

a
child
is
born

THE MIRACULOUS BIRTHS OF THE BIBLE

2021 Advent Devotional



a
child
is
born

THE MIRACULOUS BIRTHS OF THE BIBLE

2021 Advent Devotional

INTRODUCTION

You might have picked up that I (Austin) am from the UK. Advent in my home culture means carol services, mulled wine, and mince pies. It is a time when friends who would never darken the door of a church will come and hear about the first coming of Christ, and a chance for us to tell them of the truth that he will come again. It is a season of reflection on what God has done and (isn't this our hope in the gospel?) a time to remind one another that if he has done that—the impossible, the immediate and earthy and wholly unfeasible reality of the incarnation—how much more will he keep all his promises to come?

The four Sundays of Advent are traditionally marked by the lighting of a candle each week. As we look ahead to Christ's return, we pause to dwell on the hope, love, joy and peace that flow from the remembrance of the first coming of Jesus, and from the anticipation of his second coming. This year we are following the same pattern in our Advent devotional. After our opening meditation on the meaning of Advent, there are four short devotionals designed to help you to worship God as you consider the return of Christ. Following a call to worship, we linger on the words of a traditional carol, meditating on the familiar words and asking the Lord to fill the melodies of the season with echoes of the gospel. Next we consider a short section from Sunday's Scripture passage and a meditation followed by questions for reflection and a prayer.

In this year's devotional, we have invited long-standing mission partners to minister to our church family in pointing us to Jesus. It is essential that we understand that our partners are not beneficiaries, but family; we need their ministry to us. At the heart of each week's devotional is a meditation from a mission partner, considering the Scripture and the theme of the week in the light of God's grace in their context.

Feel free to use this devotional guide in whatever context works well for you. That might be a weekly family devotion, or a gathering with friends or your community group, or at your nightstand. For parents with younger children, we encourage you to invite your kids to participate by reading out loud, asking and answering questions, and praying in their own words. However you choose to use this resource, our prayer is that as you walk through the familiar rhythms of Advent with these guides from all corners of Christ's kingdom, your heart would be drawn to our magnificent Savior and your soul would long for his glory and return.

Finally, at the back of this devotional you will find the Nicene Creed, one of the ancient statements of the global Christian faith. Consider concluding each time of worship by reading this aloud. Its central section on Christ speaks richly of the hope of Advent, and as we repeat it, we join with the church throughout the ages in professing the true hope handed down to us.



Austin Kettle
Pastoral Intern

THE MEANING OF ADVENT

A MEDITATION FROM ISTANBUL, TURKEY

To protect our partner, his family, and his work, this meditation is anonymous.

Taking a walk in any city during the Advent season is to witness the fascinating interplay of dark and light. Sundown happens early in İstanbul, drawing attention to the many fancy city lights. Even here, the malls are beautifully decorated with huge Christmas trees and a zillion lights. Certainly, all this is a reminder of the true Light who came into the world 2021 years ago, of God becoming flesh and tabernacling among us, of Christ's growing Kingdom, and of the joy to see God at work in our lives and cities.

In Turkey, being among the largest unreached countries in the world, most people don't know the meaning of Christmas, Advent, or Christ being the Savior. But they still long for light, hope, justice, meaning, and ultimately salvation. In an environment of economic strife, relational and psychological struggles, depression, anxiety, and uncertainty endemic among the younger generation, we are seeing an ever-increasing spiritual hunger. Interest beyond the known, beyond the norm, beyond inherited religion is present. Younger people are increasingly curious to come to church, to read the Bible, and to hear about Jesus.

Titus 2:13-14 reminds us that we're "waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." Like Titus, the Advent season invites us to reflect on the past, the present, and the future. How was your 2021?

For us it was an eventful year full of light and dark: new believers, many baptisms, discipleship and training new leaders, deportations of friends, local pastors having to leave their country because their non-Turkish wives were denied residency permits, local believers being interrogated for hours by secret police and asked to spy on their church. Persecution in its many forms has the benefit that it creates clear lines between light and dark.

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few — and, while Christ's Kingdom is constantly growing across the globe, the enemy is not peacefully standing by. So how can we grow in these "good works"? What does "waiting for the blessed hope" of Christ's second coming look like for us amidst the brokenness in our respective peoples, cities, countries?

Let us enjoy this Advent season and look back to the grace of God that Christ magnificently showcased in his first coming by coming into our brokenness. Let us look at Christ and his love for the poor, marginalized, outcast, foreigners, widows, his empathy to lost sinners like us, his sacrificial and servant life poured out. Let us look back, so we can look forward full of hope. We can be certain that all present brokenness will be healed, and that as we wait, each one of us is called to use our lives to participate, with help of the Spirit, in our Father's work until Christ comes again.

HOPE | THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

NOVEMBER 28 - DECEMBER 4

CALL TO WORSHIP: PSALM 130:5-8

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.
And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

PRAYER

God of hope and joy, open our hearts to your Son, Jesus Christ. By your Spirit, help us to prepare for the day he comes again to make all things new. Amen. ¹

SONG: ONCE IN ROYAL DAVID'S CITY

Once in royal David's city stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby in a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ, her little child.

He came down to earth from heaven who is God and Lord of all,
And his shelter was a stable, and his cradle was a stall:
With the poor, and mean, and lowly, lived on earth our Savior holy.

He was giv'n to pay our ransom; by his blood we are set free;
Suffered he for our transgressions, Lamb of God upon the tree.
Then he rose up from the grave, risen King with pow'r to save.

And our eyes at last shall see him, through his own redeeming love;
For that child so dear and gentle is our Lord in heav'n above,
And he leads his children on to the place where he is gone.

Words by C.F. Alexander, 1848; alt. Vs 3 by Jamie Brown, Music by H.J. Gauntlett, 1849

SCRIPTURE READING: GENESIS 18:1-21 — THE PROMISE OF ISAAC

MEDITATION

BY MAISON & AVERY LITRELL, YOUNG LIFE CAPERNAUM, FAIRFAX VA

In Genesis 18:14, the Lord asks Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" I work with teenagers and young adults with disabilities. I call them my Capernaum friends. And for my Capernaum friends, it's not hard to see the brokenness of the world. Not because of how their bodies and minds were made (because they were made on purpose and for a purpose by God) but because of how hard it is for them to navigate this broken world. And this is the reality we all find ourselves in.

¹ Prayers in this guide, unless otherwise noted, are reprinted or adapted by permission from *The Worship Sourcebook, Second Edition*, © 2013, Faith Alive Christian Resources

Recently, we were doing a Bible study on “relationship restored.” We had already talked about relationship right, ruined, and rescued. This day was about how it will one day be, with Jesus, in heaven, together. We read the chapter from *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, “A Dream of Heaven.” You should read it all, but here is an excerpt:

“One day, John knew, Heaven would come down and mend God’s broken world and make it our true, perfect, home once again. And he knew, in some mysterious way that would be hard to explain, that everything was going to be more wonderful for once having been so sad. And he knew then that the end of The Story was going to be so great, it would make all the sadness and tears and everything seem like just a shadow that is chased away by the morning sun.”²

There is a young man named Ian who is a part of our group. He is a non-speaking autistic and one of the most intelligent people I have ever met. For this reason, we always have a “go deeper” question specifically for him. On this day, when we got to that question, he couldn’t control his body. He was in the corner with his leader (who is also his communication specialist), literally rolling on the floor laughing. To be honest, I was disappointed to not get more engagement from Ian, but that is part of the ministry.

The next day, his leader sent me this message:

“I just asked Ian why he was laughing so much & being so goofy and this was his response - ‘I was imagining heaven and I was overcome with joy and laughter.’ Funny how I thought he was being silly and not paying much attention to the lesson, but it was quite the opposite! God works in funny (literally) ways!”

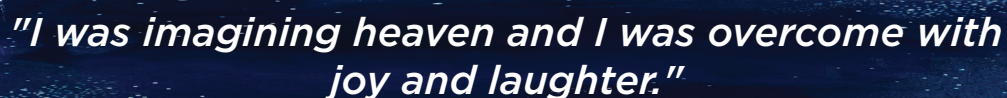
I have a lot of things Ian doesn’t have. The ability to speak, control my body, and the opportunity to live independently, just to name a few. But Ian has an incredible gift of hope. Most days I feel more like Sarah in Genesis 18, questioning if the Lord can REALLY do as he says. But in this season as we look forward to the birth of Jesus, I pray we have hope like Ian. Sarah laughs out of fear and doubt but Ian laughs from being overcome by the promise of Jesus’ rescue and redemption. God can, and in time will, redeem all things, restoring us to the way things were meant to be. And for that reason, we can have hope like Ian.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) What are some things you hope for?
- 2) How does thinking about heaven bring you hope?
- 3) Who do you know who doesn’t yet believe in Jesus? How can you pray for and be a witness to them?

PRAYER

○ God, you have promised that Jesus will come again to redeem all things. Help us to be ready for that day. Teach us how to be faithful like Jesus so that our lives will reflect his goodness and mercy to a world in need. By your Spirit and in Christ’s name, Amen.



"I was imagining heaven and I was overcome with joy and laughter."

² Sally Lloyd-Jones and Jago. *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz, 2009), 348.

LOVE | THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 5 - 11

CALL TO WORSHIP: JOHN 3:16-17, 1 JOHN 4:9, 11

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

PRAYER

Father in heaven,

Our hearts desire the warmth of your love,
and our minds are searching for the light of your Word.

Increase our longing for Christ, our Savior,
and give us the strength to grow in love,
that the dawn of his coming
may find us rejoicing in his presence
and welcoming the light of his truth.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SONG: WHAT CHILD IS THIS

What child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary.

Why lies he in such mean estate, where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here the silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spears, shall pierce him through; the cross be born for me, for you:
Hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mary.

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh; come, peasant, king, to own him;
The King of kings salvation brings, let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise the song on high, the virgin sings her lullaby:
Joy, joy for Christ is born, the babe, the son of Mary.

Traditional English Carol, Adapt. by W.C. Dix; Melody GREENSLEEVES

SCRIPTURE READING: JUDGES 13 — THE BIRTH OF SAMSON

MEDITATION

BY NATHANIEL A. ADAWONU, NEW HARVEST MISSIONS INTERNATIONAL, TOGO

When God delivered his people, Israel, from Egypt, he led them through the desert towards Canaan. He told them to conquer the land he had given them and that he was with them. End of story? Of course not. We know the story: the people of God failed over and over again.

Regardless, God never gave up on these people he called his own. As we come to the time of the judges, we see how the people of God had fallen into sin with their pagan neighbors and were barely worshipping God.

Along comes Samson, the last judge that God would use to catapult his people forward. Samson was a mess, but he reflected God's people as a whole. Take a look at his life, and it is a mirror image of God's people with all of their flaws and failures. Yet, God persisted through Samson to move his people forward.

As I think of the people of God back then, I can't help but consider God's people in my native country of Togo, as well as all of those in West Africa. They, like God's people in Samson's day, live surrounded by a people group hostile to their faith. They too need a deliverer to come to their aid just like the Israelites of Samson's day.

You see, our West African brothers and sisters in Christ face terrible suffering, persecution, violence, extreme poverty, and religious discrimination today. Yet, the Christmas story tells us of Christ, the Savior who, like Samson, has broken into the lives of his own to stand with them in their suffering so he can bring them help amid hopelessness.

Today, he calls us also to stand and bring love and support to our brothers and sisters in Muslim West Africa during this Christmas season. We are reminded of the truth that God has sent to his people the true Savior of the world. And with his coming, a new Kingdom has come. God is undoing all that is wrong and broken with this world and with us.

Christmas is the reality that defines our world, even more than all the persecutions and suffering we are experiencing in Muslim West Africa. We indeed face injustice, persecution, suffering, and even death. But with the coming of Jesus through his gospel in Muslim West Africa, those things are on the run. The days of darkness and the devil are numbered. They will not have the final say. But Jesus, in all his infinite goodness and love, will reign.

Samson was that flawed image of a deliverer to the nation of Israel so long ago. Today, this Christmas, we have a perfect Savior. Unlike Samson, our Savior, our Judge, is perfect and sinless. Samson was selfish and arrogant. Our Savior is self-less and humble. Samson was a precursor to Jesus, a shadow of the ultimate deliverer for the people of God.

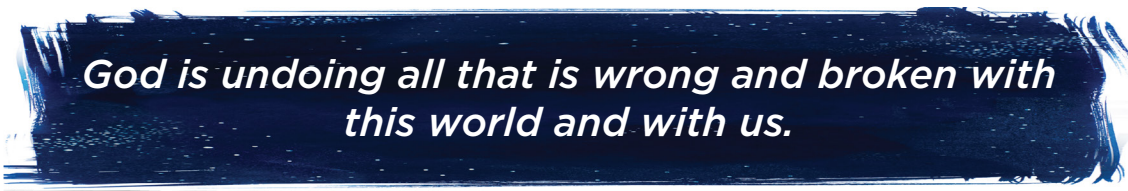
My people in West Africa and all of God's people throughout the world, have reason to celebrate this Christmas season with great hope and "advent" or expectation. Christ has come, Christ is with us, Christ will come again. Merry Christmas!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) What is one thing that jumped out to you in today's devotional?
- 2) How has God shown his love toward you this year?
- 3) How might you be able to share the love of God with unbelieving neighbors this Advent season?

PRAYER

God of love, you are the King of nations. You care for the poor and needy across all lands and peoples. Help us to be more like you. Give us your love, that we may love those who suffer and spread your light and peace throughout the earth. Help us all to hope in the day when Christ will come again to rule and reign forevermore. Amen.



***God is undoing all that is wrong and broken with
this world and with us.***

JOY | THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 12 - 18

CALL TO WORSHIP: PSALM 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us, *Selah*
that your way may be known on earth,
your saving power among all nations.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!

The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God, shall bless us.
God shall bless us;
let all the ends of the earth fear him!

PRAYER

God of timeless grace,
You fill us with joyful expectation.
Make us ready for the message that prepares the way,
that with uprightness of heart and holy joy
we may eagerly await the kingdom of your Son,
who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
now and forever. Amen.

SONG: JOY TO THE WORLD

Joy to the world! The Lord is come: let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heav'n and nature sing, and heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns: let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness
And wonders of his love, and wonders of his love,
And wonders, wonders, of his love.

Words by I. Watts; Music by G. F. Handel

SCRIPTURE READING: 1 SAMUEL 1:15-18 — AWAITING THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL

MEDITATION

BY STEFFEN WEIL, CITY TO CITY D-A-CH (GERMANY, AUSTRIA, SWITZERLAND) NETWORK LEADER, HAMBURG, GERMANY

Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." In the early years of our marriage, my wife and I needed to be very patient. We had to wait for several years before God answered our prayers and gave us a child. Year after year, month after month, a growing despair. Questions. Tears. Prayers. Mourning. Waiting.

After a couple of years, which felt like an eternity to us, our sovereign Lord heard our prayers and gave us a daughter. And 14 months later, a second daughter — and then two sons. We were so thankful, and still are. With our kids came a deep joy into our life. Our hearts absolutely can relate to Hannah's heart.

While ministering as church planters in Germany, we were praying and working desperately hard for changed hearts, transformed lives, and born-again people.

In both cases, as a couple and as ministers, we were constantly reminded that we are part of creation and not creator, dependent on God's transforming and life-giving work. We are not able to make life, fix life, or create spiritual life.

God is calling us to trust him like Hannah did. I want to learn from her to bring my grief and mourning, my requests, to him — because I'm expecting to receive help directly from him.

And I want to listen to the "Elis" whom God has placed into my life to speak peace into my situation. We all need an Eli and we all are called to be an Eli to others, because we all need God's peace in our hearts - as humans, as children, as couples, and as ministers.

Samuel, Hannah's son, brought joy into her life, but God brought peace. And Samuel was just a shadow of the Prince of Peace and the joy to the world that he brought.

This is what describes the deepest joy of Christmas: the Prince of Peace became flesh to bring peace into our lives, and, through Jesus Christ, God is inviting us to give him our grief and our mourning so that he can transform it into peace and joy. Let's eat, drink, and enjoy this year's Advent, because Jesus is born, son of Mary, Prince of Peace. God. Emmanuel.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) What brings you a deep sense of joy?
- 2) How has God taught you to trust in him this year?
- 3) Who is God using as an "Eli" or godly counselor in your life? For whom might you be a godly counselor?

PRAYER: AN ADVENT PRAYER BY HENRI J.M. NOUWEN, FROM *THE LORD IS NEAR*

Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas. We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day. We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us. We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom. We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence. We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light. To you we say, "Come Lord Jesus!"

God is inviting us to give him our grief and mourning, to transform them into peace and joy.

PEACE | THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 19 - 25

CALL TO WORSHIP: ISAIAH 9:2, 6-7

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

PRAYER

Faithful God, we wait for you to come. We know that you will because you already have and because you promised to return. While we wait, send your Spirit so that we may grow in grace. Prepare us for your coming, Lord. Amen.

SONG: HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations, rise, join the triumph of the skies;
With th'angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."

Christ, by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold him come, offspring of the virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the God-head see; hail th'incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings, ris'n with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."

Words by C. Wesley; Music by F. Mendelssohn

SCRIPTURE READING: LUKE 1:5-25 — THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST FORETOLD

MEDITATION

BY CHRIS SEATON, PROJECT BELONG VA

“Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”
Luke 1:25

In this verse, we see Mary’s elder cousin, Elizabeth, responding to her miraculous pregnancy with John. Take a moment to imagine, with all the cultural shame attached to infertility at that time, how much Elizabeth’s pregnancy must have brought a sense of deep belonging and peace.

The story is an extravagant one. Not only was Elizabeth barren, she was well past childbearing years. Friends, the extravagance doesn’t stop there. Her husband Zechariah was struck speechless for months because he questioned the angel’s promise of a child. God’s lavish blessing on Elizabeth wasn’t restricted by any of her limits. And that’s not lost on Elizabeth. We get a sweet window into her response. She says the Lord did this for her.

Jason Johnson, an author and adoptive father suggests, “Christmas is the story of a good Father going to extravagant lengths to adopt those who were once separated from Him. It is the celebration of God seeing the plight of His people and responding with the greatest gift of love this world has ever known - Jesus.”³

Creating spaces of love and belonging flow directly from Jesus’ lavish response. In Project Belong’s work with vulnerable children, we see people go to extravagant lengths for children. We see foster parents lavishly love children as they struggle through inordinate loss. We see adoptive parents graft children into forever homes. We see mentors pour time and energy into young adults who’ve aged out of foster care. That gift of moving towards another person with time and heart is what’s been modeled for us by Jesus in Christmas.

Do you know what happens when a child transitions from a place of chaos to a place of safety? The child goes from being in a constant state of “fight or flight” to a state of security. Love and pursuit bring healing. The child returns to his calling: being a child.

May that truth cause you to experience his peace and belonging this Christmas.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) What is one thing that jumped out to you in today’s devotional?
- 2) How has God shown his love toward you this year?
- 3) How might you be able to share the love of God with unbelieving neighbors this Advent season?

PRAYER

God of hope, you call us from the exile of sin with the good news of restoration; you build a highway through the wilderness you come to us and bring us home. Comfort us with the expectation of your saving power, made known to us in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



Christmas is the story of a good Father going to extravagant lengths.

³ © 2019, Jason Johnson. All rights reserved. Originally published at www.jasonjohnsonblog.com/blog/christmas-adoption-the-gospel

NICENE CREED

381 A.D.

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son],
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

2021 Advent Schedule

November 28

Advent Communion

5:15pm service in the McLean Sanctuary

December 11

Live Nativity

10am-12pm in the McLean Parking Lot

December 12

Christmas Choral Concert & Reception

7pm in the McLean Sanctuary

December 24

Family Christmas Eve Services

3pm & 4:30pm in the McLean Fellowship Hall

Candlelight Christmas Eve Services

6pm in McLean & Fairfax

8pm in McLean & Fairfax



MCLEAN
PRESBYTERIAN

mcleanpres.org/christmas



CAPITAL
PRESBYTERIAN
FAIRFAX

fairfaxpres.org/christmas