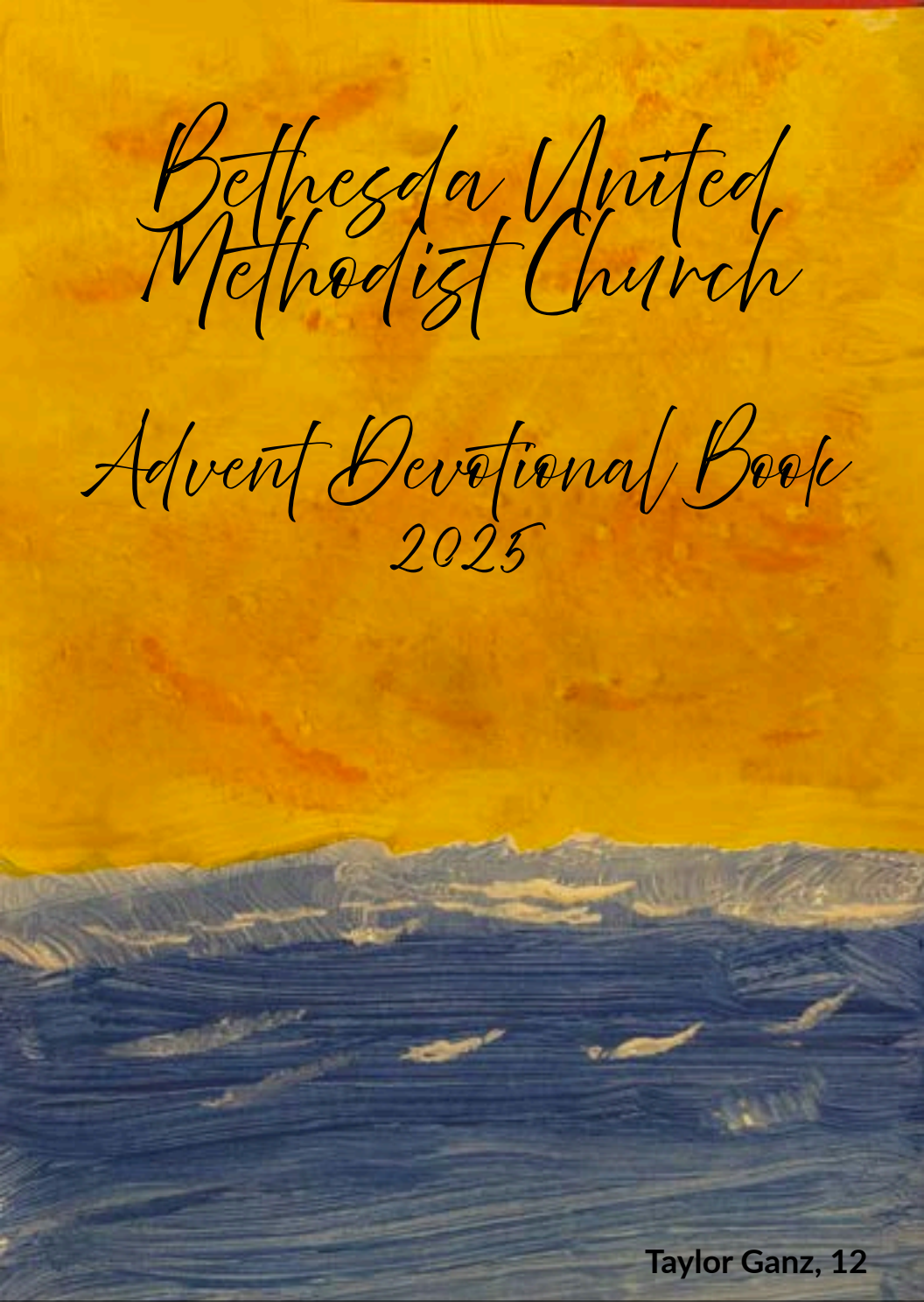
Bethesda United Methodist Church

Advent Devotional Book 2025



Taylor Ganz, 12

Luke 1:45: “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Welcome Friends,

Advent is our season of holy anticipation. We are waiting for a baby, and we are learning to notice the ways God is already here. Different can feel scary. A diagnosis can shake hope. Work can change. Relationships can ache. Distance can thin our joy. Still, God does not leave. Advent teaches us to wait with our eyes open.

This year we're praying alongside a witness from the darkest places. The poem you'll see in these pages was found on a wall in a Holocaust-era concentration camp. It is anonymous, and it is brave: "I believe in the sun even when it is not shining. I believe in love even when there's no one there. I believe in God even when he is silent." We hold these lines with reverence. They are not about bravado. They are about faithful waiting, like Mary carrying a promise before anyone could see it.

So we light one small candle and make room. We practice hope. We let beauty help us breathe. Most days you'll pause with art from our community. On Wednesdays you'll find a brief devotional. On Christmas we will rejoice together with a final devotional. Children and adults built this as one church family. If you are full of songs, welcome. If you are quiet and watchful, welcome. Even now, God draws near. The child is coming. Hold your candle. Keep watch. Believe, even now.

Rev. Shaw

“I believe in the sun
even when it is not shining.
And I believe in love,
even when there’s no one there.
And I believe in God,
even when he is silent.
I believe through any trial,
there is always a way.
But sometimes in this suffering
and hopeless despair
my heart cries for shelter,
to know someone’s there.
But a voice rises within me, saying, ‘Hold on.
My child, I’ll give you strength,
I’ll give you hope. Just stay a little while.’
I believe in the sun
even when it is not shining.
And I believe in love
even when there’s no one there.
But I believe in God
even when he is silent.
I believe through any trial
there is always a way.
May there someday be sunshine.
May there someday be happiness.
May there someday be love.
May there someday be peace…”

Advent Week 1: I Believe in the Sun: Hope for Tomorrow

(Julia Coffey, 7)

Advent wreath liturgy for Week 1

Gather: Sit together with the ones you love or sit alone in the presence of God and notice the wreath and the candle for this week—the first candle, the candle of hope. Take a slow breath together to prepare yourself.

Opening thought: This week, we remember hope. Advent asks us to wait and to trust that God is coming into the world. We say, "I believe in the sun even when it is not shining." We believe that through any trial, there is always a way. When suffering weighs our hearts and hope feels far, we trust that God's promise holds us through the dark. We wait together, believing the sun will rise again.

Scripture: John 1:5 — "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it."

Candle: Light one purple candle for hope.

Closing prayer: God of hope, hold us when the night feels long. Teach us to believe, even now. Light our way through every trial, gather our hearts, and make us signs of comfort for one another. We trust your mercy is new each morning. Amen.

December 1

(Rev. Steven Martin)

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord…and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed." - Isaiah 40:3

December 2

(Nick Ganz, 12)

Psalm 27:13 — "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

December 3

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shone. (Isaiah 9:2)

Back in 2019, the General Conference doubled down. They didn't just keep the bans, they tightened them. They said people like me couldn't be ordained, and they imposed penalties for pastors who blessed couples like us. It felt like the door wasn't just closed, it was slammed and bolted. Rev. Jenny and Rev. Scott called me in tears. I felt that gut punch all the way to my knees.

But then BUMC showed up. My phone lit up with love. Calls. Texts. Emails. Flowers on the porch and a card in the mailbox that said we're with you. That Sunday, I walked in, and the altar was covered in rainbows. The sun did not seem to shine within the denomination, but it was blazing at our church. I didn't leave. I joined. My family found home right there.

Now, the whole denomination is inclusive. The wider sun finally broke through, and I'm grateful. But I will never forget who held us when it was darkest. The love in this church kept the light on. You kept the table set. You told my kids they belonged before any vote ever changed. That's the gospel to me.

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." That's John 1:5. I saw that with my own eyes at BUMC. When the big room went cold, this house stayed warm. When the rules said no, this community said yes. Thank you for being the people who made it shine.

- Dennis Williams

December 4

(Julia Coffey, 7)

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."
(Isaiah 40:3-5, New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

December 5

(Emma Lazare, 10)

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it." (John 1:5)

Advent Week 2: I Believe in Love: Daring Right Relationship

Julie Petrossian

Advent wreath liturgy for Week 2 — Love

Gather: Sit together with the ones you love or sit alone in the presence of God. Notice the wreath and the two candles we light for this week. Take a slow breath and let your heart soften.

Opening thought: This week, we remember love. Not the easy kind—the steady kind that keeps its promise. As the poem says, “I believe in love, even when there’s no one there.” We believe God draws near, choosing us again and again. When fear is loud and courage feels thin, we trust that love takes on flesh and moves toward us.

Scripture: Matthew 1:21-23 — “She will bear a son and you will name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us.’”

Candles: Light two purple candles, one for hope and one for love.

Closing prayer: God of tender mercy, teach us to love the way you love — patient, brave, and present. When we are afraid, remind us that you come close and stay. Help our hands hold one another with kindness, and our voices speak consolation. May love be our story and our shelter, now and always. Amen.

December 8

(Rev. Dr. HiRho Park)

"God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him." (1 John 4:9)

December 9

(Kathryn Whitfield)

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). (Matthew 1:23)

December 10

At Bethesda United Methodist Church, the music community plays a vital role in shaping the worship experience, offering both a foundation of faith and a source of strength and comfort. Music has a unique ability to reach places in the heart that words alone often cannot touch. When sung, played, and shared together, it becomes a powerful expression of God's presence.

This community is built not just on Thursday rehearsals and Sunday performances, but on relationships. Showing up and working together through harmonies, listening, and offering gentle encouragement to one another is a meaningful demonstration of love.

Being a part of the music community has enhanced my sense of belonging and strengthened my connection to the church and our shared faith. Musicians and vocalists working together model unity, listening closely to one another, and blending their voices into something greater than the sum of its parts. This unity can be a witness to the congregation, inviting everyone into a shared experience of grace.

For me, the music community at BUMC does more than enhance worship—it becomes a living testimony to our faith in action, helping to sustain the church and point all who gather toward God's healing presence.

Mike Moran

December 11

(Wyatt Fotiades, 13)

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14)

December 12

(Karen and Sam Fratantoni)

"Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."
(Luke 2:19)

(Andrea Hamel)

Advent Week 3: I Believe in God: Ode to Joy

Gather: Sit together with those you love, or sit alone in the presence of God. Notice the wreath and the three candles for this week. Take a slow breath and let gratitude rise, even if it's small.

Opening thought: This week, we remember joy. Joy does not ignore pain. Joy grows right in the middle of real life and surprises us with a song. Even in our saddest times, we pray: "May there someday be happiness." And there will be, because we believe that God is at work, tending seeds we cannot see. When tears come and laughter feels far away, we trust that God's promise meets us and reminds us of the joy to come. In Advent we wait together, believing joy will find us again.

Scripture: Luke 1:46-47 — "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Candles: Light two purple candles, one for hope and one for love, and add a pink candle for joy.

Closing prayer: God of joy, meet us in the middle of real life. Lift our tired hearts and plant gladness that can grow even in tears. Let your light warm us from the inside so we can share kindness with gentle hands. Keep our hope alive until laughter rises again. Amen.

Monday, December 15

Twilight

The branches, bare against the gray sky, are asleep.
The ground swept clean, the garden quiet, at peace.
The western sky, for a moment, was streaked with red and gold.
Dusk settles in.
The stars appear one by one,
twinkling lights that have guided across the millennia—
lights that give hope in the darkness, the work of our Creator.
Believe.

(A poem by Mary Ann Toomey)

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples, but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you." (Isaiah 60:1-2)

Tuesday, December 16

(Taline Petrossian, 14)

"Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy." (Psalm 126:5)

December 17

Let's face it. These are incredibly challenging times to keep up the hope and belief that things will work out. When I think of a story that is an example of joy, hope, and love, the situation of a 16-year-old boy (let's call him Jonathan) who is in the foster care program in Montgomery County comes to mind. He was full of joy when he received gifts from our church that helped him feel like he was closer to being a normal kid. The hope was found when the boy started to thrive. The love came from the caring social worker and also from the love and effort put into clothing donations from our BUMC congregation for foster children and youth like Jonathan.

The story is told through a series of emails I received from a social worker (let's call her Sheila) who works for the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services:

"Janet, I am wondering if I may visit your Foster Care Closet to look for some school clothes to fit a 16-year-old high school student who resides in a group home. He is about 6 feet tall and weighs about 135 pounds. When he first came into our care several months ago, he weighed only 110, so this is a huge thrive! He will be in 10th grade, and this fall he will be playing basketball quite often. He could use socks and shoes size 11 or 11.5. He needs clothes that fit so he can be ready to start school next week. Thank you so much for your generous heart. — Sheila"

"Janet, I do not want to push my luck, but may I make one more request? You have previously helped a youth who is 16. He received many gently used clothes and a pair of slippers from you. He and I appreciate all the items. Thank you! He is in desperate need of a pair of basketball shoes. He started a county rec center basketball league. He is outgrowing his old pair. I plan to take him to the Salvation Army or Goodwill if you cannot find a pair of basketball shoes for him. Again, I appreciate any help you can provide and wish you happy holidays! — Sheila"

"Janet, Jonathan remembered your first name from receiving the basketball shoes you provided him not long ago. When I dropped off all the items, including the new blue marble Crocs, he was totally

wowed. He said, 'Why is Janet so nice to a kid like me?' So I asked, 'Kid, like what?' He then said, 'A random black kid who has no one.' So I responded, 'You do have people in your life, like Janet and me.' The smile he put on his face after that was priceless. He has been placed in a new group home and will be changing to a different high school. He is excited about his fresh start.

He has grown a great deal within the last 16 months since he came into care with Montgomery County Foster Care. He was so malnourished, and now at almost 6 feet he weighs about 165 pounds. This is largely due to the kindness he received from people like you. He realized now that the world is not such a cold, dangerous place and that there is good in the world. He regrets that he stole some food, and more, from stores during those days when he was put out on the street by his mom. He also realized that feeling sorry for himself does not do well for him and could make things worse. He is learning to be grateful, which makes him feel better about himself. I intend to continue providing support for him to develop true self-worth and self-love.

"By the way, Jonathan is finishing up 10th grade and is attending a job seminar for a summer job today. He's very excited. I saw him the other day in the marble blue Crocs that you bought him. He looked very cool in them. He loves the pair as well as the other clothing you got for him. One of the shirts will be perfect for his job interview. Again, we deeply appreciate all you and your church members do." — Sheila

This story reminds us how fortunate we are and how what we do for others can bring joy, hope, and love.

(Janet Edmonds)

Thursday, December 18

(Julia Coffey)

"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for see, I bring you good news of great joy for all the people.'" (Luke 2:10)

Friday, December 19

(Kate Dansie)

"A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him—the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." (Isaiah 11:1-2)

Advent Week 4: I Believe in the Light: Illuminating Peace

Gather: Sit together with the ones you love or sit alone in the presence of God. Notice the wreath and the four candles for this week. Take a slow breath and let your shoulders drop.

Opening thought: This week, we remember peace. Peace is not the absence of struggle but the gift that steadies us in the middle of it. We say, “My heart cries for shelter, to know someone is there.” Even when the world is noisy and it can feel that we are alone, that is when God comes near to mend what is broken and to hush our fears. We wait together, trusting that God’s peace will find us and shape how we live.

Scripture: John 14:27 — “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

Closing prayer: God of peace, breathe into our anxious places. Calm the rush inside us and steady our hands to do your work. Teach us to listen for your quiet voice and to carry your peace into the places that need it most. Make us instruments of your restful love, now and always. Amen.

Monday, December 22

(Mike Mitchell)

"C&O Canal Park at Widewater"

"I have said this to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution, but take courage: I have conquered the world!" (John 16:33)

Tuesday, December 23

(Libby Fotiades, 9)

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Great will be his authority, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this." (Isaiah 9:6-7)

December 24 — A thought about how to live out Christmas all year

The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) has always been a foundation of my faith. It has challenged me throughout my life to take what God has given us and make more out of it. It tells us that God doesn't give us good things for us to hang on to them (or bury them in the ground), but to go and multiply the good with them. It promises that if we seize the opportunities God gives us, he will bless us further. But if we just hoard what we've been given, we will lose even that.

Christmas is a time when we celebrate God's greatest gift to us—his only Son, Jesus Christ. The Parable of the Talents reminds us that God doesn't want us to receive his gift passively, but to take what we've been given and turn it into something more. So this Christmas, let us think about how we can take all the good things that we receive—the music, presents, gatherings, food—and turn them into something more. Maybe that means inviting others to share in what you receive. Maybe it means deepening relationships with family and friends during this season. Maybe it means taking the peace and hope of Christ's birth into places that need peace and hope. "Joy to the World…He comes to make his blessings flow." Won't you join in making his blessings flow this Christmastime?

Neil Gregory

December 25 — Merry Christmas

Romans 12:10 — "Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other."

When winter comes, everyone starts looking at their calendars, thinking excitedly about what they will do over Christmas break. Because of its length and spiritual importance, Christmas is a favorite holiday for many, including myself. My family travels to Virginia to stay with our grandparents for Christmas. Though this may sound small and uneventful, it is the reason I look forward to winter so much: family. Memories are built talking, laughing, and playing with each other, and having a good time together. Being surrounded by people you know and love, and who feel the same in return, is a feeling like no other. Many people also find this joy in celebrating with friends and being close to God and Jesus. In the end, where you go and what you do isn't what makes a great Christmas. It's who's at your side, talking and laughing and experiencing everything with you.

Elliot Sim, 9th grade

Merry Christmas!

Dennis Williams

(Shannon Coffey)

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