's love springs up from the earth in the form of beautiful fruits and vegetables, lovingly grown, harvested, prepared, and shared around tables of a new community of love. And strangers now are friends.

*Grace Hackney*



DAY 8

“Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone and will bear no fruit,” Jesus said as He was talking with his twelve disciples. Jesus



This photo was taken in Nashville at Thistle Farms Cafe. When you leave, near the door, is this bowl. You may leave or take a blessing for your life. Can you image what our world could be like, if we took seriously sharing love with strangers every day? (Image from Suzanne Castle)

was predicting His own death and was inviting the disciples into His death with Him. Little did the disciples know that Jesus was on His journey to the cross, where He would give His life and die because of love. Many have tried to understand why Jesus had to die. Do we really have a vindictive Father in the sky that demands blood for payment? If we want to know the Father we do not need to look any further than Jesus. If there is something that Jesus teaches us about love, it is that love goes beyond ourselves. Love does not begin and end with self. Love looks to the interest of others. Love breaks your heart. Love is about sacrifice. And maybe what we see in the suffering and pain of the cross is a mysterious and powerful example of God placing the interest of humanity before Himself. This is the Easter story and the Christmas story. Christ “emptied Himself” to walk with you. No matter what your story may be, or where you may walk, the greatest gift is that Christ

walks with you. In pain and in joy, the ultimate gift of the cross is it shows God’s willingness to walk with us anywhere. This season of Advent, take some time in prayer to turn to God who is with you.

*Brock Meyer*

MY THOUGHTS

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DAY 9

In the story of Jesus’s birth, I have always seen the innkeeper as a super villain. A pregnant lady shows up on his doorstep and is turned away! The phrase in Greek that we translate as “no room” can also mean “no place.” It is possible that the inn was not full, but that our villainous innkeeper turned Mary away because of the taboos around women’s bodies and childbirth.

Have you ever been turned away from a place? Rejected and asked to go somewhere else? If so, you’re in good company. Jesus entered this world marginalized to a horse stall.

But Jesus was never alone and neither are we. The angels, the shepherds, and the wise men followed songs and stars to find him. God’s love chases us, too.

The love that Jesus brought into this world was too big to be confined to an ordinary inn; too deep and overwhelming to abide by taboo.

I worship each Sunday at an outdoor church with people experiencing homelessness. Many of my friends do not feel comfortable at indoor churches. Taboo has kept them away.

But each week, the Jesus who was born outdoors welcomes us to communion. He remembers our names and gathers our prayers. And then we go forth, strong like Mary, proclaiming that our justice-loving God has set us all free.

*Melissa Browning*

MY THOUGHTS

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## DAY 10

It was my twenty-first birthday. On that warm August afternoon, my mom grabbed me by the hand and took me out to the backyard where she sat me on a brightly colored chair with a happy birthday sign. She said she had a present for me.

She proceeded down the steps of the pool. This was quite surprising because she was afraid of water. She dipped her head underwater and began to splash her way across the width of the shallow portion of the pool. When she touch the other edge she emerged exclaiming, "Happy Birthday!"

This present didn't cost any money, it wasn't trendy, or part of my "must have" birthday list, but it's one of the most memorable gifts I've ever received.

My mom had a unique way of expressing and displaying her love for me. This was not my first unique birthday present. On my seventh birthday she had convinced my dad that both of them should quit smoking, because they knew how much it bothered me.

Just the other day I was reminded of her love for me. It seems like every time I visit she asks me to come and sit next to her. That's because she knows how much I love to have my back scratched. It may seem silly or even sadly sentimental, but even without words, she reminds me of love.

*Spencer Burke*

## MY THOUGHTS

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## DAY 11

As followers of Jesus, no matter what it is that we do, whether we raise kids, help our neighbors, work a mundane job, comfort someone who is in a difficult situation, or just simply going through the motions in this thing called life, if we are not doing these things out of a place bathed in love, they are meaningless. In Galatians, Paul describes the nine elements that are present in the Fruit of the Spirit, and we possess each of them through His work in us. Love is listed first because it is the key to each of the following characteristics. Donald G. Barnhill said it best: "Love is the key. Joy is love singing. Peace is love resting. Patience is love enduring. Kindness is love's truth. Goodness is love's character. Faithfulness is love's habit. Gentleness is love's self-forgetfulness. Self-control is love being the reins."

There's love, and then there's love.

*Jason Mitchell*



MY THOUGHTS IN A PICTURE

DAY 12

“This is the one about whom it is written: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ ” (Matthew 11:10)

This week I have been with a friend’s family as they mourn the death of their father and husband. They held each other in the kitchen, told stories of the love and care of the man who had been an essential pillar in their lives. They also talked about regret, about the imperfection of their love - of his love. He was a second husband, a second father, a man who stepped into their lives in a moment of turmoil and offered a woman and her two children a path to belonging and safety.

He chose them.

How many have parents who never chose them? Who walked away? The gift that this father gave to his children was a love that was not coerced. He freely chose to share his name, home, and resources. This is the love of Advent: that God prepared a way for Christ so that Christ could prepare a way for us; not in secret, but for everyone to see, because we have been called by name. We have been chosen.

*Sus Long*

MY THOUGHTS

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# Joy



This is a snapshot of a wall near a home in in the Val d'Orcia in Tuscany, Italy. I love how the layers of stone meld together to tell a story about this wall... all it has endured, all it holds. That's how joy works, right? True joy is a part of who we are regardless of all the things that teem around us. Joy comes from living our story, the things that we didn't think fit or worked, and how it has made us who we are today.

*(Image from Suzanne Castle)*









## DAY 15

Mary says: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Who in the world rejoices following this kind of disruptive news? Mary had plans. After a timely engagement she would become Joseph's wife and eventually have children. She had every intention of being a respected woman in her community. An unexpected pregnancy before marriage was not part of Mary's plan, yet apparently an important part of God's.

Many of us are well acquainted with the unforeseen, the unanticipated, the startling. We have our own stories of what we thought life would look like. At some point and time, we've been confronted with a change in plans that were not of our design. However, we are more likely to dread the redirection than dance and sing. Who celebrates inconvenience, pending ridicule, and sacrifice? The truth is that Mary wasn't celebrating the approaching challenges. She was celebrating the greatness of God and the privilege of participating in God's eternal plans. Where others viewed Mary's circumstances as those to be pitied, Mary saw them through lenses of humility and gratitude; she rejoiced! Mary rejoiced in the opportunity to be a servant of God rather than focusing on plans that were different than those she had imagined.

*Beth Hood*

## MY THOUGHTS

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## DAY 16

This image was taken by me laying on my back during a time in my world when JOY was the very last thing on my mind: health scares, not enough money, job insecurity, and family drama were all at play. And I had had enough. So I wiggled on my back in the middle of a cool day and just wailed at the winter sun. And I happened to hit my button on my phone and take this image. I didn't see it until several months later. It's such a testament to that day, to me continuing to persevere and honestly, my every day as life continues to present a variety of challenges in relationships, jobs, and faith. This accidental image glistens, glows, beckons, and is color-rich IN. SPITE. OF. ME. I didn't set up the shot. I didn't work all the angles. I didn't set out to 'catch it.'

JOY comes in the midst of the mess - all of our schemes, plans, and to-do lists, with all our failures and inconsistencies. And I say all this to note that part of the story of God being born as Jesus is that joy came anyway.

There were huge power struggles happening in the empire. Assassinations and plots at every turn. Hoards of people going without so the Emperor and his minions could be revelers. Scared shepherds, the most despised profession of the day, just trying to make ends meet any way they could. A homeless family, struggling with a baby-to-be-born. A city on the edge of erupting. And joy came anyway.



Staring up at the sky, the shepherds saw a glow and heard the song. They were terrified AND filled with wonder at the same time. God chose that place, that night, those people.

What do we do? For joy comes. It doesn't always have a plan or a timeline. It comes. Every year at this time I am reminded how accidental joy can be and yet, I'm pondering how to be more aware of the joyful glow that is present in our time. This year. This day. What blink of light, what call to run and share, what song is being sung to lift others out of despair?

It picks me up. It shows the way. For joy comes. May the God of Birth be in our living and our being on this day and every day.

*Suzanne Castle*



MY THOUGHTS IN A PICTURE

## DAY 17

St. James, a half-sibling or cousin of Jesus, was among the early Jewish Christians who suffered persecution from both within the Jerusalem community and from the ruling Roman Empire. The Pharisees eventually made him a martyr, throwing him from the pinnacle of the temple and stoning him to death after he survived the fall. This James wrote to the Jewish Christians scattered through the Mediterranean world, “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.”

Count it all joy, James insists. Joy, I find to be among the spiritual fruit hanging highest, beyond my reach. I can love others, offer kindness, and practice self-control out of a sense of duty. I can have faith, hope, and patience, believing that God will make all things new in the end. But joy, and peace with it, is something deeper. You can’t fool yourself into thinking there’s joy when there’s just not. Count it all joy, James says, when you fall into suffering. Maybe that’s the secret. Just count it. Simply smile when it hurts. “Laugh to keep from crying,” says our folk wisdom. I’ve known people who suffer much more than I do, yet who find a way to smile. Maybe the act itself brings joy, even if you have to fake it till you make it. Maybe closing the distance between future hope and present joy requires nothing but practice.

*Jesse James DeConto*

## MY THOUGHTS

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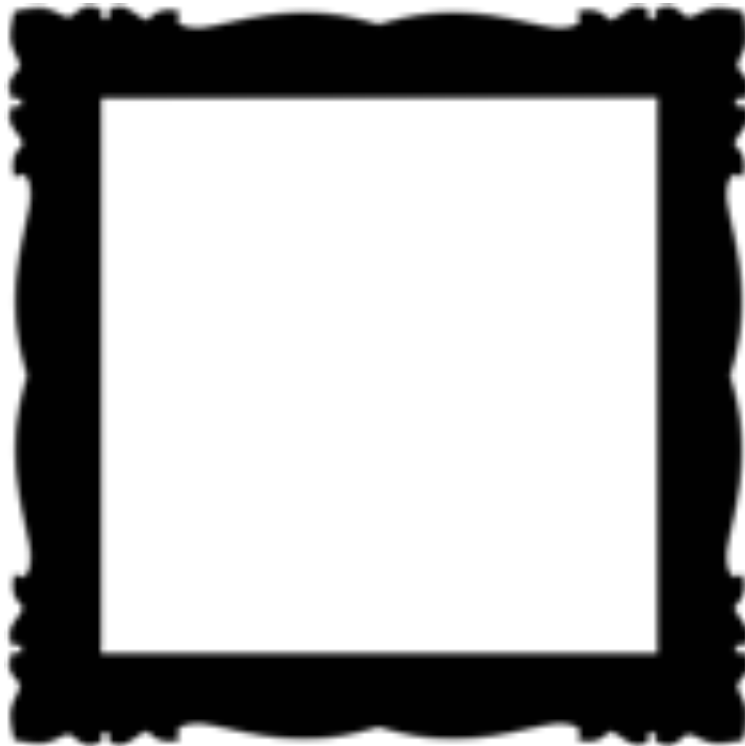
## DAY 18

“He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant. Look! From now on everyone will consider me highly favored because the mighty one has done great things for me. Holy is His name!” (Luke 1:48-49)

Mary was a young girl, given a great task, in a society where she knew she would be judged and looked down upon. She was unwed, yet getting ready to have a baby and making some great claims that God was the father. Imagine how the world would take that kind of news. Yet Mary saw it as a gift with joy, that even though she had nothing, the love of the Father saw past the things the rest of the world valued. She was good. She was pure. But even more, she loved God, and nothing could stop her from this act of love and service.

We all have something to offer. We all have something to give and the greatest joy we can offer God is our love.

*Laura Wittman*



MY THOUGHTS IN A PICTURE

# Peace



This image was taken in Hawaii and I love how it embodies what we think are peaceful waters. Notice the jutting formation that breaks the surface. Seems that's the way our lives are: not always as peaceful or settled as we want.

*(Image from Suzanne Castle)*









## DAY 21

Whenever the Bible talks about peace, so much more is meant by that word than what we typically think of when we say “peace.” When we say peace, we usually mean the absence of conflict, or perhaps some kind of inner tranquility. The biblical vision of peace, what the Hebrew word shalom points toward, is everything in all of creation fitting together as God created it to be when God looked down at all that He had made and said, “It is very good.” The biblical vision of peace sees everything and all people as intricately connected, like threads in a fabric all weaving in and out of each other to form a single, beautiful garment. This peace is for the healing and the flourishing of all of creation. This is what Jesus promises to us when he says, “Peace be with you; my peace I give unto you.”

In the church, we often greet each other by saying, “The peace of the Lord be with you.” This simple statement is a declaration of the truth. The peace of the Lord IS with you. It is also a prayer of yearning – that you would know the peace of the Lord, the healing of all things.

May this Advent season be one in which you yearn for the peace of Jesus, and may the peace of the Lord be with you.

Come, Lord Jesus. Come. Amen.

*Cleve May*

## MY THOUGHTS

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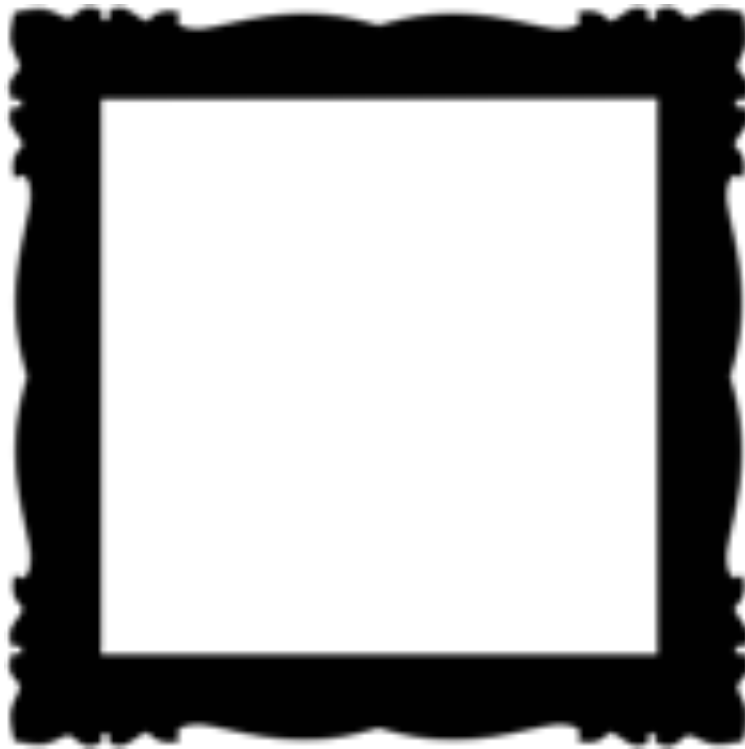
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## DAY 22

Around this time of year, I always hear Elvis's Blue Christmas come on the radio. It hurts, because I suffer from bipolar disorder, and I have no control over the blue I feel around the holiday season. This can be a difficult reality for all of us with mental illnesses because we simply want to be happy.

But let me assure you of something: Christ came for us too. Christ came for those society has deemed as misfits who think differently because of their mental health. Christ came and arrived for you and for me and for all the loudness in our head. Christ came and offered peace. This is our greatest and surest hope this Advent season. So be bold, be brave, and have a blue Christmas because even in the darkness, we face a light which shines, and the darkness cannot overcome it.

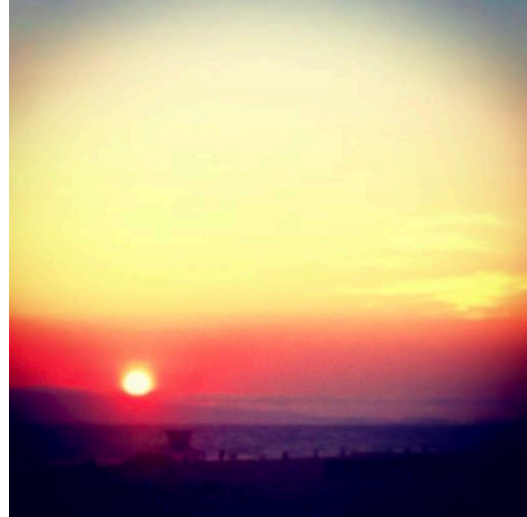
*Robert Wright Lee IV*



MY THOUGHTS IN A PICTURE

DAY 23

The one whose birth we're currently preparing to celebrate comes to us today, and in fact, comes to us every single day, presenting us with a gift that has the power to transform and to heal. It is the gift of peace. When His closest friends were overcome by fear, uncertainty, and danger, He said to them: "I am leaving you with a gift - peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid." (John 14:27 NLT) Friend, the season of Christmas approaches and countless gifts will be exchanged. Most of these gifts will likely be taken for granted, easily dismissed, or forgotten. But the gift of peace of heart and mind that Jesus offers you and me every single day, is a gift that has the power to transform our reality no matter what our current circumstances are. This gift of peace has the power to bring the light of healing into a world that is darkened daily by violence. Wherever you may find yourself today on this journey we call life, whatever your situation may be, would you accept the loving gift of peace that Jesus offers you? My prayer is that this gift of peace will bring healing into your heart and grant your mind the focus that is needed to follow the footsteps of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.



This photo was taken on the pier in Huntington Beach, California as the sun set. At the end of each day, as the sun sets, how can we be agents of peace through the unlit places of life?  
 (Image by Suzanne Castle)

*Edgar A. Vergara Millán*

MY THOUGHTS

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DAY 24

“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don’t be troubled or afraid.” (John 14:27)

For many, peace is the moment a war ends. Others might say it’s an afternoon nap.

Every day our brothers and sisters battle to find food, to find shelter, for dignity, and for equality. How can an individual experiencing poverty ever feel rested? How hard is it for an individual experiencing homelessness, war-weary from the battles of the day, to find a place to sleep?

Would you believe me if I told you that even though those battles continue, Jesus is right there beside you? That when your heart is broken, Jesus’s heart is broken also? That when you cry out in frustration, when you weep tears of sadness, Jesus weeps with you?

This is the peace Jesus gave us and continues to give us: His heart. His tears. His presence in the midst of our upside-down lives. The world gives us some jacked-up things. Jesus gives us His peace:

“I’ve said these things to you so that you will have peace in me. In the world you have distress. But be encouraged! I have conquered the world.” (John 16:33)

*Jason Darden*

MY THOUGHTS

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## DAY 25

The Psalms are the song book for God's revolution - the soundtrack that prepares us to notice when God's day has come. Like the fight song at the football game or the theme song in a movie, we have to listen to the Psalms for cues. They teach us how to pay attention.

Most people didn't recognize Jesus when he first came, just as many don't recognize him now. Their ears were trained to Herrod and Caesar's song, not to the song book of God's revolution. If a new king was born, they expected fanfare. If someone important shows up, we expect the TV cameras to be there.

This is why we train our ears to the song book of God's revolution. "The stone that the builder rejected has become the chief cornerstone," we sing. Mary, an unwed teenager is pregnant with the God of the Universe. Migrant farmworkers will be the first to worship Him, along with the angels. The poor and the outcast will flock to Jesus, just as the downtrodden of the world know today that God's revolution is for us. "The stone that the builder rejected has become the chief cornerstone and it is marvelous in our eyes."

The Psalm teaches us to sing, "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad." Today is our day for celebration, even as we wait for Jesus to come, because we know that God has chosen us to be instruments of God's revolution in the world.

*Jonathan Wilson Hartgrove*

## MY THOUGHTS

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