Advent 2025

"How Great Our Joy," a traditional German carol of the late 19th century, serves as the theme for this year's Advent celebration and Advent devotional book for Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church.

Over the course of the last year, we as a congregation have been called to rise to the occasion of the falling ceiling in our sanctuary. We did not expect to deal with yet another restoration project. But we are, and we are meeting the challenge through our financial gifts, our volunteer hours and a spirit of cooperation and flexibility that describes us as Christians. Thank you all for helping us experience joy in the midst of this unexpected task.

This year's writers of Advent devotions are sharing stories of the joy they have found in their Christian faith. You will be inspired by the experiences they share with us. We are grateful for each writer. Be sure to read the scriptures that are referenced with each devotion.

The weekly lighting of the Advent candles will be followed by the singing of the fourth stanza of "How Great Our Joy."

How Great Our Joy

This gift of God we'll cherish well,
That ever joy our hearts shall fill.
How great our joy!
Great our joy!
Joy, joy, joy!
Joy, joy, joy!
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

Our special thanks go to members of the Joy Circle who sponsored this year's Advent devotional book and to Evonne Mobley and Carolyn Hale Cubbedge who co-chaired the project. As always, the help of our staff colleagues Jennifer Doki and Ashley Mays Henry has been invaluable.

Feel free to share a copy with your friends. There will be plenty to go around. Our prayer is that as you enter into this Advent season in the life of the Church, you will be filled with the Joy we know through Jesus Christ, the Lord.

The First Sunday of Advent

November 30, 2025

How Great Our Joy
While by the sheep we watched at night,
glad tidings brought an angel bright.
How great our joy!
Great our joy!
Joy, joy, joy!
Joy, joy, joy!
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

November 30
Children's Coat Drive
Coats are due by noon
Oliver Hall Lobby

Please see the weekly bulletin for details
regarding Advent and Christmas events.

Sunday, November 30, 2025

Luke 1:26-38

On December 1, I will mark the 31st anniversary of my ordination to the Gospel Ministry. It was a day long in the making. As a five-year-old, I had a conversation with myself that included the words, "I would be a preacher when I grow up, if I were a boy." I had never seen a female preacher although I had been in church all of my life. My father was a preacher, after all.

My career path led me to education. I taught high school English, drama, and speech. I served in Christian higher education as the Dean of Student Life at Georgetown College in Kentucky. I worked with students who were seeking their own career paths—some of whom were young women who were considering a call to vocational ministry. I encouraged them to answer whatever call God was placing on their hearts. As I worked with them and affirmed what God was doing in their lives, that five-year-old call surfaced again. If God could call these young women, why was it that I had not affirmed my own call.

And so, I started seminary when I was forty-one years old. I attended classes and worked fulltime. I finished my Master of Divinity degree in 1993 and began the long search for a church that believed God was calling us to serve together. As I graduated from seminary, I received a word of encouragement from my pastor and spiritual director. It came during Advent. He led me anew to Mary's encounter with the Angel when she learned that she would be the mother of the Messiah. She also heard the angel say "For nothing will be impossible with God." Her response was "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

My friend claimed the joyful expectant hope for me with those words. God's call that I had heard would also be true for me. My call to become a pastor did not come until 1999 following many job searches and rejected resumes. But the call came. In God's good time. And it was filled with the joy of believing in God's call for me.

Thanks be to God for the working of God's Spirit in me and in the churches that I have been blessed to serve. Make us ever aware that we work together to be all that God wants us to be. Amen

Carolyn Hale Cubbedge

Monday, December 1, 2025

James 1:2 and Matthew 11:28

Driving back and forth down I-16 is as boring a drive as you can imagine. Construction is never ending, traffic is ever increasing, and billboard after billboard remind me of those poor souls who have been injured in an accident and whom they should call.

James 1:2 tells us that trials come in many forms…some health related, some emotional, some financial, you name it. We all face our own challenges, and this year it seems as if our family has faced a plethora of trials. My father-in-law passed away unexpectedly, and my beloved sister-in-law was diagnosed with breast cancer and endured a double mastectomy and radiation. Two weeks later, Michael's sister was diagnosed with the same dreaded disease and has undergone chemotherapy. I have struggled with an on-going construction project that is testing my will and my patience, and all the while I have been working to grow and support my real estate team. To say I have had a lot on my plate this year is an understatement!

So, imagine my surprise last week as I drove home from a meeting at the church and for the first time this season noticed the fall beauty surrounding me. My mind has been over-occupied, and I had been so consumed with so many challenges recently that I had completely missed God's handiwork in the changing of the color of the leaves! As I drove, I could feel the weight lifting from my shoulders as God took that moment to remind me to remember the source of my joy. It was as if I could hear Him saying as He did in Matthew 11:28, "come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."

We rejoice today in the full recovery of my brother's wife and in the anticipated full recovery of Michael's sister. We rejoice today that our children have dealt with the grief of losing their Boppa and can again find joy in their sweet memories of him. We rejoice in all the ways God continues to bless us!

Dear God,
Thank You for Your unwavering love for us and for the joy we have in our hearts because of You. Please keep us happy, healthy and faith-filled during this Advent season. Amen.

Whitney Butler

Tuesday, December 2, 2025

Isaiah 12:2.-6

The nights you fight best are when reason gets kicked in the gut, when the chariots of gloom encircle you. The nights you fight best are on a night like this as you chase a thousand dark rats from your brain, as you rise up against the impossible, as you become a despite husband to the tender wife of joy and move on regardless. The nights you pray best are when all the weapons are pointed at you, when all the voices hurl their insults while the dream is being strangled, and then from this loving wife's hand, the lungs that are being filled taste of the sweet coolness of oxygen and come back to the joy of being alive.

In the spring of 2024, I experienced a closure of my lungs caused by clots that had chosen to fill them. My heart struggled to push the little oxygen it could find through my body. My cardiologist, who had promised to answer any question truly and fully, told me I had a 50/50 chance of surviving.

One night, as I lay alone in the ICU, I accidentally knocked out the tubes to my nose. I felt the strangling. I reached for the bell to call the nurse, but either I couldn't reach it, or they didn't hear it. It was 4 AM when I felt my cell phone and dialed my wife, not knowing whether or not she would hear it. **She answered. I told her I needed her. It takes about 30 minutes to get from our home to the hospital, but about 20 minutes** later she came into the room. The joy I felt.

I am a very fortunate person, with a loving wife, a loving son, and many loving stepchildren, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. I am a blessed person in a joyful church congregation led by a joyful pastor who can bring joy out of even the most catastrophic situations. I have delightful neighbors and friends. Joy!

Our Father who art in Heaven, joyful is your love for us. Holy Spirit, you are in each of us. Lord Jesus, you give faith and salvation to us all. With our thanks, Amen

Noel Cooper

Wednesday, December 3, 2025

Psalm 30:11-12

An Angel's Face

I met Angel on my first mission trip to Santa Elena, Honduras in 2017. He was a year-old infant born with spina bifida. Angel experiences life from a wheelchair. Perhaps a hindrance to some, but not Angel! He and his two siblings live at the Oaks of Righteousness home with ten other orphans. On subsequent trips to Santa Elena through the years, I watched and admired Angel's determination, courage and pure joy in participating in all activities.

Fast forward to 2023, the Wesley Mission Team secured enough funds through the congregation's generosity to purchase bicycles for the children living at the Oaks, which is a group home for orphans supported by Mission on the Move. What a joyous occasion! Angel wasn't left out. Upon entering the bike shop in the city (two hours away), a team member spied a scooter that could be pulled behind a bike. A prayer answered. When Angel saw the scooter, the joy on his face melted my heart. After a group prayer of love and gratitude, off sped the brave and experienced bikers, adults included. Angel slid out of his wheelchair onto the scooter, wrapped his lifeless legs around the steering column and howled in delight and joy all the way down the hill! At that moment, I experienced the gift of God's Joy, pure joy, reflected in the face of an orphaned child.

Angel has long since outgrown the scooter. Now he's perfecting his soccer skills, ruining pants as he scoots along the ground. New moments of pure joy to watch! Love, joy, faith and hope, gifts from God to be shared in any language.

Dear Father God, language and cultural barriers are not barriers to love, joy, faith and hope. We pray that during this Advent Season, You will guide our words and actions so that we are reminded to find pure joy in life, to love unconditionally, to have unquenchable faith, to hope eternally and to be kind and gentle in all circumstances. In Christ's Name. Amen.

Sharlene Monahan

Thursday, December 4, 2025

Isaiah 40

A Shepherd's Life

No nativity scene is complete without the Holy Family and at least one shepherd. There is too much symbolism wrapped up in a shepherd for this one devotion, but it is quite amazing that they were willing to go off and leave their flock, even at the behest of angel choirs.

Think about it, they walked away from protecting their flock, leaving them vulnerable to predators and attack. Sheep are good at getting lost, and they left them in the wilderness. The shepherd is responsible for the well-being of their flock, and left them susceptible to injury. One or all of their sheep could've been stolen, and they would have lost their livelihood. The shepherd also had a responsibility and was accountable to the owner of the flock. Seeming negligent, they could lose their job.

A favorite carol of the season is ***Rise Up Shepherds and Follow***. Given the work of a shepherd, one of the more poignant verses sings, "if you take good heed to the angel's words; rise up, shepherd, and follow; You'll forget your flocks, you'll forget your herds; Rise up, shepherd, and follow …the Star of Bethlehem." There are professional reasons to ignore the angels. But the shepherds had enough trust in God to know that they could go to that place where their infant Savior lay, confident that the same God who sent the angels would not only mount them up, but as Isaiah 40 also tells us, God would tend the flock, gather its lambs and carry them close. When the shepherds left the manger, returning to their flocks, all they could do was rejoice. Although the Bible leaves out the details, they went back to a healthy flock.

Through this Advent season, in a world full of obligations, tumult, scares, and distractions, may we leave these things in the hands of God our Shepherd as we approach this child Incarnate, our Savior born of Bethlehem.

Savior, like a shepherd lead us, much we need Thy tender care. In Thy pleasant pastures feed us, and for our use Thy folds prepare. Blessed Jesus, Thou hast bought us, Thine we are. Amen.

Scott Cleaveland

Friday, December 5, 2025

Matthew 20:1-16

Before taking my first appointment in the church, I spent a year in Emory's Clinical Pastoral Education program known as CPE. CPE's purpose is to educate pastors in pastoral and spiritual care and chaplaincy. I served as a chaplain in Emory's hospitals and affiliations.

During my time at Crawford Long Hospital my primary area of responsibility was on the cardiac care floor. There was a gentleman I saw several times before his scheduled surgery. He told me it was serious, and the doctors were not sure of the outcome. On the afternoon prior to the surgery, he sent word that he wanted to talk with me. He confided in me that he went to church with his wife but had never been baptized. He asked me if I would baptize him in the morning before the surgery. We talked and I asked him the baptismal questions. We prayed and he confessed Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

At 6:00 am the following morning I went to pre-op with a small seashell. I stepped quietly into the room because there were many doctors and nurses getting him ready. I waited until someone acknowledged me and asked me what I wanted. I said this gentleman asked me if I would come this morning and baptize him before his surgery.

The room became completely still, and the staff moved to the side of the room. I put a few drops of water in the shell, blessed the water and walked over to where he was laying. I asked him if he knew why I was there. He said he wanted to be baptized. At that moment I knew we were in God's kingdom of heaven on earth, and I was overwhelmed with joy. The baptism brought forth tears of joy to everyone in the room; the man took my hand and thanked me; and I heard the voice of God saying: "I chose to give this (man) the same as I give to you".

Gracious God, we have been given the season of Advent to prepare once again for the coming of Christ. Help us to recognize the joy that abounds in this season. And if we are unable to do this, refresh our memories of our joy in the past. In Christ's name we pray, Amen

Martha Fielden

Saturday, December 6, 2025

Psalm 30:5

Tears, Joy, and a Crisp White Handkerchief

Last year, my father died on the morning of All Saints Sunday. It was fitting, as he had truly lived his Christian faith with no fanfare and finally had a celebration. You as a church showed such welcome and love for him during the final two and a half years of his life, after he moved here. He was active in the church, even enjoying Wednesday Night Supper and Bible study only four days before his death.

Always Daddy carried a neatly folded white handkerchief in his pants pocket. His top dresser drawer contained an assortment of these handkerchiefs, including early lop-sided squares I made as a little girl for him as presents, where with unsteady, crooked stitches I embroidered his initials, as well as later efforts with a neater monogram when I could sew a little straighter. Daddy saved all my pitiful attempts and referred to my homely projects as his best handkerchiefs that he reserved, in his phrase, “For Show and Not for Blow.”

Now a few of his handkerchiefs are in *my* top dresser drawer, and I make sure to have one in my robe’s pocket during worship every Sunday. In the All Saints Sunday services this year, I wiped my eyes of grateful tears with one of Daddy’s handkerchiefs as the bell tolled at the reading aloud of Daddy’s name, among those who had died over the past year.

Joy may not always involve laughter: sometimes joy comes in the form of thankful tears to have had an earthly father who demonstrated our Heavenly Father’s love for us, no matter how homely our efforts are to love Him.

Thank You, Jesus, that weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes in the morning. Amen

Nelle Bordeaux

Second Sunday of Advent

December 7, 2025

How Great Our Joy
There shall be born, so he did say,
In Bethlehem a child today.
How great our joy!
Great our joy!
Joy, joy, joy!
Joy, joy, joy!
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

December 7
Christmas at the Gardens
Wesley Gardens Retreat
4:00—6:00 p.m.

December 10
Children's Nativity Evening
Fellowship Hall
6:15 p.m.

Please see the weekly bulletin for details
regarding Advent and Christmas events.

Sunday, December 7, 2025

Matthew 7:3-5

Is joy the same as laughter? I had to google whether there are any expressions of Jesus laughing at himself recorded in the Bible. Apparently not, unless my research fails me. Surely Jesus was a man with a sense of humor, and there are references to his use of humor and exaggeration, as in Matthew when Jesus wonders why one would focus on a speck in another's eye but have a large plank in his own eye.

I am 63 now, but back in my mid-thirties, my husband and I, practicing law together, went to take a deposition of a witness in Annapolis, Maryland. My first cousin, Greg Mort, a famous artist, who has artwork in the Smithsonian, invited us to come to an art show in Chestertown, MD after the deposition. So, we journeyed to Chestertown where we arrived during the springtime at a beautiful, stately, white-columned mansion on the Chester River. As we approached the grand front steps, Stan, my husband, said to me, "Janna, you and I know very little about art. I think it best if we just listen politely to the conversation around us." I agreed.

I was chatting with a refined lady. She was remarking about the beautiful artwork on display. I agreed. She then said she was so excited about Cinco de Mayo coming. I agreed again. I then added, "I love his work." She looked at me puzzled, and said, "excuse me, what did you say?" I thought she hadn't heard me, so I embellished my reply, "Oh yes, I love his work so much, I am very excited about his arrival." I knew upon speaking the words, with her tilted head and furrowed brow that I had made a colossal mistake. I quickly excused myself, found Stan and whispered in his ear, "who is Cinco de Mayo, and what did he paint?" Stan, dumbfounded, with laughter said, "I think we better leave now."

God wants us to be able to laugh and see joy in our blunders. Stan and I have laughed about this many times. In my defense, I grew up in small town Statesboro, GA in the 60s and 70s, without much diversity, including Cinco de Mayo.

Dear God, thank you for giving us joy and humor, and help us not take ourselves too seriously when we make mistakes.

Janna Martin

Monday, December 8, 2025

Psalm 118:23-24

Obviously, the moment of greatest joy in my life occurred when Diane accepted my proposal of marriage. Our story is an unusual one. We first met when we both were teaching for a year at the same school in Virginia in the late 1970's. I was getting out of a bad marriage, she was getting into one, and as a result our relationship never progressed beyond friendship and mutual cat-sitting. We stayed in touch over the years, primarily by means of Christmas cards and letters, and by 1997, when we were both single again, we decided to get reacquainted at an island near Charleston. Romance blossomed immediately. That Fall I travelled up to Virginia on every long weekend. I proposed at Thanksgiving. Because Diane was able to leave her teaching job at the end of the semester, we decided to get married on Valentine's Day. That will be 28 years ago this February. The years since have flown by.

Diane came to Savannah over that Christmas vacation and we went house-hunting, ultimately buying a home in Ardsley Park. Since Diane is a life-long Methodist, we decided to attend the Christmas Eve service at Wesley. We immediately decided to join the church and have been members since, even during the many years when Diane worked as an organist at other churches in Savannah. We have been able to resume more active membership since Diane retired from her last such position three years ago. Diane's parents moved to Savannah in 2011 but left us to go to Heaven, both at age 94, in 2023 and 2024. We are extremely grateful for the many kindnesses that members at Wesley, especially the members of the Alpha Sunday School class, showed them in their declining years. There has been no joy in my life equal to knowing that I am with the person that God meant for me to be with and that we are worshipping at the church where He wanted us to be.

Heavenly Father, As we give you thanks for your many blessings, please help us to take the joy of this holiday season into the New Year and beyond.

Byron Boyd

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

Romans 15:13

I used to think "joyfulness" was a personality trait. Some people "are joyful" and other people "are not joyful." My wife Jennifer "is joyful" and I very obviously "am not joyful."

But I am not sure this is correct. I started to notice that all y'all joyful people also experience grumpy mornings, frustrations, bad days, heartbreak. Joyful people cry. They turn red when someone cuts them off in traffic. Sometimes they even <whispering> say bad words.

So maybe joy is habit. I have tried to make myself rejoice, and wouldn't you know it, it works. I rejoiced when I got to travel and work in Tapachula Mexico with young people, cleaning paint brushes and rollers in 105 degree heat for hours until my fingers turned white and wrinkly. I rejoiced when I got to talk about weird old books on Wednesday nights with other busy people who oddly also like to read and talk about weird old books. And I rejoiced when I got to sit on an uncomfortable aluminum bench in the rain watching high school football, surrounded by dozens of drunk and angry parents screaming at coaches and referees, and for some reason the Islands head coach called time-out with 1:21 left in the game even though they were losing 49-0. At times like these, I remembered that God could have left me at home, bored and lonely; but instead, He placed me in the midst of people who love me, who care about seeing me, and whose lives might be a little bit better because of me. And in gratitude, I rejoiced.

Heavenly Father,
Fill my heart today with Your quiet, steady joy.
Let it rise above bad days, frustrations, and heartbreak.
Help me to notice the small blessings in the people around me who love me,
and to share Your light with them.
May Your joy strengthen me and guide my steps in love,
Amen

Glen Doki

Wednesday, December 10, 2025

John 15:11

They say name your child something with meaning because you will have to call it out a thousand times a day! That you might as well be declaring God's gifts and purpose over them. I have often read of the many names of God and how each one hits your tongue a different way when spoken, names a unique need we all hold in our hearts. My name, Hannah, is sometimes translated to "Grace." I would like to think I walk out each day and season with grace but it is not always true. One name that I call out each and every day that certainly, positively, *absolutely* describes the little body that houses said name attached to it is "Savy Joy"—my five-year-old.

When I was pregnant with Savy, we were living in Spain. When we found out she would be a girl, we immediately bubbled with excitement to call her Savannah—a place we loved so dearly and would have great significance in our lives. But the middle name, *oh what would it be?!* Nothing stuck. Until one day, I realized that each and every person who prayed with us, whether friends in person or family members miles away on the phone, would pray, "May this baby give them great joy, God." That was it! Joy!

It was the middle of the depressing pandemic and scary lockdown, bottling fear to go into a grocery store or doctor's appointment for risk of the unknown. We would have no visitors; we would have no celebration. *Except* for the one my husband and I held in a little hospital room, holding our little girl. And oh, did she bring us JOY! We wanted to shorten her first name to "Savy" derived from savvy (the wisdom or "know-how" to do something). We wanted her to have the wisdom and ability to hold joy in all the beautiful days of her life. And it suits her! She is definitely her name. And she teaches us each day how to have God's JOY. Not to mention, she is savvy at everything!

Now, this holiday season I challenge you to declare JOY—even if you have to call it out a thousand times a day. And may you remember a baby named Jesus with no welcoming parade but with all the world's source of joy in his tiny body.

Hannah Swails

Thursday, December 11, 2025

Matthew 16:13-19

Hold to the Rock

It was already May-summer-hot in Savannah when we visited friends on the shore of Lake Superior. It was cold there to us. Our friend geared us up with waterproof boots, jackets, wool caps, gloves, and special UV spectrum flashlights. He said: “just shine your light into the shore line pebbles and when you see an orange light, you’ve got one. You can’t miss it,” he said. He was right.

The mostly synite rock, a granite like rock, looks like just any other typical grey or brown rock until a UV light hits the composition of the fluorescent mineral sodalite. It’s amazing. We searched along the shore and found thirty-three Yooperlites.
It is glorious that typical looking rocks have a special light that glows from them.

I wonder if that is how God sees us. Just typical looking people, but some have a light within. It’s a light that we can’t hide and must share. Maybe, God flashes his UV light down into our hearts and says to himself:

“There they are. My good and faithful servants.”
What joy it will be to be counted in that glowing number! God’s treasures in nature and His promise bring joy.

Dear God, thank you for shining your light of Love into our hearts, minds, and souls. Thank you for giving us the strength to share the joy of your Son Light with others.

Era Hall

Friday, December 12, 2025

Nehemiah 8:10

Joy In Giving

When I was a young girl, my Girl Scout troop delivered a hot meal, some warm clothes and a few toys to a family in need during the holidays. While that may be a typical service project for many, it was a lesson learned for me at a young age on the joy of giving to others. I clearly remember walking into that cold, wooden house and seeing holes in the floor and being shocked at the conditions of how this family lived. The family was so grateful and their smiles of appreciation have always stayed with me! Our little bit of giving brought great joy not just to them but to us! It certainly brought light to Jesus' words for us to be cheerful givers.

Having spent the first 20 years of my career in nonprofit fund raising, I got to see giving in action every day! I called them "small victories" in people's lives as we spread joy in giving to others. I have found that giving to others whether it be to give someone a little boost in the right direction, a little cheer in their lives, a helping hand in a time of need, even a smile to someone having a bad day brings joy.

This Advent Season is the perfect time for us all to reflect on our many blessings and then use those blessings to spread joy to others. We have opportunities to give through our many mission ministries here at Wesley, by connecting to so many wonderful charities in our community, or by helping a friend by bringing a little joy to someone's life.

May we all practice paying it forward in bringing joy to others through giving. It will certainly bring joy to those receiving your gifts and to you!

Dear God,
Please guide us to be cheerful givers in bringing joy to others and by doing so bringing joy into our own lives. We thank you for our many blessings. Help us to always let those blessings be used to bless others as we help spread joy. Amen.

Susan Hancock

Saturday, December 13, 2025

Psalm 16:11

The Joy of Marriage

Saturday, June 6, 1998, is a date I will always cherish and remember because it was our wedding day. It was a very busy day, but also a joyous day, as Janie and I began our lives together.

While the day was filled with sunshine outside and inside our hearts, the greater joy has been our time since our wedding day over 27 years ago. As life has unfolded, we have had our ups and downs but would not trade our journey together for anything in the world. We have experienced God's presence, and we know that he has walked with us every step of the way.

I think sometimes we think that joy comes in the big events of life and this holds true from time to time. However, joy can come in the smallest things if we take time and effort to look. Perhaps it is helping each other with the groceries or other errands. Maybe it is sharing a nice meal together in one of our favorite restaurants. Modern life can be hectic, and in the hurry of it all, we miss those small but precious moments.

One Sunday morning on television, Janie saw this new ice cream place that had just opened. The new place made their own ice cream. We went to church and then stopped to have lunch. It turned out that the ice cream place she saw on television earlier that day was beside where we had stopped to eat lunch. We did not plan it this way, but what a delightful surprise! I am glad that God is a God who can make our hearts glad in the smallest things and that our marriage has been a source of God-given joy through these last 27 years!

Lord, we thank you for all the small moments and delightful surprises you bring into our lives. Thank you for being the source of our joy now and always, Amen!

Ralph Long

Third Sunday of Advent

December 14, 2025

How Great Our Joy
There shall the child lie in a stall,
This child who shall redeem us all.
How great our joy!
Great our joy!
Joy, joy, joy!
Joy, joy, joy!
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

December 14, 2025
Children's Nativity Morning
Fellowship Hall 10:00 a.m.

Christmas Caroling
Noon

Joyful Noise Celebration
Fellowship Hall 5:00 p.m.

December 15, 2025
Urban Hope Christmas Supper
Independent Presbyterian 5:30-7:30 p.m.

December 18
Family Mission Project
Oliver Hall Lobby 10:00 a.m.

Please see the weekly bulletin for details
regarding Advent and Christmas events.

Sunday, December 14, 2025

Philippians 2:1-2

Unexpected Joy

One summer evening, my husband Ethan, and I decided to go to Jekyll island to look for sea turtles laying eggs. We grabbed our red light flash light, kicked our shoes off and headed down the path to the beach. It was a clear night with a well lit moon and a low tide. We were walking in the dark, just enjoying the sound of the waves and the gentle wind. We didn't see any sea turtles but with the tide being so low, there were lots of tide pools.

Ethan is always looking for fish and creatures in tide pools no matter what time of day, so we were looking around and then realized there was something blue in the water. I recognized it, but I couldn't put my finger on what exactly it was. Then when we moved our feet in the pool again I realized what it was. Bioluminescent algae. This stuff lights up anytime there is movement and is a beautiful shiny blue. And then we noticed a bigger thing glowing and it was tiny jellyfish that have the bioluminescent algae in them! Seeing this in a place that we both love was such an extraordinary experience.

That night we walked around like little kids splashing the water to see it light up. The Lord often gives us joy at unexpected times and that was one for me. We are so thankful to live in a place where we get to see these beautiful things the Lord has created and take joy in the simple things he has created. I challenge you to look for joy in the small things this season.

Lord thank you for your creation. Please let me find joy in You and all that You have given me.

Maggie Hatchett

Monday, December 15, 2025

Galatians 5:22-23

Called to Serve, Called to Joy

I never imagined that my greatest joy in life would come from being called to lead a Boys & Girls Club. Years ago, I was praying for direction — I knew I wanted to serve God in a way that went beyond my own comfort zone, but I wasn't sure how.

Then, the opportunity came to take on the leadership of the Frank Callen Boys & Girls Club in Savannah, an organization with a century-old legacy of helping children, especially those who need it the most.

At first, I questioned whether I was the right person for the job. The responsibility was enormous, and the needs were greater than our resources. But as I prayed for clarity, I felt God's quiet assurance: *"This is where I need you."*

What began as a challenge soon became a calling filled with joy. Every day, I see how God works through this place — in a child's smile when they master a new skill, in a teenager who discovers their purpose, and in a parent who finds hope again. God has used this work to teach me that joy is not found in ease or success, but in obedience and service.

When the days get long and the problems seem overwhelming, I remember that I'm not just running a program — I'm part of God's plan to change lives. Seeing these young people grow into confident, capable adults is a daily reminder that His joy is complete when we live out His purpose.

Lord, thank You for calling me into a work that reflects Your heart for the least, the lost, and the young. Help me to serve with compassion, to lead with faith, and to find joy in every opportunity to make a difference in Your name. Amen.

Mark Lindsay

Tuesday, December 16, 2025

John 15:11

As a toddler, whenever things were not going my way, I developed a habit of walking up to my mom and saying, “I’m not happy.” It has become a sort of inside joke between my mom and me over the years. Even today, whenever I’m upset, I call my mom and start the conversation with “I’m not happy.”

Happiness is fleeting. Various things make me happy… “raindrops on roses, whiskers on kittens, bright copper kettles, warm woolen mittens…” I’m not always happy; sometimes those same kittens create chaos in my home...even as I prepare this devotional.

Joy is not fleeting. It stems from something deeper, a constant internal state of contentment and purpose. I accepted Christ as a child, but it was not until high school that my faith began to grow and develop in earnest. For me the greatest joy and comfort was truly understanding what it means to be a Christian and fully accepting I am loved by God. As I began to study scripture and doctrine, my love of Christ and my understanding of the sacrifice He made on the cross for me grew. The realization that Christ loves me despite my self-perceived flaws and shortcomings continues to blow my mind. “You love me?!”

My relationship with Christ also brings me joy through volunteering with middle and high school students. I remember many people who invested in my spiritual development. I promised myself I would pay it forward and invest in the lives of students around me. I feel sincere joy when I get to see students make their faith their own and it is no longer a story in a book. My own relationship with Christ grows in those moments as well. I find joy in helping others grow in Christ. Seeing it all “click” for a student is truly a reward in itself. I know I have been given the privilege to see their faith grow. I see how far I have come in my faith and all that I learned about the love of God from working with each student.

Dear Lord,
Throughout this Advent season, we find joy in the coming of our Messiah. May we find comfort and joy that comes from growing a relationship with you. Amen

Sheila Watts

Wednesday, December 17, 2025

Psalm 18:28

That Citrus Feeling

Growing up in Tampa, Florida, Advent was balmy and tropical. Loquat trees were always in bloom in December, with a fragrance so beautiful, one wants to bottle it for a keepsake. Bees were frantically collecting pollen on the blossoms like doing last-minute Christmas shopping, all the while flapping stiff, see-through wings about a million times creating that signature buzz. Ripened oranges, lemons, and limes, lifted their exotic scents aloft during the cooler evenings adding citrus smells that hung in the humid air. It was amazing. Truly.

During Advent, I was always fascinated with God's approach to this winter fruit. In what is supposed to be the gloomiest weather season, bright yellows, mysterious greens, and vibrant oranges are there to bring joy. Why this harvest of light right now, during winter? Oftentimes, the holidays can be dark. Loss of loved ones, broken homes, broken dreams. These heartaches can put out one's light.

My mother made celebrating Christ during Advent very memorable. Holidays with her reminded me of the joy that the Savior was born, and that I belong to Christ. An important tradition of hers was putting oranges in our Christmas stockings. She would start the stocking with an orange from Dad's trees to hold the beautiful hand-made stockings open to fill with surprises. All the wonders of her homemade candies and gifts would follow to tell me of her love for me. Moreover, to remind me of God's love in giving His Son.

God's joy is there, waiting. His largeness of Spirit shows up in the miracle of the Christ Child, and in the tiny, translucent loquat blossoms. His Spirit rests on the citrus fragrance of night air. As a Christian, to have joy is only to recognize it. His gifts, and the reality of belonging to Christ, show how big God's heart towards humanity truly is. When I smell the fragrance of winter fruit, and see light through God's creations, I remember the joy of Christ.

Dear God, May I experience Your joy today.
In Christ Name. Amen.

Ann Eller

Thursday, December 18, 2025

Psalm 97:11-12

The Joy of Learning while Living

I wrote my first book, *Log Cabin Logic – Creating Success Where You are With What You Have*, in 1995. I thought it was a memoir of sorts, of my time as a young teacher in Native American villages in Alaska. It turned out to be so much more. Was it frustrating? Yes! Did I have to stop writing sometimes? Yes! Yet, there are times when I am aware of how much those years, literally spent in a variety of villages in the Alaskan wilderness, happened because God put me there to experience and learn about a totally different way of living and teaching – I was a city girl; my idea of "wilderness" was a visit to a National Park, a far cry from ordering groceries for a year, living in a log cabin with no TV, telephone, or internet, adjusting to it being awfully cold and awfully dark for awfully long, while trying to teach kids who had no real language.

Was living and working in Alaska always a joyful experience? No! There were lots of challenges, setbacks, and frustrations. Yet there was Joy almost every day – a child learned to read or understand a new concept, a care package came from home with silly things (a tape recording of a dripping faucet, the flushing of a toilet) with comments from my mom like, "Do you remember this sound?" She also sent food items, photos of an event, funny stories about other family members, and her thoughts and never-ending prayers for my safety. The ability to make new friends, learn about other cultures, from village life to depending on bush pilots to bring mail, weather permitting, learning to sew, cook, knit, and the list goes on and on.

The lasting Joy has been revealed over the years as I remember something I learned from a child, another teacher, an experience. Each time I think back to how something from that first adult working experience changed and enhanced my life, I say "Thank you, Lord, for the learning, the sharing, the growing, because I belong to You. You kept me both safe and sane. You continue to provide me with opportunities to share something I learned during those days so long ago. Amen."

Susan Luke Evans

Friday, December 19, 2025

I Peter 1:8

The Smallest Blessings Can Bring the Greatest Joy

There are several key moments in my life that I immediately reflect on the joy and blessings that God has provided through his many gifts – the birth of my two boys, my wedding day, and my salvation and baptism. Of course, there are others such as a positive diagnosis related to a loved one's health scare or a new opportunity that brought excitement to our family.

But as I have gotten older, I have recognized that those small moments of joy we find in our everyday lives are often the greatest reminders of God's love. On the good days and most certainly on the more stressful ones – finding those moments that we often call "God Winks" are a reminder of his grace.

The pockets of time we get together as a family of four with two busy teenage boys, those deep belly laughs that come while connecting with old friends, a hymn on Sunday morning that reminds me of my childhood at First Baptist Church of Ty Ty, a memory of my mom, aunts, and grandmothers while decorating or cooking during the holidays. That is when I often feel the Holy Spirit the most – nudging me to remember and reflect on my greatest blessings.

I pray this holiday season you find joy in those small, still moments that are truly the best reminders of our many blessings. Whether it is a special memory that makes you smile, time spent with loved ones, or something as simple as a starlit sky or the smell of your favorite Christmas dish – those small moments are really not that simple but a reminder of God's gift of blessed assurance.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your quiet voice that reminds us to find joy in everyday moments. And thank you for the greatest gift of all – your promise of eternal peace and salvation through your Son Jesus Christ.

Neilie Dunn

Saturday, December 20, 2025

I John 4:8 and Hebrews 11

What brings me joy

Rain drops on roses and whiskers on kittens. Goofy puns and smiling faces. Perfect timing of everything. Seedlings and flowers and the maturing cycle of all in nature. Interesting rocks and leaves and crawling critters. Giggling babies. Learning something new to me. Order, tidiness, and the chaos of a happy dog. Projects in the works and plans that work out. Fun friends and music and the quiet of new mornings. The love of life shining out from the eyes of others. The reflective thoughts of difficult times when God sees us through. These are a few of my favorite things.

My joy comes from observing and appreciating all the good that is given without my interference or request. Love is like that. God is love.

Through years of living, I have held great losses of persons dearest to me. I cried buckets of tears. I wondered if the heaviness would ever leave my heart. I read Hebrews 11 and know that with a little bit of faith, the flames of grief will be quenched and my heart will leap with joy for all Jesus has given. That is my faith. I will not resign my faith nor my joy. It's down in my heart. And, as the song goes: if the devil doesn't like it he can sit on a tack. I have learned that a thankful heart is a happy heart. I am thankful that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. Hold to the rock.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the beauty of the earth and the lives you have sent to teach us to live with joy. Thank you for teaching us to love others. Thank you for the moments your promise pulls us through loss and grief.

Era Hall

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 21, 2025

How Great Our Joy
This gift of God we'll cherish well,
That ever joy our hearts shall fill.
How great our joy!
Great our joy!
Joy, joy, joy!
Joy, joy, joy!
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

December 21, 2025
Lessons and Carols
Congregation Mickve Isreal
8:30 and 11:00 a.m.

Longest Night Service
Oliver Hall Parlor
6:00 p.m.

December 25, 2025
Hospital and Nursing Home Visits
9:00 a,m.

Please see the weekly bulletin for details
regarding Advent and Christmas events.

Sunday, December 21, 2025

James 1:2-4

Lord, your sacrifice mends our sins into sincerity,
Our burdens into bounties, the mundane into miracles,
The morbid into mirth, and our folly into forgiveness.
Through your blood, sweat, and tears,
we became the salt of this earth.
The seasoning of all seasons for
The reasoning of all reasons.
Our worldly sacrifices enrich this path
Of righteousness, create kindness and clarity,
and reveal our gifts through your grace and mercy.
Thank you for creating this community of friendships
in followers and fellowship
The warm light of your joyful love glows within,
As we understand that you call us Friend.

Zoe Manning

Monday, December 22, 2025

Psalm 67:4

Throughout my faith journey I have been involved in sharing the Gospel with teenagers. Working with teens is fun and hard. It is a gift from God and makes me question my credentials. You can have conversations that range from “Who is Jesus?” to “How do I get through this challenge?” and beyond. There are times when I have felt ill equipped to answer the hard questions. I have learned that it is ok to say, “I don’t know, but let’s try to find the answer together.” There is also great joy when you see it click in those students, that Jesus loves *them*. God continues to lay on my heart how important it is to be consistent and show up; to be the joy and the light to these students.

Through my time volunteering in youth ministry, God has forged bonds for me with students that last. There is joy in knowing the time invested was real and is reaping dividends in their lives. Recently, one of my former students (now a 30 something woman) and I had a heart to heart about a very real adult issue in her life. God gives me the opportunity to be there for my former
students during times of sadness and rejoice in answered prayers.

There is joy in sharing your faith. You can be vulnerable and build deep connections with others. God can use all of us in this way. We may feel like we don’t have the answers, and maybe *we* don’t. God does. Trust that He will guide the conversation.

God, thank you for the opportunities to share who you are with others. Even when I feel like I do not have the answers, give me peace in knowing that you have called all of us to share your Gospel. Let me bring the joy and light to others for your glory.

Jaclyn Jordan

Tuesday December 23, 2025

John 16:24

There was a pillow on a chair in the room where we met our son for the very first time. It said, “ENJOY TODAY.” And how could we not? We had been on our adoption agency’s waiting family list for many, many years. Finally, after a series of not-so-ordinary miracles, our day had come.

His interim caregiver settled the weight of him into my arms, and a different weight came to rest in a corner of my heart: grief. While we reveled in our delight and elation, our son’s remarkable birth parents (and grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other extended family!) had just said goodbye-for-now to him. One day, he too may look back upon that day with a sense of sadness, grieving what could have been if circumstances were different.

I can’t ignore that reality, and I wouldn’t want to. The grief inherent in adoption reflects how much each child is loved. Every goodbye carries a measure of sadness because joy can’t be separated from the moment of hello, at least in some part. Our Creator knows this, and he made us with the capacity to hold and honor both. While grief exists today in all sorts of circumstances, joy remains steadfast. The two can coexist. We hold grief and honor it for what it represents: something is not right here. And we simultaneously look to our good, kind, and trustworthy God for the joy we need to make it through another day. Because of who God is and what he has done for us, joy still burns bright and all will be made right.

Shortly after we brought our son home, I printed off several pictures from the moment we met him. I put my favorite in a frame. Then I noticed that “ENJOY TODAY” pillow. Because of the way my husband was standing in front of it, the pillow in the picture reads, “JOY DAY.”

Whatever the state of your heart and the state of the world today, may God give you the grace and courage to look to him in expectation of your own “joy day.”

Lord, give me the grace and courage necessary to celebrate and endure throughout this Advent season. Help me to recognize you in all of my moments, taking comfort and joy in your nearness. Then, allow me to extend that same comfort and joy to others. Amen.

Ashley Mays Henry

Wednesday, December 24, 2025
Christmas Eve

Luke 2:10

Becoming a father has been a completely transformative experience—so much so that you would struggle to recognize the old me. Like a lost sheep, I had drifted far from family and faith. Living alone and surrounded by sin, I didn't have the capacity to feel true joy.

My story took a major turn when I met my wife, Laura, and we began building a relationship rooted in love. When our first daughter, Naomi, was born, everything I had ever been told about fatherhood came true. There is no way to describe the flood of emotions that come when you hold a sleeping baby.

The following year, we moved to Savannah and passed Wesley Monumental on a walk one day. Since Laura grew up in the Methodist tradition, we decided to walk in off the street and give it a chance. The feeling was indescribable—the organ thundered, the choir sounded angelic, Ben's sermon was enlightening, and Nelle raised her hand about fifty times when Ben listed volunteer opportunities. For the first time in my faith journey, I felt *welcomed* somewhere. The lost sheep was finally found.

It hasn't been long since that day, but the joy of joining Wesley Monumental has been life changing. It has helped me experience the joy that comes from following Jesus—by serving others, supporting our community, and learning to slow down and spend time in prayer and reflection.

In August, we welcomed our second daughter, Marlo, and my joy multiplied overnight. We now have Naomi in Eli's Place and have brought the kids to events at Wesley Gardens. Knowing that our children can grow up learning about Christ in such a wonderful community has been the greatest joy of all.

I pray for other lost sheep out in the world. I pray that those searching for joy may find it. And I pray that those seeking answers will discover the path that leads to Jesus.

Nick Sartino

December 25, 2025
Christmas Day

Psalm 30:5 and Luke 2:10

""Behold I bring you good news of great joy" Luke 2:10

I found this year's theme of joy a somewhat difficult one to write about. Maybe it is just the season, I find fall to be a bit melancholy. Or maybe it is the circumstances. We've had our fair share of challenging ones here at Wesley lately. Or maybe it is my vocation. I walk so often with people in places of pain, loss, and grief. I was racking my brain to remember some experience of "great joy" and coming up empty.

Then I glanced away from my computer screen and glimpsed some pictures on my desk. One our daughter's graduation and another's wedding, a couple of pictures of our grandchildren, and I felt a lightness in my spirit and smile naturally find its way up from my heart and into my face. I realized I felt a moment of joy, and I remembered joy is always present for me, though it is too often buried beneath the weight of life.

I think for me joy is more a practice than just a serendipitous experience. It is countless little moments instead of a big memorable event. I must remind myself that joy comes with the morning, especially on Christmas morning. Every Christmas carries memories of joy that I must lean on in the absences of people I have loved and lost whose places at the table are so conspicuously empty. But there is joy in those memories. These days I am blessed with the experience of watching a new generation of excited children once again and their joy begats my own. So, I'm going to try and practice joy by anticipating its unexpected return.

Lord Jesus, you brought joy in the morning to frightened parents, lonely shepherds, and weary traveling wisemen. Would you bring joy to all of us once again who are seeking even in the weeping of night. May it come as a welcome surprise when we least expect it. Amen.

Ben Martin