

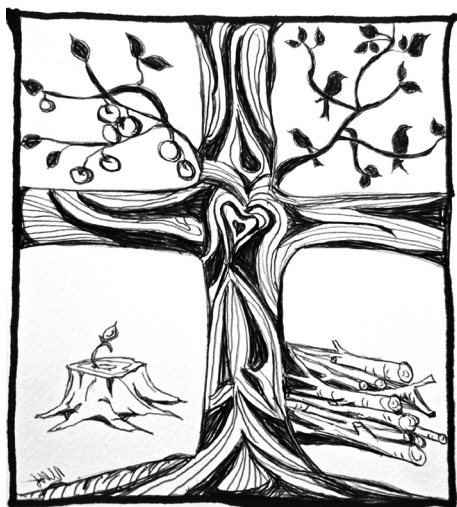
**SPEAKING THE
LANGUAGE OF LOVE**

MLUVIT JAZYKEM LÁSKY



ADVENT DEVOTIONS 2025

ADVENTNÍ ZASTAVENÍ 2025



A recent book by Mike Tidwell, entitled *The Lost Trees of Willow Avenue*, has led me to think of trees as much more than pretty objects or parts of the landscape but as vital neighbors. Mike, founder of Chesapeake Climate Action Network and Takoma Park Presbyterian member, teaches us that trees communicate with one another, parent young seedlings, experience pain, and, as Shel Silverstein depicted so beautifully in his

own famous children's story *The Giving Tree*, are a source of abundant life for hundreds of God's creatures. One oak tree, it turns out, can sustain up to 100 different forms of life – as any squirrel might tell you.

So, when Betty shared your wonderful theme of the language of love, I found myself thinking of trees, which have remarkable ways of speaking love without words (at least words we can hear). My sketch thus tries to depict some of these ways: by providing shelter for the birds, fruit to eat, wood for warmth, and ultimately by giving its whole life in service to all of creation. I hope those sound like familiar gospel themes, all rooted in the giving tree of the cross of Christ. Or, as St. Francis may have said, „Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary, use words.”

– Mark Harper, artist for the front cover of this book of devotionals

“HOW DO WE SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE?”

The Advent Devotional Guide is prepared by members of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren and the Presbyterian Church USA partnership. The daily devotionals bring our communities together.. as we share the theme for the devotionals, “How Do We Speak the Truth in Love?”.... Listening to the Wisdom and Advice filled with grace and truth. Can we? How can we? Will we gain the strength in days of darkness and challenges? When and How are the times to speak the truth in Love? As partners, let us gather the strength to open the table to all people, welcome the strangers, take care of the weak, and always speak love to our neighbors in days ahead.

As we approach Advent, we are grateful to be able to share with members of the ECCB and PCUSA National Offices, the churches, seminaries, and Diakonia around the theme. This is a wonderful opportunity to bring partners closer and reflect together, to learn and share our thoughts through the scripture. This year, we have included the name, address and emails so that you can be in touch with the authors in case you would like to dialogue with them about their Devotional.

The Advent Devotionals are gifts of love to you. Following are the contributors:

- Devotional Authors...Youth, Laity, Pastors, Professors;
- Mark Harper, for his drawing on the cover of the guide;
- Luciano Kovacs, for the image at the end;
- David Hancock, for editing;
- Kevin Miller, for publishing;
- Dora Ticha, for translating;
- Valerie Frey-Stone, James Anderson and Rev. Tom Buchanan, for text selection.

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ADVENT 2025 PREFACE (*continued*)

As we continue to build the ties among us and nurture and grow the partnership, we invite you to join the “Bridges between Neighbors” Partnership Gathering In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania USA from May 3-6, 2026. For further information, check the website Czechpres.net.

We hope that the joy, wisdom, counsel, grace, truth, and peace in the texts and devotions will prevail, and we will be given the strength to “Speak the truth in love” in all of our lives.

Joy, Peace, Hope, and Love,

Betty McGinnis, Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus
ECCB PCUSA Partnership Working Together Committee



SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30 (1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT)

Psalm 122:6-9

Psalm 122 is one of the Songs of Ascent or Pilgrim Songs sung by people making their way to Jerusalem for religious festivals. The idea of “pilgrim songs” always reminds me of walking to church as a child (though the tunes I usually hummed on the way were more apt to be from the radio than our hymnal—except during Advent—when I sang my favorite Christmas carols on the walk. The Advent season is a spiritual pilgrimage during which we look back at the birth of Jesus and forward to his return, when he will establish a new and heavenly Jerusalem. As we reflect on this passage, let’s join together to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and for every place where violence, division, and oppression reign. Let us pray for peace in homes, for family and friends, and in churches. Let us pray for the peace that only God can give, and may our pilgrimage this Advent season make us instruments of God’s peace here on Earth.

Joan Prittie / Athens, Georgia, USA



MONDAY, DECEMBER 1

Micah 6:8

“Do justice.” How easily we say it. We have this verse memorized. But what is “justice?” And why is it something to be done? The concept “justice” as used by the prophets, means “recompense”: not restoration of that which has been lost, but what can help to heal the breach between those who have suffered loss and those who have benefitted either directly or by simply having more: riches, social position, or sheer good luck. To “do justice” is to do what we can to heal the gaps between us. The Samaritan “does justice” and so does the innkeeper. Micah tells us to be aware of the gaps in our relationships – and then offer what we have to close that gap. Justice happens through action. Just do it!

Barbara Renton / Ellicott City, MD USA

Psalm 85:10

Psalm 85 sings of God's restoration, envisioning a future where the wounds of the world are healed and estranged realities are reconciled. Love and faithfulness—so often torn apart—are brought together. Righteousness and peace—so often opposed—embrace in intimacy. This is not a sentimental dream but a vision grounded in God's redeeming work.

Yet when we look around, we see the distance between the psalmist's vision and our reality: love betrayed, faithfulness broken, righteousness twisted, peace absent. We know the ache of injustice, the sting of division, the fatigue of longing. Still, the psalm holds before us God's promise: a future where love and truth, justice and peace are not enemies but companions.

As activist and Cherokee wisdom-keeper Randy Woodley has written, "A society concerned with shalom will care for the most marginalized among them. God has a special concern for the poor and needy, because how we treat them reveals our hearts, regardless of the rhetoric we employ to make ourselves sound just." Psalm 85 is not only a vision of harmony but also a summons to justice. To long for peace without seeking righteousness is to miss the kiss entirely.

In this season, may we look for glimpses of that kiss between righteousness and peace—in small reconciliations, in acts of compassion, in communities working for justice alongside the poor and the vulnerable. These glimpses remind us that God is still at work, and that God's future is drawing near.

God of love and peace, you desire wholeness for the world and for us. Draw us into your reconciling work. Make us people of faithfulness and justice, so that peace may take root in our lives and communities. Through Christ, the Prince of Peace, Amen.

Mihee Kim-Kort / Annapolis, Maryland USA

Exodus 34:6

Exodus 34:6 is among that rare breed of texts that is usually cited apart from its context. It reminds us all of God's mercy, grace, faithfulness and, perhaps above all, patience. No wonder it shows up so frequently in worship services—especially as part of an assurance of pardon after a prayer of confession: “God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” is mantra-as-manna for those of us who recognize our need for these things.

It is, though, worth remembering its context. Moses has led the people to freedom and Sinai. And God, through Moses, has given them the law in the form of two tablets—which law they promptly broke in favor of idols. So Moses breaks the tablets of the law; surely, as symbolic a gesture as we find in the Old Testament. In response, God asks Moses to make two new tablets that are like the old broken ones. These new tablets do more than reveal, in their stony form, the basis for the covenant between God and God's people. They reveal the durability of that covenant and God's fidelity to do renewing work.

During Advent, it is worth remembering that divine fidelity to us means divine renewing work. God incarnate expresses divine fidelity to us in the renewing work of Jesus Christ, born some two thousand years ago and yet anticipated in our future as we are renewed through divine mercy, grace, patience, and love. As God is patient with us, perhaps we ought to be patient with God's timing for that return.

Mark Douglas / Decatur, Georgia USA

Deuteronomy 6:5

When reading today's text, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart," the "Three Commandments of Love" may also come to mind. Is that the case? Oh, the Three Commandments of Love don't ring a bell? I apologise – let me explain. Hint: many know this Biblical passage from Matthew 22:37-40 as the Double Commandment of Love, because Jesus used the word "Love ..." twice. It's not long ago that I discovered a third commandment of love in this text ("...as yourself"): apart from loving God and your neighbour, you also need to love yourself. I dare say that today, Jesus would also say something like "... as you love yourself in a healthy way". After all, the text clearly states so. In today's world, Today's world, with its increasing incidence of alienation, self-harm, depression, etc., reveals how neglecting healthy self-acceptance is a topical issue. This is not about self-love, self-centeredness, narcissism, or egoism. It's about healthy self-acceptance based on gratitude to the Lord for one's life, as complicated as it may sometimes be. If we keep the Lord before our eyes, but also in our hearts, mouths, and hands, as our God, then it is desirable to go out in love for our neighbour, but from the position of a person who also loves themselves in a healthy way. In practice, this is beautifully demonstrated by the Scouts, who are guided by the three basic principles of Scouting: duty to the highest Truth and Love (the Lord), duty to others, and duty to oneself. Love is sometimes hard work – it is a duty. Take care and love one another.

Dan Žárský / Vsetín, Czech Republic

1 John 3:11

The First Epistle of John is one of my favourite books of the Bible. When my wife Adelheid and I were looking for a Biblical text to accompany us throughout our lives, we chose a text from 1 John, because the author repeatedly places emphasis on what matters the most in our lives. Verse 11 says it in one sentence: “This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.” John draws attention to a problem that we are all familiar with. We like to talk about love and how important it is in our lives, and in this world. In real life, however, things are often different. We only focus on ourselves and forget about loving one another, which should be the meaning of our lives. Or we are simply too busy and preoccupied, so it doesn’t even occur to us that we need to change something. How often is love talked about and sung about – especially during Advent! And yet, we are stressed out about all the gifts we still need to buy, especially now, around the Second Sunday of Advent, when we feel Christmas is slowly but surely approaching. Perhaps it would be better if we thought of someone who is particularly lonely during Advent and would be very happy if we dropped in to see them. Or if we wrote a letter to someone and let them know they are important to us. We’ve known for a long time that we are supposed to love one another, but in practice, we need to learn it over and over again and keep reminding ourselves – especially during Advent. May this time, just before the Second Sunday of Advent, be a peaceful moment for us all.

Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus / Prague, Czech Republic

Luke 10:25-37

Jesus' question—actually, his charge—in this parable is simple: don't pick neighbours—be a neighbour. Or, in a few more words: you are not to decide who is worthy to be your neighbour; you are encouraged—yes, you are called—to act neighbourly.

Every Thursday afternoon, a long line of people forms on Broadway and around the corner to the entrance of our church on 73rd Street. For decades, we have been serving meals to our food-insecure neighbours. And the numbers are growing. We started with sixty or seventy, then eighty, one hundred; recently it has been one hundred and fifty—sometimes up to one hundred and sixty.

Our deacons lead this ministry, but it would not happen without the many volunteers who are not church members. These are people who want to help—neighbours helping neighbours—with our church serving as a catalyst.

Among those volunteers was Joel, a youth from a scout troop associated with our church. Over the past year, he designed a listening project. He helped serve meals, but also invited one guest at a time—whoever wished to participate—into a quiet corner of our sanctuary. And Joel simply listened, as a friend, to whatever they wanted to share about their lives. Just being there and listening—without judgement or strings attached.

With our Presbyterian focus on logistics and efficiency—serving and feeding ever-growing numbers—this was a gentle wake-up call, reminding us of our Gospel roots and why we do this work. Providing food? Yes. But also being fully present—you and I—listening, showing up, and being attentive neighbours.

Andrew Stehlik / New York, NY US



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7 (2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT)

Isaiah 11:6-9

For the Old Testament prophets the kingdom of God is almost always in the future tense. Isaiah writes that: "...a shoot *shall* come out from the root of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1). And "his delight *shall* be in the fear of the Lord." (Isaiah 11:3). So when we arrive at Isaiah's beautiful and poetic portrait of what awaits the world in God's future—we are greeted by the image of a wolf that *shall* live with the lamb. And the evocative glimpse into the future in which "a little child *shall* lead them." (Isaiah 11:6).

Our hope is always a hope that is rooted in what is and what shall be. The earliest Christians heard echoes of Isaiah's prophecy in the life of Jesus. Jesus will be proclaimed the Prince of Peace. That is a hope-filled word in a world torn apart by "wars and rumors of war." Our Czech brothers and sisters in Christ do not have to look very far to the east to see the death and destruction inflicted on Ukraine. I distinctly remember the young mother from the Ukraine sharing her story in Olomouc at the Partnership Conference in 2023. And now the cries of the mothers in Gaza are being heard daily.

And yet in these days of Advent we continue to believe that the Prince of Peace will have the last word. Indeed, we harbor the hope that one day the wolf will lie down with the lamb, and a little child will lead them. May it be so.

David Evans / Austin, Texas USA

John 13:34-35

Jesus speaks of a *new commandment* that he gives to his disciples. It is, in fact, a commandment that he took from the Old Testament: to love one another. The other Gospels mention the two great commandments of love, which are a collage of Deuteronomy 6:5 (to love God) and Leviticus 19:18 (to love one's neighbour). So, what makes this commandment, to 'love one another', a new commandment? Perhaps it is not a *new* one, it is simply one that needs to be *renewed* constantly. It cannot be fulfilled once and for all. This commandment is always fresh. Jesus gave it to the disciples after he had washed their feet like a servant. In the Gospel of John, this story replaces the account of the Last Supper that Mark, Luke and Matthew speak of. It is a new version of the Lord's Supper. What will be my version of the commandment to 'love one another' today?

Petr Sláma / Stará Boleslav, Czech Republic

Acts 2:43-47

Love comes to us in many ways: through a welcome hug, a warm smile or a kind word. There are many forms of love; the “language” of love that the community of Jesus-believers spoke was through their palpable care for one another. All members who came to be part of this new community experienced love through the tangible, daily acts of sharing companionship, food and financial resources. No one was in need.

The passage ends by saying that the community was growing in number. Day by day, people were being saved. Salvation, like love, may be expressed and understood in different ways. God’s salvation – shalom or “fullness of life” for all people – was growing among the believers. From this text we can surmise that they experienced this salvation *not only* with a hope for fullness of life after death, but with a full belly and a peace-fullness born of palpable, communal love in the here and now.

The salvation that God offers to all people, and the love that the community of believers shared in the early days before a church was born, go hand in hand. Salvation and love are so much more than a spoken word! Those who were part of the community were growing in understanding and faith through the apostles’ teaching and preaching. At the same time, the community was learning through the language of love-in-action: everyone who came to believe that Jesus Christ was the Messiah were welcomed with care, in a spirit of mutuality and equity. No one was seen as more important than another; everyone had access to shared resources. Everyone had enough.

May we, too, discover and receive God’s gifts of love and salvation in ourselves. May we, too, live the language of love by serving as instruments of God’s shalom for all our neighbors, near and far. Amen.

Ellen Sherby / Louisville, Kentucky USA

I John 3:16-18

When I'm preparing to set out on a long journey, I always want to know the basic directions before getting onto the highway. First, it's Prague, then Dresden, then Berlin. Only then do I look for the road to the village where my German friends live. I need large landmarks as well as the small ones to make sure I reach my destination. One does not work without the other; together, they build up the route.

Apostle John must have been an experienced traveller: he marks out our journey of faith both with large, and with small landmarks. Christ came for us, as proclaimed by the words of God's great love. They are crucial, because they set out the basic direction: ***This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.*** (v. 16) However, I also need the smaller signposts. I would never reach my friends' home if I only followed the main route from Prague to Berlin. I need to find my way, my personal little signpost. The same is true for faith and love. Apart from the big words about Christ's death and resurrection, my small actions are also important. They, too, take me towards my goal – towards my neighbours. ***If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?*** (v. 17)

Let us build our life's journey on the big words of God's immense love, as well as on our small acts of love.

Jiří Těgler / Polička, Czech Republic

Hebrews 13:1-3

How simple and straightforward. Yes, that is what we should be doing. We agree, but only up to the point where we think of specific people and situations. A friend who has a different political opinion now. A dirty homeless person at our door. The suffering. We can't bear to watch the horrors on the news anymore.

The first verse teaches us to love those that are closest to us. But even that can be challenging. Just think of all the long-standing conflicts in families and in various congregations. Do we know how to nurture brotherly and sisterly love? Are we capable of forgiving?

The second verse encourages us to be open to newcomers. That requires great courage – both at our front door and in the congregation, where sometimes people who are not quite like us come to visit. In addition, the author of the verses provokes us with a reminder: what if these people are angels? What if it is precisely these newcomers who are the hope for our congregation, our church? Maybe their way of doing things will be completely different from what we are used to. Can I handle that? What degree of hospitality, or acceptance, is expected of us? Where do we draw the line between what we need to hold on to without making concessions, and what novelties we need to accept?

The third verse leads us to those we probably haven't even met yet. It seems as if it was written for a situation that is different from ours. However, the text is almost unpleasantly realistic. They are flesh and blood people like us, and they experience the same suffering as we would if we were in their situation. How should I keep these people in mind? In prayer, of course, but what else? Should I send money? Donate my time? Nothing is as simple as it seemed at first.

Advent reminds us once again that God's love enters our everyday reality. Through his life, Jesus gave us examples in specific situations.

Lord, we pray for the strength to love perseveringly, we pray for openness to new things and for the courage to rely on you. We pray that you would make us your tools for effective love, for love in action.

Eva Grollová / Prague, Czech Republic

Romans 12:9-10

I'm standing and waiting for the morning bus, along with many other people. When the bus arrives, chaos breaks out. Everyone is trying to get in through one door, and it looks like people are fighting for their lives to get on. When we were in Scotland with my family, everyone would line up in a queue – disciplined and polite. Americans solved the problem differently: everyone has their own car. Although, not exactly. I remember on one occasion when I had a rental car in the States, I was driving through a big city and as a tourist, I was quite slow. The driver behind me started honking and then passed me. I saw a beautiful driver in a beautiful big car showing me a not-so-beautiful symbol through the window. Is it possible that in the modern world, where we have everything, evil becomes so attractive that people embrace its ways as an option?

In the church, we are all polite. We don't push our way through the doors; we let others go first. We fill the pews in an orderly way, starting from the back. After all, the last shall be first. And we all know what love is – you shall love your neighbour as yourself. But love isn't just learned words. Love is an act. Love is not a game or pretence. Love is life itself. Love has the right to clearly and directly point out bad things. The Bible has clear names for bad things: sin and sinner, and it speaks about it plainly. Jesus calls Peter "Satan" when Peter thwarts God's plans. On the other hand, the Bible clearly and unambiguously emphasizes what is good. It speaks of people as beloved, saved, found, God's children, friends, brothers, and sisters – it speaks of a family of faith where people love and give priority to one another. This is what verse 10 expresses. Love always clings to what is good, while evil pushes it away. In this sense, it is necessary today to reprogram human hearts—toward love and love only.

One of the biblical translations paraphrases today's text and says: "True Christianity doesn't mind playing second fiddle." And I would add: "Even the second fiddle has its own score and must play in tune."

Lord Jesus, teach us humility and sincerity in love. Amen.

Petr Peňáz / Vysoké Mýto

I Corinthians 13:4-8

This familiar passage, some refer to it as a poem, is often read at weddings for obvious reasons. I think that during the Advent season it is important to remember the context of these verses as we ponder how these words apply to our lives today as individuals and within our church community.

These verses are taken out of one of several letters the apostle Paul wrote to the church he founded in Corinth. This particular letter was sent because Paul had been told of many troubles within the new church and he wanted to address these issues. There were a variety of beliefs, conflict between members, practices that were abhorrent to Paul, personality worship, and other problems. Sound familiar??

When we think of “love” we often think of romantic love. Paul was talking here to individuals and members of the church community about how the kind of love Jesus lived gives meaning to **all** other Christian behavior. Even when doing “good things,” without this kind of love they won’t really do good! He sets a very high bar for our behavior!

I often think of the night before the last supper when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples – ALL of them – even Judas and Peter whom he knew would betray him. This kind of love is on a level that defies the word ‘love’ as we commonly think of it.

Let us read this passage slowly, one line at a time. Think about how we see each of the qualities in the life of Jesus – and how we experience them in ourselves –and as the Christian we hope to be.

Dear Jesus, help us to see that the LOVE you lived, as described in these words, is the answer to many of the issues in our church and in our own lives. Please help us to understand what it means that “love bears all things, believes all things, love hopes all things and endures all things” as we are being made “new” in Christ. Amen.

Joan Murdoch / Sewickly, Pennsylvania, USA



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14 (3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT)

Luke 1:46-55

The song of Mary, the inspiring Magnificat song of pious praise and humility, is one of the highlights of the Advent season. It makes our hearts soar with joy. But it is full of nuances that we can too easily miss. Mary suggests that the good news of the upcoming birth of our Savior is world changing. The current order of things is about to be radically shaken up, and the world will be turned upside down. Not only will God raise up his humble servant, but he will humble the mighty and bring good things to those who are currently on the bottom of the social hierarchy. It is a message of good news and hope for the poor. No wonder that this scripture is a centerpiece of liberation theology in Latin America. It is a powerful prophetic statement that foreshadows Jesus' ministry. In Matthew 25, Jesus proclaims that what we do for the least of these, we do to him, echoing Mary's message of praise. We can see from the Magnificat that Jesus was very much Mary's son and learned well from his mother. We should pay careful attention to her words – all of them – and respond accordingly.

Jim Anderson / Athens, Georgia, USA

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15

Matthew 5:43-45

Loving our enemies, can we imagine that? Is it even possible to take it seriously? How could a mother love the soldier who had murdered her child? Could those who survived the holocaust love their tormentors? That is simply absurd!

Let us think about love. What is love, actually? Perhaps we sometimes consider it to be an emotion. There is also another point of view: love is not mere emotion; love is an act of will. Love is a deed. A good example of love is the Good Samaritan.

Those who have had to endure evil from others sometimes show more kindness than those who have not. I met a lady who survived a concentration camp. Despite her horrible experience, she never said she hated those who had tortured her.

Viktor Fischl, a Czech-Jewish writer, wrote a novel called the “Song of pity”. He says: What we can feel toward murderers is pity. Pity, not hatred.

Pity is also an emotion. It is a way of feeling your enemies’ sorrow, wishing them a change of mind, and repentance. And also God’s compassion and His salvation, because he wants all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4).

The only reason why we should love our enemies is the true love of God. He loves us all, the good and the bad. Jesus demonstrates this through a beautiful parable: the sun and the rain is not only for good and honest people, it also falls on the gardens of the evildoers. Even they receive God’s blessing.

Loving our enemies could mean wishing them salvation.

God’s Son came to our world – for all. For the good and the righteous, as well as for the bad. This is his decision: human hatred could thus be removed forever.

We are on a journey. It is still difficult for us to love our enemies. Yet, it is a possibility.

Lord, we confess that we are usually only capable of loving those who love us back. Please help us to understand your love – a bigger and deeper kind.

Jan Lukáš / Olomouc, CZ

Galations 5:22-23

When I was in elementary school, one of the teachers was hard to please. She never told the students what behaviors or outcomes she was looking for. Instead, she simply praised some students as “good” while others earned a frown and were told they were “lacking.” When I was growing up, sometimes I felt this unsurety within my faith as well. I tried hard to be good, but whenever I sinned or my feelings weren’t nice, I felt God must be frowning on me. I remember my relief upon learning about the Fruit of the Spirit. It gives me a way to check in with myself, to take stock of how I’m nurturing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in my life. It also gives me a way to feel confident about leaders, relationships, or church groups when I see these spiritual gifts reflected in them, helping me know there is healthy love there.

Valerie Frey Stone / Athens, Georgia, USA

Ephesians 4:15

The young boy had been so excited to play a shepherd in a small-town church's Christmas pageant until his father told him everything he did wrong afterwards. Perhaps the father spoke the truth, but he surely didn't speak it in love. We all know people who wield the truth as weapon intended to wound or diminish others. But as children of Christ, we are to be truthful but in a way that builds up rather than tears down. That is why Paul reminds us that as we mature in Christ, we must always speak the truth infused with love. Growth in Christ is not simply about gaining knowledge—it is about becoming more like Him. When we speak truth in love, we reflect Jesus Himself—the One who never compromised truth yet always embodied perfect love.

Reflection

- Do my words reflect both truth and love, or do I tend to lean more toward one than the other?
- How is Christ calling me to grow in maturity by balancing honesty with compassion?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are full of both grace and truth. Teach me to speak words that reflect Your heart—words that are honest, yet gentle; firm, yet loving. Use my voice to build others up so that together we may grow into Your likeness. Amen.

Dan Nadenicek / Athens, Georgia US

Phillippians 2:1-4

“Be of the same mind.” “Regard others as better than yourselves.” “Look not to your own interests.” These bits of advice, in the wrong hands, could be dangerous tools indeed, used to silence disagreement and suppress dissent. Too often, teachings about unity and humility have functioned to preserve social hierarchies, teaching those with less authority (because of gender, race, economic status, or other identity marker) to accept their places and “respect their betters.” In times of rising authoritarianism, we need to be particularly vigilant about who is uttering these words, and for what end.

What is the “same mind” that we should share, in these days? Not bland uniformity. Not anxious acquiescence to people in power. Not avoidance of all conflict. Rather, the “same mind” here is the one that “was in Christ Jesus,” as Paul says in the next verse (Phil. 2:5). This is a specific kind of mindset, and a specific kind of unity. The “mind” of Jesus describes one who gave up power, to live as an enslaved person and be executed as an enemy of the Roman empire. The unity we should share as Christians is more about sharing this common purpose of humility, which is the embodiment of the reign of God who “brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.” (Luke 1:52)

In this season of Advent, we await the coming of one who gave up power and became one of the least of these, so that the least of these might be exalted. May we share *that* same mind.

Martha Moore-Keish / Decatur, Georgia, USA

Colossians 3:12-14

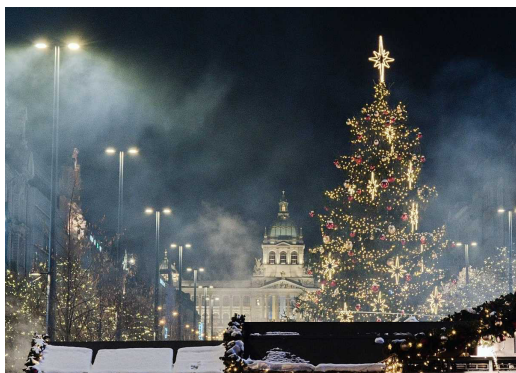
Apostle Paul reminds the church in Colossae that people are chosen are loved by God, he even claims that they are holy. We often doubt ourselves and under the burden of bad decisions, mistakes and shortcomings, we drown ourselves in self-pity and think that God has given up on us. And yet, God has chosen to love each one of us. He made a conscious choice for all of us. We were given the honour of being on God's team, and therefore we must also put on our jerseys. We must now literally take off all our dirty clothes and instead put on clean ones in which we will play the game that is our life. I believe that the comparison of certain characteristics to clothing in this text is entirely intentional, for it is not without reason that they say, "clothes make the man." The first thing other people usually notice is what we are wearing. Paul tells us to show off our good qualities so that others can see that we are there for them, to show kindness. At the same time, however, there should also be modesty and humility, so nothing is too ostentatious. Don't overdo your makeup and other alterations to your appearance. There is no need to have a lot of advertising and flashy colours on our team's jersey. Just as we symbolically declare our agreement with the rules of a given sport by putting on a jersey during a game, so, too, by putting on God's clothing, we are to forgive one another and, above all, to love one another. Forgiveness and especially love should be part of our game during the whole match, from the first minute to the final whistle. That is not easy when we are faced with injuries and fouls, but forgiveness of both supposed and real wrongdoings should also belong to our game. We can be sure that the match of our lives is being refereed by a genuinely fair referee.

Jan Dostál / Olomouc, Czech Republic

James 3:17-18

How do we know that we are living wisely? Is it about how much information we can gather? Or about the ability to argue so brilliantly that we win every debate? James points us to something very different. True wisdom isn't about having the upper hand — it's about being willing to listen. It doesn't seek victory but understanding. It looks at the world through the eyes of mercy. Such wisdom isn't loud or combative — it brings peace. It doesn't push its way through by force but shines through in truth.

Jesus embodied this wisdom perfectly: His words were true, and His heart was full of compassion. He brought peace even when He was rejected. He bore the fruit of righteousness — love that has the power to change the world.



This kind of wisdom doesn't come from education or years of experience. It's a gift — a gift from above. It's given to those who ask and who allow themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit. To those who can set aside their pride and admit that before God they have no merits — only debts. To those who rely on His forgiveness. To those who understand that mercy and compassion stand higher than human reason or knowledge.

Let us therefore be people who don't rely only on our own wisdom but allow ourselves to be shaped by God's wisdom. Our world desperately needs this today — and God is eager to give it to anyone who humbly asks.

Renata Popelářová / Letohrad, Czech Republic

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21 (4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT)

Matthew 1:20-23

Angel means *Messenger*.

An angel of the Lord is someone
who is sent to tell you, "Do not be afraid!"

An angel is someone who tells you,
"Do not be afraid to accept others."

When someone tells you this, they are your angel.

The name Joseph means *Added*.

Joseph was added to the events that took place without him.

But Joseph also represents us,
who are added to the story,
who become part of Jesus' story.

The name Jesus means *The Lord saves*.

May we too give this child this name:

May he become Immanuel for us – the one in whom God is with us!

May he become Jesus for us – the one in whom the Lord saves us!

Martin Horák / Silůvky (Brno), Czech Republic

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22

Galatians 5:22-24

"Actions speak louder than words."

"Actions speaker louder than words." Language isn't only verbal. It can be an action, such as sign language or body language. Romans 5:5-8 says that God demonstrated His own love for us. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. This Bible passage seems to fit a Lenten devotion better than an Advent one. However, Christ's birth would not be as important if Easter hadn't happened. The two events are inseparable.

Poetry is another form of language. This poem, written by my mother, points out the connection between Christmas and Easter, and rephrases Romans 5:8 as a person's reaction to God's gift.

The Meaning, by Mary Ann Smith

You say a baby boy was born? ... *many are.*
And people came from miles around to see this baby bedded down?
How curious they must have been ... *some people are.*
You say his family had to flee the bloody sword of jealousy.
So young to be a refugee ... *but, many are.*
You say he learned to work with wood? ... *Well, most boys should.*
You say he fought alone with sin and heard temptation from within? ... *Hmm, don't we all.*
But then, you say he "won the game" and put temptation's power to shame? ... *I wish I could.*
You tell me that he taught good news and healed the broken and confused. ... *I like that man.*
But then, you say that all this good disturbed the vested brotherhood
of power, position, greed, control?
That's how it goes. What's right is wronged, crushed by the heel of what seems strong.
... *WHY IS THIS SO?*
And so, you say they took his life? ... *Many die.*
What's that you say – he died for me? ... *But WHY?*
Who am I that he should care? How did he know? I wasn't there.
How would he know I feel so lost, when he pointed the way from the top of a cross?
Why would he take my selfish pride into his hands and feet and side?
You say he's living! ... *How can that be?* ... They really saw him by Galilee?
You say he hasn't forgotten me? ... *even me?*

So THIS is the meaning of Christmas Joy!! ... and why we sing Glory songs ... and echo
Easter Alleluias ... and send Christmas love letters ... and think of each other a little more
than usual!!

Now I know what there is to say,
Do you want to know what can be born today?
Hope and Joy, a new kind of Peace
And a Love that includes the very least.
I mean to tell you ... THAT'S Christmas!

Linda Smith / Cumberland, Maryland, USA

ČTVRTEK 23. PROSINCE

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

OUT OF DARKNESS...CAME

HOPE!!

A special Newborn Child!

Brighten dark days! Share joy!!!

COUNSEL

Wisdom, advice ...

Use strength! Put wisdom into practice! Dialogue!

PEACE

Righteousness and Justice...

Invite all to the table! Go and serve!

LOVE

Unconditional and freely given.

Act! Support neighbors! Show kindness!

CELEBRATE

The SAVIOUR'S BIRTH...

Sing together with energy!

Wonderful Counselor.

Mighty God.

Everlasting Father

Prince of Peace.

FOREVER and EVER!

Betty McGinnis

Annapolis, MD

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24 (CHRISTMAS EVE)

Luke 2:10-11

The silence of the night. The only thing you can hear is a light breeze. Some shepherds under the open sky. Just a regular day – and yet a day that changed the whole world. God is coming. He is here! Not as a mighty king with a sword, but as a child. He is not born in a place, but in a stable. Not among the elite, but among the simplest of people.



The angel says: “Do not be afraid.” How many times have we needed to hear these words - in moments of uncertainty, fatigue, disappointment, or fear of the future. Christmas reminds us that God is not distant. Where we are afraid to venture out on our own, that is where He is present. He comes into our fears, our pains, our empty spaces – but not with reproach. He comes to transform everything into joy. And this joy is not only meant for selected individuals, the strong ones, the ones who are “good enough”. It is for everybody. For all of us. For you!

Today, we celebrate the birth of our Saviour. He is not just a figure from ancient history. He is the One who can be our Saviour today. He comes as light into darkness, hope for the lost, love that never fails.

In the distance, we can hear the choir singing “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to the people!” Bells ring in gratitude, organs play their chords and virtuoso elements, and a festive prelude fills our hearts with joy – a joy that is not afraid of pain. A joy that knows darkness no longer has the final say. A joy that shines even in the darkness. You no longer need to be afraid.

God is coming. He is here. And the name of the child is: Savior. Christ. Lord.

Jingle... jingle...

Let us celebrate and rejoice on this day!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for coming – not with reproach, but with salvation. Thank you for becoming human so that you could be close to me. I pray that you would truly be born in my heart. I ask for the joy that the world cannot take from me. And I pray, let me be the light for others. Amen.

PS: Greeting from the Good News Bells in this picturesque snow-covered village!

Emilie Adámková / Kateřinice, ČR

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25 (CHRISTMAS DAY)

John 1:1-5, 14

Until the word is spoken, we may have varying ideas of what should be said. Until action is taken, we don't know what to expect. Until an idea, an attitude, or a relationship becomes reality, we can hardly assess its significance.

Jesus was born. God spoke and took action. Jesus is the incarnation of God's word. We heard him, we saw him, we experienced him. Although there is still room for different views and interpretations, this room is much smaller than it was before this word had been spoken. Once the word became flesh, it became much clearer what life is and what light is, enlivening and illuminating God's world.

The fact that the word became reality is a joyful event. Finally! We have seen His glory. Among all the Gospels, the Gospel of John sees the glory of the word most clearly embodied in Christ's cross. The crucified Son of God is the word, full of grace and truth. What does that mean?

We will keep uncovering and discovering new meanings of the word. God's incarnate word will always speak to us in new ways. At the same time, however, it has become clearer that we cannot just expect anything from it. The word is grace and truth. We will find new forms of grace, and truth will always be revealed to us anew. But it will always be only grace and only truth. It will never be brute force. Nor will it be the brute force of spiritual or ecclesiastical authority. It will never be demagoguery, or a half-truth bent to suit somebody's interests. It will never be *Deus ex machina*, God pulling the strings. It will never be a God who does not care about each individual person whose heart he wants to touch with his grace and truth.

God's word became flesh. The Word became reality in a man full of grace and truth. Like everything human, this word is vulnerable, exposed to misunderstanding, indifference, or contempt. We are awestruck by God's courage to speak in this way. To enter our world in this way, in the form of a man, Jesus. To reveal himself. To expose himself to an environment where ruthless indifference and lies tend to prevail.

What chances do mercy and truth have? Probably the same as a child in the world of adults... Will the incarnate and crucified Word of God, full of grace and truth, have the last word?

Pavel Pokorný / Prague, Czech Republic

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Na zadní straně přebalu, stejně jako na té přední, se nachází obrázek, který ukazuje, že jazyk lásky se obejde beze slov. Tento pastýř miluje své stádo, ať už k tomu používá slova, nebo ne, a jeho stádo je na tom o to lépe. Tímto „jazykem“ je neustálá péče a pozornost, starost o blaho stáda a nevyslovené vědomí, že pastýř i stádo jsou v bezpečí. Dokonce i hory a mraky odrážejí věčnou lásku, kterou všichni cítíme.

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Our back cover, like our front cover, shows an image where the language of love needs no words. This shepherd loves his flock, with or without words, and the flock is better for that. The “language” is that of constant care and attention, concern for welfare, and the unspoken knowledge that shepherd and sheep are safe. Even the mountains and clouds echo the timeless love we all feel.

