



Each day during Advent place an item in a box and say a prayer.

Bring the box to church to add to our collection.

1. Basketball,

15. Pot Holders

Soccer ball, etc.

16. Dish Drain

2. Board Game

17. Toilet Cleaner &

3. Kid's/YA Book

Brush

4. Gift Wrap

18. Laundry Basket

5. Pine-Sol

19. Laundry Detergent

6. Twin Sheets (new)

20. Toilet Paper

7. Pillows (new)

21. Razors (Men's &

8. Blankets

Women's)

9. Chapstick

22. Shampoo &

10. Hairbrush

Conditioner

11. Lotion

12. Bodywash/Soap

13. Spaghetti & Sauce

14. Hygiene Products:

Acne Face Wash,

**Feminine Products** 

Dear Church Family, this year, once again, we are encouraging our friends and members to partake in a holy Advent through daily prayer and via a commitment to serve others. This year's devotional is based on the cantata "Bearers of the Divine" by Hannah Jensen-Heitmann and contains the lyrics to several of the songs featured in that work. Here you'll find a prayer for each day of Advent as well as a list of items that are needed by some of our vital ministry partners. Each day during the season, we invite you to take a moment, light a candle, recite a prayer, and place one of the items in a box in your home. Think of it as a "reverse Advent calendar." You may bring the items to the church during regular office hours and place them in the parlor. This year's items will go to benefit the following agencies: Hastings Public School Food Pantries, enCourage Advocacy Center, Crossroads Homeless Shelter, Maryland Living Center, and Toys for Tots. This Advent, may we prepare to encounter the God who meets us in our need by preparing us to meet others in their need.

#### Luke 1:26-34

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be?"



### Week 1: Mary's Question

One supposes that God could show up at any time and to anyone of us asking that we play a role in bearing the divine in some way, shape, or form. And if God did that, what then? What would we do? How would we respond?

Mary, we are told, was perplexed by her conversation with this angel. How could she not be? And how could she wrap her mind around the totality of what she had been asked to do? One imagines any number of doubts, worries, and matters of practicality that could come flooding through her. What does it mean to bring God into the world, and how would she do it? Not that she thought she couldn't. But how? She would need to turn somewhere for support, encouragement, and direction for this great mission she was about to undertake.

Luckily, Mary was not alone. She had the strength of her community, the resolve of generations who had come before her who had, in their own way, been bearers of the divine. Shiphrah and Puah had listened to God above all others. Mary knew this. Moses' mother and Pharaoh's daughter had understood that the waters of chaos can be survived. Ruth and Naomi pledged to face life's struggle together. Hannah understood that blessings are to be shared. Esther knew that what matters is what you do with the lives of others, and Mary's own relative Elizabeth would soon declare the possibility of hope.

"How can this be?" Mary had asked the angel. And as her question hung in the air and floated in her own mind, perhaps her heart was taken back to her ancestor Sarah, who had learned to trust in God even in the midst of the improbable and whose laughter brought joy to Mary's heart.

#### Genesis 18:9-15

"They said to [Abraham], "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."



Sunshine, where's your laughter coming from?
You're mine, it's not time to run.
Come here, forget your fears.
I'm here, no need to shed a tear.

Just know wherever you go, I'm in the wind that blows and swirls around you, And nothing's impossible for you. And my dear, whenever you hear A songbird's lullaby or a baby cry I'm here, I'm here.

Slow down, we need you now. Don't drown inside your fears right now.

Just know wherever you go, I'm I am the pull inside your heart that guides you, And nothing's impossible for you.
And my dear, whenever you hear The sound of the thunder crash or a raindrop splash, I'm here, I'm here.

You'll stay young forever, In my eyes you'll never fall. You can climb a mountain, Have a babe, do it all. You are right where I need you. Breathe in the air, and I'll use you.

Sunshine, where's your laughter coming from?
You're mine, it's not time to run.

Just know wherever you go,
I'm in the sky, the earth,
and everything around you.
And nothing's impossible for you.
And my dear, whenever you hear
Someone take a breath or another step,
I'm here, I'm here.

#### Prayer for December 3rd

As the days shorten and the nights lengthen, we find ourselves struggling in the dark, searching for direction and bearings for our lives. Our hearts are covered in shadows. Our lives become shrouded in doubt, in fear, and in worry for what may or may not come. In the midst of such stretches in our lives, remind us that you are our light. Grant, O God, that we may not get lost in the darkness around us. Amen.

Item: Basketball, Soccer ball, etc. (Toys for Tots)





There is much before us that seems impossible. There are many challenges we face that seem insurmountable. We can't find the right words. We can't calm our own self-destructive habits. We cannot envision a path to peace and reconciliation in our families, our communities, our nation, and our world. And yet, here you are, showing up to Sarah and telling her that nothing is impossible for you. Help us, O God, to believe that. Help us to trust in you and join in the work that makes the impossible possible. Amen.

Item: Board Game(s) for all ages of kids (Toys for Tots)

## Prayer for December 5

You are present, implicitly, in all of the things of the world: the laughter of children, the roll of thunder, the song of a bird, and the air that fills our lungs. Yet it is often up to us to make the implicit explicit. You call us to be your hands and feet in the world. You ask us to make manifest your peace, hope, love, and joy. Inspire within us hearts that are full of your compassion and mercy. Call us forth, that we might make your presence known on this earth. Amen.

Item: Book for a child and/or teen (Toys for Tots)

## Prayer for December 6th

It often feels, O God, that our lives belong to everything. So much of our time and so much of our thinking is occupied by things that aren't you that it feels as though we belong to them. Our schedules and calendars are demanding. Our jobs are consuming. Our hobbies call to us and ask for our ultimate loyalty. It is easy for us to feel as though we belong to 1,000 different things, none of which are you. And yet the season of Advent reminds us that we are yours. We belong to you, O God. May our lives be used for your purposes. Amen.

Item: Gift Wrap (Toys for Tots)



For the gift of community, O God, we offer you our thanks and praise. For our sisters and brothers in faith who sustain and nurture us amid the shadows of life, we praise You. For those who call us forth, challenge us, and inspire us to be Jesus' disciples, we lift our hearts in joy. We thank you, O God, that like Mary, we are not left to ourselves. We have your word and your children to rely on. Thank You for all of the faithful communities that we have been a part of and for all of the ways that they questioned and learned and grew together to be your holy people. Amen.

Item: Pine-Sol (Crossroads)

## Prayer for December 8

I'm not sure, O God, if I want to see your angel, your divine messenger. On the one hand, Gabriel seems pretty great. He shows up, issues divine proclamations, and usually tells people not to be afraid. That all seems good. But your words carry weight. Your words mean something. Your words place a claim on the lives of those who hear them. I'm not always ready to live up to their demands. Thank you, O God, for Mary, who pondered and considered and decided that she was ready to be your servant in the world. Amen.

Item: New Twin Sheets (Crossroads)

#### Prayer for December 9

Peace is no easy thing. Peace requires diligence. Peace demands discipline. Peace cannot and will not exist without honesty and perseverance. Peace is that which emerges when we put aside our egos, when we understand that the world does not and should not revolve around us. Peace is forgiveness. Peace is humility. And those things are not easy. Peace is what happens when we take the old proverb to heart: I am because we are. Peace is the understanding that there is life beyond greed, beyond consumption, beyond power and influence. It is the acknowledgment that the world is not ours for the taking; it is a home to be shared. Help us, O God, to align our hearts and our lives with the ways of peace this Advent. Inspire us to carry that peace forward into the year ahead. Amen.

Item: New Pillows (Crossroads)

## Sunday, Dec 10th: Mary Remembers the Hope of the Past

On the second Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of hope. Mary, of course, would have had her own reasons to be in need of hope. She was young. She was unmarried. And childbirth is always at least a somewhat dangerous proposition. And added to all of that was this: Mary had been told that her child would become a king. That is the sort of thing that actual kings don't really like to hear. The shadow of Rome was everywhere in those days, and Caesar dealt harshly with any would-be usurpers. The fear of wrath from worldly leaders seeking to keep power was nothing new to Mary or to her people, but still, carrying a child and raising it amid her oppressors would require a particular courage. She would need to continue to listen to the voice of God above all fear and doubt. Perhaps she couldn't help but to think of Shiphrah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives who ignored the voice of another ruler who thought of themselves as a god and instead listened to the voice of YAWEH and became light and hope for others.

#### Exodus 1:15-21

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.

## Listen (God Calls Shiphrah and Puah)

Here the rise of words meant to scare.
Hold onto the cries in a desperate prayer.
Listen to the voice that points
To the light.
Be the light,
And listen.

Heed the signs that call out to you.
Feel the truth in all the ways you move to
Free those who are small,
Those who lose the light.
Be their light.

Darkness finds (Be the light)
It can't survive (Be the light)
When moved aside
By the ones to try
To be the light
And listen.

Listen to the sound
Of your heart pounding,
Drowning out their hollow shouts.
Listen closely knowing you can always count
On your light.
Be the light.

Darkness finds (Be the light)
It can't survive (Be the light)
When moved aside
By the ones to try
To be the light
And listen.

Listen when the earth feels shaken. Listen now, stay awake, and Listen to the voice that's saying, "Be the light. Be the light."

Darkness finds (Be the light)
It can't survive (Be the light)
When moved aside
By the ones to try
To be the light
And listen.

### Prayer for December 10th

Hope is a thing, and it must be nurtured. It is a thing that must be raised, taught, and instilled. Hope is more than longing; it is a call to work. If we hope for a world free of hunger, then we must fill some stomachs. If we long for a community free of violence, then we must make peace. The hope and the work are the same thing. Call us, O God, to the work of Advent: the work that lives beyond an idea, beyond a vision, and within the reality of the world. Amen.

Item: Blankets (Crossroads)



How, O God, can I hope to hear you through the noise of the world? From every direction, my ears seem to be filled with the sounds of selfishness, the noise of pomposity, and cries of frivolity. After the clamor of the market and the braggadocio of so much self-aggrandizement, what room is left in my little canals for any small word of community, squeak of curiosity, or whisper of compassion? I know that they are hollow shouts, that they carry no weight, no meaning, and no heft. But still, they make your voice hard to hear. Help me, Gracious One, to turn down the sound of the world and let your voice come through. Amen.

Item: Chapstick (enCourage)

#### Prayer for December 12th

There's a reason I love the candles of Advent, and it's that I choose to light them. Each time I make that choice, I remind myself of my own agency in the world. If it is dark, if it is cold, I can light a candle. There are things I can solve. There are problems I can work on. It need not be dark forever. I don't have to be overcome by the cold. You have blessed me, O God, with capability. And though I often feel small and frequently overwhelmed, I can light a candle. I can support and tend to your dancing little flame. Amen.

Item: Hairbrush (enCourage)

#### Prayer for December 13th

It seems to me that fewer and fewer people trim their houses with twinkling lights. I often wonder why. Maybe they can't afford them. Maybe they waited too long, and it was too cold. Maybe it seems silly to them. But I fear that it is because they don't believe that the world can be better than it is, that hearts can change, that a little light can change anything. Inspire us by the lives of Shiphrah and Puah, and help us to live in such a way that our lives become the very light that others need. Amen.

Item: Lotion (enCourage)



To the shepherds, you gave an angel. To the magi, you gave a star. To the faithful people of all generations, you have given signs if they knew how to look and how to listen. It is, O God, our desire to heed your signs that call out to us, but sometimes we need help spotting them. Help us, O God, to notice and respond to the voices, the stories, and the acts that implore us to join in your work of peace, hope, love, and joy. During this season of Advent, help us to be like Shiphrah and Puah, alert and responsive to the calling you place upon our lives. Amen.

Item: Body Wash and/or Soap (Hastings Public Schools)

## Prayer for December 15th

Our lives are surrounded by promises. The new toy promises us joy, but the truth is that such joy is fleeting. The new method promises us hope, but such hope is conditional. The new philosophy promises us peace, but such peace is perspectival. The affiliation promises us love, but such love is often misleading. All of these promises seem so alluring but they are not your truth. They are not the truth of your son or your great mercy and forgiveness. Let us, O God, surround ourselves not with the empty promises of the world but with the deep truth of the incarnation: that you dwell among us and share our life. Amen.

Item: Spaghetti & Sauce (Hastings Public Schools)

## Prayer for December 16th

Move aside, O Hatred, for I have lit the candle of peace. It shines in my heart, and you cannot grow. Away, O Despair, for I have lit the candle of hope. It burns, and you will be consumed. Retreat, O Indifference, for I have lit the candle of love. Its warmth melts your frost. You cannot survive, O Fear, O Anger, for I have lit the candle of joy. And by God's will, it shall be sustained, and you shall be no more. Amen.

Item: Acne Facewash and/or Feminine Hygiene Products (Hastings Public Schools)

## Sunday, Dec 17th: A Gift to Be Shared

"A King." The angel had said. "The Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." This could mean a lot of things, but one thing that it clearly meant was that this child was not just for her. He was meant to be a blessing to others, perhaps to the whole world. It meant, at some point, she'd have to give her son away. A small, contented smile came to Mary's face as she remembered Hannah, Samuel's mother. Hannah had longed for years to receive the blessing of a child. After suffering through years of heartache and chastisement, God finally heard her voice and gave Hannah a son, a gift of love. But Hannah understood that this blessing wasn't just for her. As most blessings are, it was meant to be shared. On the Sunday when we light the candle of joy, it is important for us to remember, as Mary did, that blessings are to be shared with others.

### 1 Samuel 1:24-28, 2:19-20

When she had weaned [Samuel], she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord." She left him there for the Lord.

His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the Lord repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the Lord"; and then they would return to their home.

## A Blessing (Hannah Sings to Her Son)

Under the starlight I sit quietly.
And thank God for listening,
for bringing you to me.
And each time we part, with all my heart
I pray you will always be
A blessing
To others
Like you are to me.

You are; a walking miracle, Covered in a robe of love, More than enough. You are; strong and gentile, Made of the moon and the sun, A child of God, my love.

Under the sunlight I see beauty, harmony
In all things, with all life
I'm not lonely. There is light in me.
So if the world feels dark, ignite your spark
Then you will always be
A blessing
To others
Like you are to me.

You are; a walking miracle, Covered in a robe of love, More than enough. You are; bold and peaceful Always and forever one Great child of God, My love.

Walking miracle
You are, you are
Strong and gentle, moon and sun
Bold and peaceful, my love
More than enough
A child of God

## Prayer for December 17th

The candle we light today is the candle of joy. Joy is floating. Joy is healing. Joy is serenity amid the storm. Joy is having a gift and sharing it. Joy is providing a shoulder to cry on or finding one in a moment of need. Joy cannot be contained, and it is that which God desires for the world. Joy is what emerges when hope, peace, and love are found in full measure. Joy is what we discover when you come to us and live among us, O God. Joy is the unfathomable notion that our lives and the world can be put rightside up and that a little baby might be able to show us the way. In the days ahead, O God, may we know joy and share joy and be joy in the world. Amen.

Item: Pot Holders (Maryland Living Center)

## Prayer for December 18th

When I look at the stars I tend to feel small. In the midst of an unfathomable vastness I am minute. I am fragile. I am less than an ant, less than a kelp, less than a microbe in all of this. But knowing this, O God, does not throw me into despair. It only helps me to appreciate the wonder of everything all the more. In the face of an uncaring universe, what a gift that I breathe? In the presence of inscrutable stars, what a wonder to laugh and cry with others? Surrounded by the vacuum of space, how remarkable to be wrapped in the arms of another, licked by a friendly dog, or smiled at by a baby? Under the starlight I sit quietly and thank you for all the blessings I've received. Amen.

Item: Dish Drain (Maryland Living Center)

## Prayer for December 19th

A walking miracle, a tangible gift of grace. Your love, O God, given shape and form; able to be seen and known. How many of these things have stumbled into my life without my knowing or my acknowledgement? How often have I confused the extraordinary for the ordinary? How many times has your presence passed me by because I was lost within myself? A game played with others; that's a walking miracle. A moment of peace amid the chaos of life would also be a walking miracle. The falling leaves sustaining the grass. The snow quieting the din of life. The water falling fresh upon the fields. All of these are walking miracles. Like Hannah, O God, help me to appreciate all the miracles that walk by me everyday. Amen.

Item: Spaghetti & Sauce (Hastings Public Schools)

## Prayer for December 20th

I can dress myself. I don't need anyone to pick out my socks or remind me to wear a coat. I am, generally, self-sufficient. I can robe myself. But sometimes I need an item that can't be found among my rags. Every now and then, I need someone else to tuck my arm in a sleeve and tell me that I'm worthy. From time to time, I need another person to hand me a tasteful covering and say, "It's going to be okay." Robes of love, that's what I need. Items that remind me that I am a child of God. Amen.

Item: Laundry Basket (Maryland Living Center)



For Christmas this year, I do not need anything. For I am your child; what more could I need? Through Mary and Hannah and all of the others, you have already given me everything that I need. When I feel lost, I know that you have found me. When I feel alone, I know that you have loved me. When I feel incomplete, I know that your grace makes me whole. I am your child, blessed by the life of Jesus the Christ. What more could I need? Amen.

Item: Laundry Detergent (Maryland, Crossroads, enCourage)

#### Prayer for December 22nd

All that I have is not really mine. It came from somewhere else. Any wisdom I hold was handed to me. My clothes were stitched by other hands. Anything that I am, my talent, my passions, my disposition was nurtured, taught, or grown by other minds. And all of it, O God, is really a gift from you. The blessings I've received are not mine. They are yours. Help me to be like Hannah and graciously share them with others. Remind me that if I am blessed, then it is to be a blessing to others. Amen.

Item: Toilet Paper (Maryland, Crossroads)

#### Prayer for December 23rd

You are, O God, the still, quiet voice in the midst of chaos. You are the shepherd who seeks lost sheep. You are the beginning and the end. You are the first and the last. You are as close to me as breathing and distant as the farthest start. You are grace and mercy revealed in uncountable ways. You are the light which guides me through the night, the foundation upon which I stand, the companion who lightens every journey. You, O God, are strength for the faint-hearted, liberation for the oppressed, and hope for the hopeless. I am your servant. Amen.

Item: Men's and/or Women's Razors (enCourage, Maryland)

## Sunday, Dec 24th: Elizabeth's Faith & Mary's Resolve

Soon after her visitation, Mary set out to see her relative Elizabeth, whom the angel had said was also pregnant. Mary would soon hear first-hand that she wasn't the only one expecting a miraculous child. Elizabeth would, no doubt, tell Mary that her own house had been visited. That she knew, that she understood, somehow, that her own child would work to make the world right (the hope, I assume, of every mother), that he would help to raise the valleys and flatten mountains, that he would help to prepare the way for the restoration of all things. And perhaps Mary would ask, "Elizabeth, how do you just believe all of this?" And in her relative's eyes, Elizabeth would see all of Mary's other questions, all of her hopes, all of her perplexities, all of the things she couldn't voice. "I guess," Elizabeth might say, "because I know my God. And I know my God is faithful."

#### Luke 1:41-55

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."



#### Mary's Contentment

My soul is steady, Lord.
My spirit praises You.
What you must use me for
Is merciful and true.

And though I'm plain and lowly,
You say I'm worthy of something holy.
I give my thanks to You,
And pray that through me, Lord,
All peace will be restored.

## Prayer for December 24th

One supposes that your voice, O God, could show up any time and to any one of us and say, "It's you. You're the one I've called to bring me into the world. You're the one that I'm asking to be my courage, to be my justice, to be my peace, compassion, and grace in the world. You're the one I'm asking to bear the divine." After all, it's happened countless times before, as Mary very well knew. Praise be to you, O God, for Mary and for all those who showed her what it would mean to bear you in the world. Praise be to you for all that Mary passed along to her son. Praise be to you for his birth, life, death, and resurrection.

And as for us, let our souls be steady, O God. Let our spirits praise you. And though we're plain and lowly, use us, O God, for something merciful and for something true. We are worthy of something holy. We are the bearers of the divine. Amen.

Item: Shampoo & Conditioner (Hastings Public Schools, enCourage)





## CHRISTMAS EVE 2023

## Cozy Christmas 2:00PM

A service of caroling and rejoicing is held at College View. Chancel Choir and Pastors hold a service for residents and their family members.

# A Family Christmas 5:30PM

A lively service held in the sanctuary features traditional hymns, organ, a child-friendly message, and singing by candlelight.

# Traditional Service 7:30PM

Held in the sanctuary, this service contains traditional hymns, music by the choir, and singing by candle light.

## Holy Night 11:00PM

A contemplative service is held in the sanctuary to greet the newborn child with simple music and prayer.

