2026 Advent Devotional Guide

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES
OF THE CENTRAL REGION



THE SEASON OF ANTICIPATION

Chris Prater, First Baptist Church of Hays
Hays, Kansas

As we once again find ourselves approaching the Advent Season, let us take a moment to remind ourselves why we as Followers of Christ observe and celebrate this time of year. Our prayer is to experience the hope, peace, joy, and love that the promised Emmanuel was to bring to all of humankind.

The Advent season serves as a reminder of the hope that we have in the promised Messiah. As we are reminded of the time of anticipation of those in antiquity, as well as our time of anticipating his second coming, we hold to that hope we have in him. That hope provides a level of peace like nothing else. Peace of heart. Peace of mind. Peace of Soul. There is a reason one of his many names is Prince of Peace. In this busy time of year, may each of us take the opportunity to find that peace sitting quietly in his presence.

Once we've experienced that hope and peace, that leads us to the joy of knowing the true reason for this season. Unlike happiness, this joy that he gives isn't based on the situations we find ourselves facing in life. With this hope, peace, and joy deep in our hearts, our advent experience is nearing its completion.

Jesus gives us hope because he loves us. He gives us peace because he loves us. He gives us joy because he loves us. All God does is due to his love for us and the desire he has for a relationship with those created in the image of God, that is you and me. Just read John 3:16 if you ever forget.





FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Travis Ball, First Baptist Church of Parsons
Parsons, Kansas

Isaiah 64:1-9
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:24-37

Do you ever have feelings that occur with no logical reasons why you are feeling that way? Sometimes, as we age, we can wake up with a stiff neck or sore back for no other reason than we were horizontal in a position that our body decided was unacceptable. Other times, we can be less than stellar in the mornings and be accused of "waking up on the wrong side of the bed" - as if there was a right one. Still, at other times we can feel happy, good, or pleasant for no reason. We can have random bouts of spontaneity and feel like being silly or calling a friend. One of the more complex inner dispositions or emotions that we have as we prepare to enter into the Advent season is the feeling of waiting.

What does waiting accompany? Anticipation, excitement, and perhaps testing of patience; it could be good feelings if it is a positive wait, or a sense of dread if we are waiting for something that we do not look forward to. How well do we wait, and what do we do while we wait? Some of us are foot-tappers, watch-watchers, phone-scrollers, or clock-counters; yet others brim with excitement, or have fluttering heart rates in anticipation. We are training our puppy, Percy, to wait for his food or a treat when we put it down. He will watch the food intently, ensuring it isn't going anywhere, and start salivating and drooling, leaving a puddle of anticipation. What sort of mess, or aura do we permeate as we wait? Do we leave behind disappointment of an untimely wait, or anticipation of what is to come? I ask these questions to probe our hearts as we enter the Advent season to find the purpose of the wait, and to instill hope while we wait.

The reading in Isaiah 64 recounts the thundering entrance and unmistakable presence of God, and yet they were taken aback, "When you did awesome things that we did not look for…". Sometimes we wait for God and we have no idea what we are looking for, waiting for, or hoping for. We certainly have a construct in our own heads of what we would like to see happen. It is that same construct in our own minds that led to much of Israel missing Jesus' coming because they had the 'idea' of what the Messiah would do, that did not fit the person or work of Jesus. We too, can miss what God is doing in our midst by not looking for it, or dismiss what has happened because it does not fit our parameters of God's approved actions.

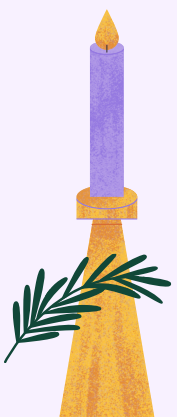
We have the assurance that Christ will come again, and we most certainly in faith, wait for that! We also have hope that God is doing something in our midst even today, and in this season. My hope is that we would be surprised by the good old narrative, that we undoubtedly have heard numerous times, and find God revealed to us in new and fresh ways.

While we wait, while we prepare our hearts, what shall we do, what shall our presence permeate? I think 1 Corinthians chapter one gives us a great framework:

to wait for the revealing of the Lord Jesus,
who will sustain us to the end of that wait,
who ensured we were not lacking in any gift,
being enriched in knowledge and speech

So while we wait, let us not be inactive or inattentive; but let us serve, let us love, let us model the hope and share the faith for those that perhaps do not even know what they are waiting for! Let us calm our dispositions as we make ready the way for the Lord to do his work in and through us.

The three fold echo in Psalm 80 gives us the perfect prayer and plea to those waiting in anticipation and hope of the things both looked for and overlooked - Restore us, O God,; let your face shine, that we may be saved!



SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Clara Osborne, First Baptist Church of Overland Park
Overland Park, Kansas

Isaiah 40:1-11
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13
2 Peter 3:8-15a
Mark 1:1-8

My husband and I have a daughter in college. In preparation of her first break, we began to prepare. We prepared by washing, painting, purchasing a new ceiling fan and rearranging her room. In preparation of her birth, we washed gently used and purchased new baby items and rearranged the room to fit her in it. On both occasions we anticipated and were motivated by who and what was to come. Us not me; We not I.

Community of believers come together and connect their hope, peace and joy of Jesus Christ second advent. As one body we look forward to the Lord's second coming with strength, a triumphant arm bringing his reward with him and his payment before him. The prophet Isaiah prophesied of one whose voice shouted in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord and make his paths straight. Therefore, dear friends, while we wait for the promise of a new heaven and a new earth, let us shout in one voice of the Lord's return. Let us make the path to Jesus straight for those coming behind. Make every effort.

Make every effort to be found in peace -pure and faultless.
Make every effort to find harmony one with another.
Make every effort to live a triumphant life yielding eternal rewards.
As we wait for the second advent of Jesus Christ, become intentional about building and cultivating community. For in community, we are united, strengthen by one another, covered on every side and motivated to move in one direction.

Let us pray: Gracious God, you have made each of us unique, with different backgrounds, gifts, and perspectives. Despite our differences you call us to unity in Christ. Help us to set aside our personal preferences and live in harmony teaching us to love one another deeply. In Jesus name we pray Amen.

Blessing: Let us carry the echoes of shared laughter, the embrace of understanding, and the beauty of souls connected in the spirit of unity. May the tapestry of our lives, fellowship and binding of our shared experiences connect us to the second Advent of Jeus Christ.





THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

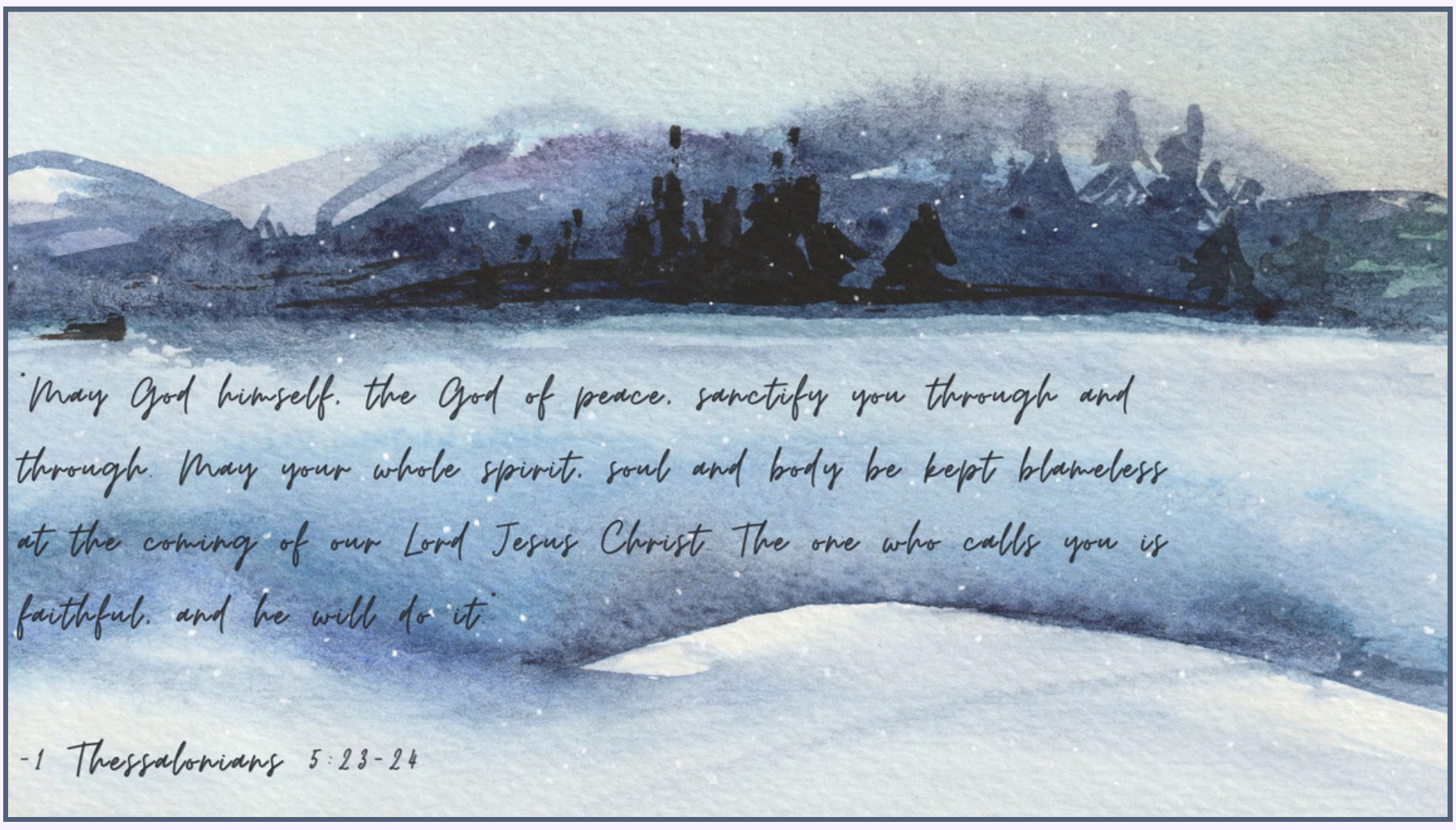
Nathan Huguley, Central Seminary
Overland Park, Kansas

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11
Psalm 126
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

The third Sunday of Advent focuses our attention on joy. It reminds us that in a season of preparation for Jesus coming to dwell with us, we pause and open ourselves to the joy of being witnesses to and participants in God's work among us. We are invited to join with Mary and allow our spirits to rejoice in God who has looked upon us with favor and promised us a Savior. In this Canticle of Mary from Luke 1:46-55, we see that there is much about which we can rejoice. After all, through Jesus, the proud are scattered in their conceit, tyrants are pulled from their thrones, the humble are lifted up, the hungry are fed with good things, and the rich are sent away empty. Jesus did not come over two thousand years ago and is not coming to us today to bring joy to the powerful and the wealthy. As he says in Luke 6, they have already received their reward. No, Jesus came to bring joy to the lost and the lonely, the poor and powerless.

Throughout the Bible we see God choosing to work with and through the unlikeliest cast of characters to bring good news to the world. Moses had a speech impediment, but God used him to call Israel out of Egypt. Paul persecuted Christians, but God used him to spread the gospel to the Gentiles. And here we have Mary, a poor and powerless girl from the backwater village of Nazareth, whom God chooses to bring Jesus into the world. Mary rejoices in this subversive work of God to redeem people that the world has deemed irredeemable and then to elevate them to key positions in the kingdom of God. Mary's invitation to us today is to join in her song of joy and in this work of God to, in the words of Isaiah, "bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn. . ."

So, if you encounter this Advent season as one of joy and excitement for what is to come, then join your joy with Mary's. Look for ways to spread that joy to a world that is sorely in need of being uplifted. Be a part of God's good news and find ways to help people who are hurting. Take joy in seeing the kingdom of God come a little closer today. However, if you encounter this season as one of mourning, of darkness, of loneliness, of disillusionment or pain or discouragement, know that Jesus is coming for you to bind up your broken heart, to release you from your captivity, and to offer you comfort in your mourning. Help and hope are on the way.





FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38

Rita Moore, Garden Plain Community Church
Garden Plain, Kansas

Christmas music is one of my most favorite things. In high school, I was introduced to my favorite song, Carol of the Bells, when I was given a Christmas CD. Since that first CD I have heard Carol of the Bells played in many different forms like a single violin, sung by a choir, or highly synthesized. Imagine my delight when I joined the handbell choir at Ottawa University and had the opportunity to play my favorite song on actual handbells. I was on cloud nine and have treasured a recording of the performance ever since.

During this season of Advent one of the songs that we read in scripture comes from a young girl who had to be frightened at the events that had just transpired. Mary had just been visited by an angel, and she was told that she was to give birth to a son who would be given the throne of King David, would rule over Israel forever, and that his kingdom would not end. (Luke 1: 31-33, NLT) Mary probably grew up hearing the scripture and the stories of long ago. Mary would have understood the importance of what was being said. After being told this news, Mary asked one practical question, “but how can this happen? I am a virgin?” (Luke 1: 34, NLT) The angel tells her how and as proof of what is to come tells Mary about Elizabeth, Mary’s relative, and how she became pregnant in her old age. After a few days, Mary went to visit Elizabeth and at Mary’s greeting the child “jumped for joy” (Luke 1: 44, NLT) in Elizabeth’s womb and Elizabeth tells Mary, “You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said.” (Luke 1: 45, NLT)

What comes next is a portion of scripture called The Magnificat or Mary’s song of praise. Having watched my daughter in music theater performances, I can appreciate anew the song Mary improvised on the spot, and how it was her way of responding to what was happening.

Mary responded,
“Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!
For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed.
For the Mighty One is holy, and he had done great things for me.
He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him.
His mighty arm has done tremendous things!
He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.
He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich way with empty hands.
He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful.
For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever.”
(Luke 1:46-55, NLT)

Instead of being frightened we feel the joy that Mary felt expressed in this song of praise. She was on cloud nine. In the style of the psalms she may have heard, we can feel Mary’s acceptance of what is to come as well as her respect for God’s work. She gives words to the mighty acts of God and acknowledges she will be remembered forever by God’s great act through her.

While I appreciate the versions of this song that have been set to music by very famous composers over the years and sung in Latin, I find myself wishing it was a little more upbeat because that is more of what I feel from these words. I find myself wondering how these words would work alongside the Carol of the Bells. Imagine the cheer Mary must have felt and how the chime of a bell often represents cheer. Imagine how the message of the bells is for everyone everywhere. How the praise that Mary gave is meant for everyone everywhere now. Let the bells and Mary ring in Christmas with a cheer that fills the air.



CHRISTMAS EVE

Ivan Greuter, West Side Baptist Church
Topeka, Kansas

Isaiah 9:2-7
Psalm 96
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]

**"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders,
and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." - Isaiah 9:6**

"Can you tell me the story again, Papa?" the little voice asked while clutching a tiny yellow photo album. "Can you tell me about the day I was born?"

It is our family custom to tell the story of each child's birth at least a couple of times a year, especially on their birthday. We share how much they were wanted, needed, special, and loved — and how they have made our lives better. My wife made each child a picture book from the dollar store, you know with transparent pages where snapshots could be slipped into the sleeves facing one another. These little books became treasured gifts, usually found among their toys, books, and stuffed animals.

Our firstborn climbed into my lap as the story began. "Oh, it truly was a special day when you arrived. God had a plan. Your mom and I planned for months. We prayed for you, and we prepared." Flipping through the pages, I described the preparations, the bags packed, the rooms decorated, and the guests who couldn't wait to receive the call to come and hold our newborn.

Then came the question I never expected.
"Papa, can you tell me about how you went home to put on your special clothes because I arrived?"

Looking at her enormous eyes, tiny finger pointing at a page, I noticed the two snapshots facing one another: me in casual clothes on the left and formal clothes on the right. "You're right, honey. I had to go home and put on my best clothes because you came into our lives."

I had forgotten the contrasting events of that day, which had become so normal to me. As a young minister, I had a wedding to officiate that had been planned a year in advance. The bride and groom knew we were expecting and graciously agreed that a clergy friend could step in if needed. But they said, "We want you to marry us."

By God's grace, the timing was perfect. Our daughter arrived in the morning, and the wedding took place in the afternoon. I had just enough time to rush home from the hospital, change clothes, and get to the chapel on time while our clergy friends visited and cared for my newly formed family. What an exciting day for everyone!

The wedding went without a hitch—or at least without a bad one. At the conclusion of the service, I announced, "I must submit my regrets for the reception, as I have a wife and newborn daughter to get back to at the hospital." Everyone smiled and applauded.

I rushed back to the hospital, still wearing my formal attire, to hold our baby again. Our friends captured the perfect picture: me holding our daughter, mesmerized and marveling at this magnificent gift—a child born unto us.

Do you ever wonder if Jesus asked Joseph at the carpenter's bench, "Can you tell me the story again, Papa? Can you tell me about the day I was born?" Did Joseph share about the angels, the shepherds, the wise men, and the flight to Egypt? Did he tell Jesus how much he was wanted, needed, special, and loved?

I imagine Joseph taking Jesus onto his lap and saying, "Oh, it was a very special day. God had a plan." Perhaps he shared the words of Isaiah 9: "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." The Old and New Testaments facing one another in a beautiful contrast: a vulnerable newborn child and the authority of God resting upon his shoulders.

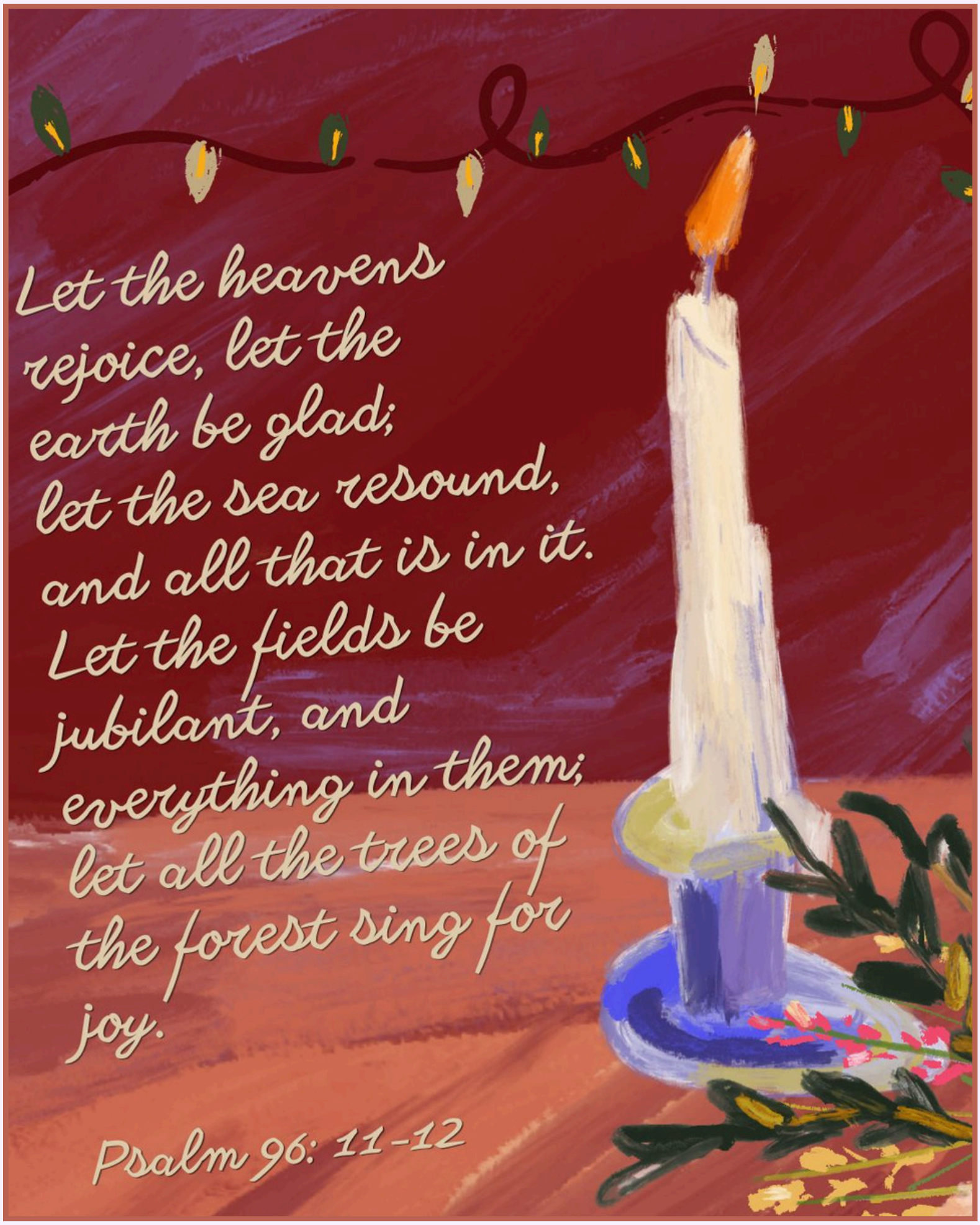
This Christmas Eve, imagine holding Jesus in your arms, swaddled in clothes, with his big, beautiful eyes looking up at you. **And marvel!**

If needed, go change your clothes into something special and formal so you can stare at this newborn, mesmerized like the angels, that the impossible is possible: The Great King of the Universe has come in human flesh.

Innocent. Vulnerable. Beautiful. Wanted. Needed. Loved.

You don't need a magnifying glass to figure it all out tonight. We have a lifetime to discover what this all means.

Unto us a child is born. Unto us a Son is given. And tonight, we marvel.



CHRISTMAS DAY

Carl Frazier, New Hope & Love Community Church
Topeka, Kansas

Isaiah 52:7–10
Psalm 98
Hebrews 1:1–4 [5–12]
John 1:1–14

I still believe great gifts come in big boxes! I remember when I was about twelve years old, I asked my aunt to buy me a watch for Christmas. Growing up in a small town in Star City, Arkansas, I learned early in life that the greatest gifts were not always easy to come by. My mother worked as a housemaid and raised eight children with limited income. My father had passed away when I was only twenty months old, leaving my mother with the enormous responsibility of raising our family. Although I was too young to remember my father, I grew up hearing stories about the kind of man he was. When he was alive, he was well-known and respected throughout the community. He demonstrated generosity by allowing people to purchase groceries on credit from his community store in Fresno, Arkansas. Back then, you can get credit based on your name not a credit score. Years later, when I was a young boy, people would approach me and ask, "Are you West Frazier's son?" I would proudly answer, "Yes. "They would reach into their pockets and give me a quarter or sometimes a dollar. Then they would tell me stories about my father and how he had helped them during difficult times. Although my father was no longer physically present, his generosity continued to speak through the lives of people he had touched. That taught me something important: **A person's legacy is not measured only by what they leave behind, but also by the lives they have touched along the way.**

THE GREATEST GIFT OF ALL

John 1:1–5 (NKJV) declares:
"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." What a wonderful gift we have received in the Word of God! This passage is one of the great summits of Scripture. It takes us beyond the ordinary understanding of life and introduces us to the extraordinary truth of who Jesus Christ is. John reveals three profound truths about Jesus:

- Jesus Christ is the eternal Word of God.
- Jesus Christ is the Creator of all things.
- Jesus Christ is the source of life and the light of humanity.

These truths are foundational to our faith. Jesus was not created, nor did He simply appear at a particular moment in history. He existed before creation. He is eternal.

John begins his Gospel with the words, "In the beginning was the Word." Notice that John does not say the Word came into existence in the beginning. He says the Word already was.

Jesus Christ was there before the foundations of the world. He was with God, and He was God. John 1:3 reminds us:
"All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." Think about that for a moment. Everything we see, everything we experience, and everything that exists owes its creation to Him. Jesus is not simply a gift among many gifts. He is the gift through whom all things were made possible.

JESUS IS THE LIGHT THAT SHINES IN DARKNESS

John 1:4–5 tells us:
"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." What a powerful declaration! Jesus came to bring life to a world that was living in darkness. His light gives us hope when circumstances seem hopeless. His light gives us direction when we do not know which way to go. His light gives us strength when life becomes difficult. We all experience seasons of darkness. Some experience financial struggles. Others experience grief, disappointment, loneliness, or uncertainty about the future. But the good news of Christmas is that darkness does not have the final word.
Jesus is the light, and His light continues to shine!

The world may offer temporary gifts, but Jesus offers eternal life. The world may offer things that lose their value, but Jesus offers a love that never expires.

DON'T THROW THE BOX AROUND!

Now, let me return to that Christmas gift I mentioned earlier. The gift I wanted was inside a big, huge box! My aunt told me not to throw the box around or turn it upside down because she knew what was inside.

I was excited about what was coming. I knew something special was waiting for me inside that box. But there is something else I learned from that experience. We should be careful not to throw Jesus around during this Advent and Christmas season. Sometimes we become so caught up in the decorations, shopping, parties, food, and festivities that we forget the greatest gift of Christmas. We celebrate the season but overlook the Savior. We exchange presents but forget His presence. We focus on what is under the Christmas tree while overlooking the One who hung on a tree for our salvation. Jesus is not someone we should take lightly. He is not just another part of a holiday tradition. He is the eternal Word, the Creator of life, and the Light of the world. Let us not become so distracted by the wrapping that we miss the gift!

FROM WEST FRAZIER'S SON TO A PREACHER OF THE GOOD NEWS

There is one more part of my story that brings this message home. When I was growing up, people would ask me, "Are you West Frazier's son?" Today, the question has changed. Instead of asking whether I am West Frazier's son, people ask whether I am a preacher telling the good news about Jesus. What a blessing! My father's legacy of generosity left an impression on the community. And I pray that my life and ministry will leave an impression by sharing the greatest gift humanity has ever received. I am grateful for the legacy my father left behind. But I am even more grateful for the gift of Jesus Christ.

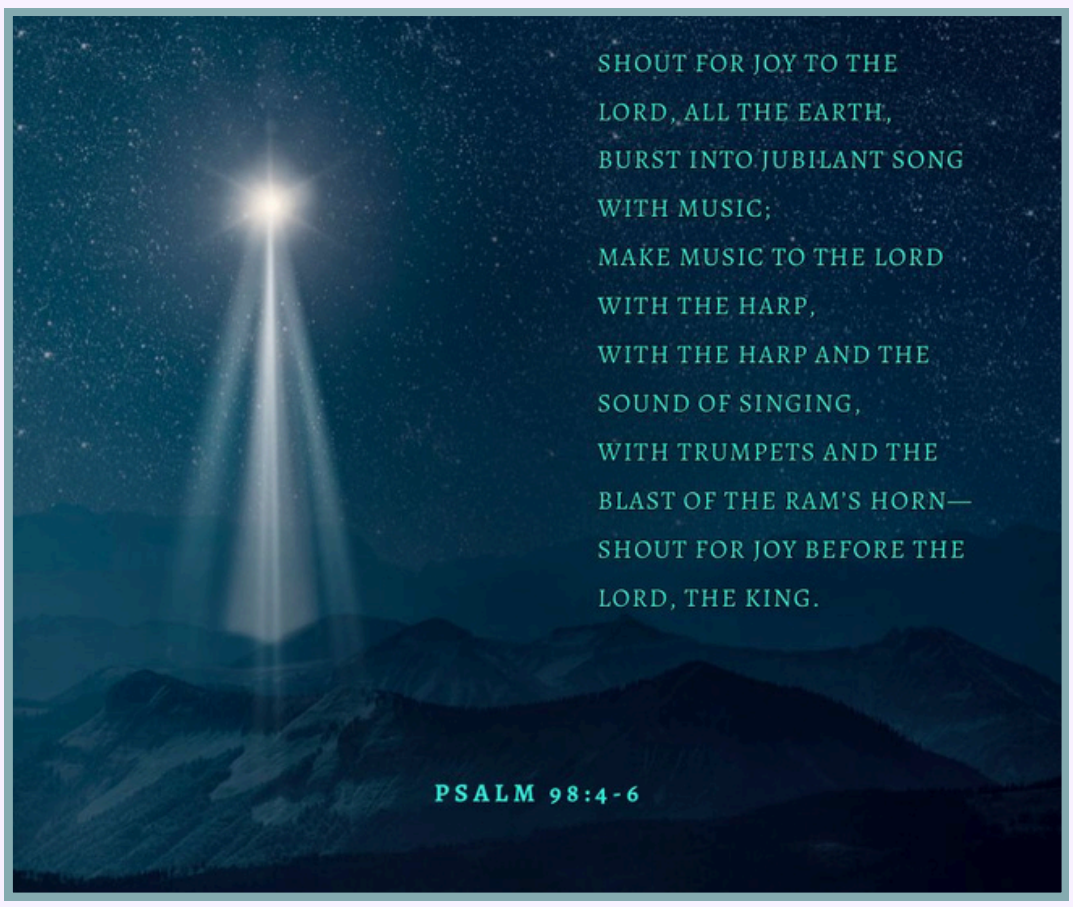
My father helped people by providing groceries when they needed them. Jesus provides the Bread of Life for a world that is spiritually hungry. My father gave people hope through his generosity. Jesus gives us eternal hope through His love and sacrifice. My father left a legacy in his community. Jesus offers an eternal inheritance to all who believe in Him.

THE GIFT IS JESUS!

As we celebrate Christmas, I want us to remember that the greatest gift is not determined by the size of the box, the price of the wrapping, or the amount of money spent. The greatest gift is Jesus Christ!

He is the Word who was in the beginning. He is the Creator through whom all things were made. He is the life that gives light to humanity. He is the Light that shines in darkness. So, this Christmas, when you see a big box under the tree, remember that the greatest gift ever given did not come wrapped in expensive paper. He came wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. God gave us His Son!

And that is why, even today, **I STILL BELIEVE GREAT GIFTS COME IN BIG BOXES!**





SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Sharon Ball, Community Baptist Church
Tulsa, Oklahoma

Isaiah 61:10- 63:3
Psalm 148
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:22-40

Take a deep breath! Christmas is behind us—for another 363 days! The preparations and festivities that we have just experienced are both exhilarating and exhausting at the same time. Some people start shopping in July for Christmas presents while others are online just 48 hours ahead of time trying to get a speedy delivery that will arrive on Christmas Eve. For some of us, our plans all during the season came off without a hitch; however, for others of us, things did not go so smoothly. Not one of us knows what is around the next corner that might prevent us from being on time, even though we had planned with exactness.

A "Dennis the Menace" movie that came out in 1993 that portrayed a Mr. Wilson waiting on an orchid to bloom for the first time in 40 years. The bloom was going to open for a brief few seconds before deteriorating and falling completely apart. The neighbor boy, Dennis, prevented Mr. Wilson in those few seconds from seeing the fully-opened bloom before it turned brown and collapsed. In great disgust and disappointment, Mr. Wilson said, "There's 40 years down the drain." In movies and in real life, timing is everything.
It is a comfort that God is never early and never late but is always on time. The phrase "In the fullness of time" is one of significance. The Amplified Bible says it like this: "When (In God's time) the proper time had fully come, God sent His Son". It is a mind-boggling concept that the prophets of old had foretold with precision the details of Jesus' birth several hundred years ahead of time. And the angel appeared to Mary, seemingly to us, at a random time. Mary conceived Jesus at the work of the Holy Spirit; and Jesus was born, grew to a man, ministered, was crucified, died, and was buried. Then he rose from the dead and finally ascended to heaven. All of this happened on God's timetable. And all of it was at the proper time, in the fullness of time. The following paragraph, lifted from the internet, gives a succinct explanation of the environment of Jesus' public ministry:

> "Jesus' ministry took place in a world where Roman roads, military bases, administrative governors, and urban development formed a cohesive system that connected distant provinces, ensured imperial control, and facilitated both commerce and communication. This infrastructure underpinned the political and cultural environment in which His life and teachings unfolded."

Yes, the timing of Jesus' birth and public ministry was predetermined by God and happened in perfect timing. In addition, since we have just celebrated His birth, let's also hearken back to the fact tha t there was more: more than a baby born in Bethlehem; more to come; more to the story.

I am reminded of the words penned by Joseph M. Martin and put into a musical setting, titled "Just Beyond the Manger":

Just beyond the manger, I hear no lullabies
I see no golden hay, I feel no starlight.
Just beyond the manger, I hear the hammer fall,
I see a rugged cross, I feel the chill of night
Just beyond the manger.
Help us recall 'mid trees of red and gold
On another tree raised long ago
We hung God's brightest star.

Jesus was "born under the law to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." The purpose of his birth? To redeem us. He is our Savior! Thanks be to God!



EPIPHANY

John Holzhuter, Ottawa University
Ottawa, Kansas

I Samuel 3:1-10
Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18
I Corinthians 6:12-20
John 1:43-51

According to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Epiphany comes from the Greek verb phainein (φαίνω) and primarily conveys the idea of making something visible or manifest. Literally, to shine or emit light. Of the three events from the life of Christ, commemorated as epiphanies, my deepest empathy is for those "wise men from the East" as reported in Matthew's retelling. Be it three or three hundred Magi, I identify with their quest of seeking for (and hiding from). Their journey towards tangible proof, with questionable support, while stressing about time constraints.

A good, long week ended with me standing next to my car, balancing three dirty, serving platters and an empty coffee carafe on my hip. Frantically digging through my computer bag, I'm on another frustrating search for car keys! I am unsure if they are truly lost or merely misplaced. I have a 'special hook' where I hang my keys at any of the regular, campus locations I might occupy. There is one on the back of the door to Campus Ministries in the chapel complex, one opposite my file cabinet in the Chaplain's Office and one (a large, exposed bolt) on the left side of my cubical in Church Relations and Advancement Office.

Resigned to the quest at hand, I set down the dishes and began dumping things from my computer case onto the top of my car, in a last-ditch effort to deny long-term disruption to my 'ready for the weekend' routine. This quandary could be effectively solved by doing what my wife would term 'retracing my steps'. In family lore, Linda was known as 'the great finder'. She had super sleuthing skills, effective teacher strategies, and really good luck. When she lived with my family before we got married, she was consistently successful in helping my parents and my youngest brother find things that had been both lost or gone hopelessly missing. My mom christened her 'the great finder' after one, legendary recovery, involving missing house keys found happily nesting in the chest-freezer on their back porch! In the following years, I would do the obligatory retracing of steps and then enlist her legendary aid. When stuff ended up in unexpected places, she knew me well enough to predict that too. She would appear, with a flashlight, looking on the floor beside the driver-side seat in the car. Finding what was hidden, just out of sight.

For over a quarter of a century the 'lost was consistently found' and the only remembering I needed was to figure out when she was going to get home--so I could enlist her skills to save my day. Since her unexpected trip to heaven, it seems I am continually looking for some thing or other. Mostly forgotten or misfiled. 'Put in a safe place', is my brain's ongoing litany of things, temporarily lost or technically forgotten. As I went back to the Campus Ministries office, to retrace my steps, I truly couldn't recall putting the keys on their special hook. I opened the door and immediately saw them hanging, almost smugly. I sighed in relief and started thank you prayers for the witnessing of 'I found it' moments. The jolt of "Eureka!" arrives when you locate what you seek. Understanding why and how something ended up where it is, grants the light of epiphanies as well. I was graced with three.

#1 God is my great finder; the keys were waiting right where they were supposed to be.
#2 I walked right past this blessing-- without reminding myself to reach for them. God knows why?
#3 (most profound) God does know! He knows my 'whys' and the place I go in these lost moments. He is keenly aware of my daily struggles; the tangible absence of Linda (and after her, my parents). He is deeply acquainted with my stress-steeped rememberings, and increasing levels of frustration. He calms the angst of retraced steps and de-fogs my daily routines.

Psalm 139:1-3 New International Version

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.



And so I pray:
God you are my key and my keeper. When I feel forgotten, keep my mind focused on and familiar with the depth of your love.
Help me to never forget how well I am known by you. Amen.

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