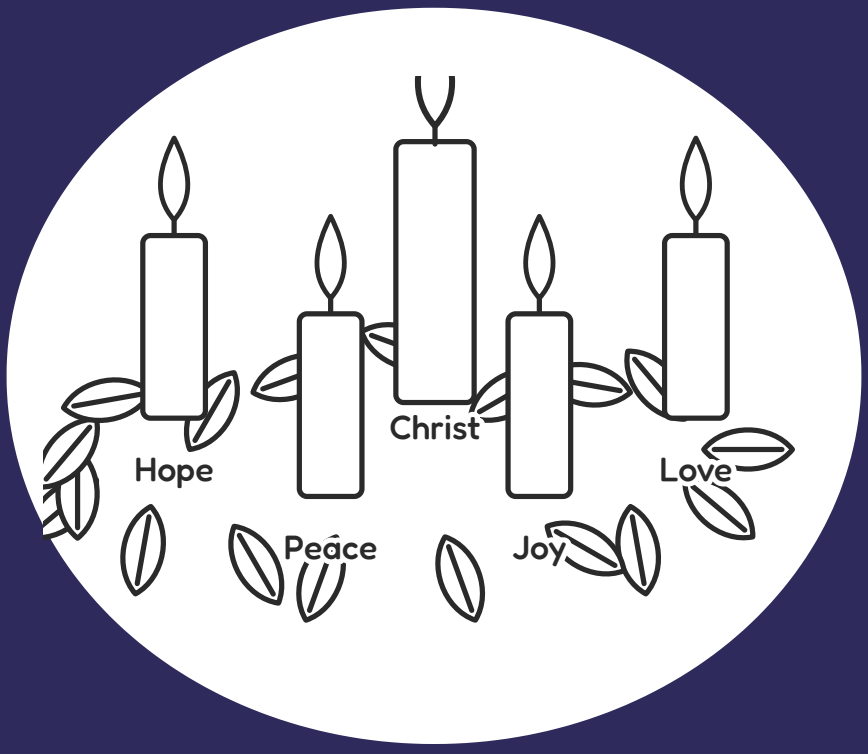
AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL & JOURNAL

Still, God Comes Near

Finding Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love in a Changing World



Daily Scripture • Reflection • Question • Prayer • Practice

Tuckahoe Presbyterian Church
November 29 – December 25, 2026

A Welcome to Advent

Dear Tuckahoe Family,

As we enter another Advent season, I find myself thinking about the many conversations, experiences, and moments of connection we've shared throughout this past year.

We've spent time asking important questions about our faith, our communities, and the world around us. We've talked about what it means to love our neighbors, especially when we disagree. We've explored God's grace and generosity, the importance of making room for others, and what it means to remain faithful in a world that seems to be constantly changing.

We've also experienced these things together. Through worship, Sunday School, shared meals, mission opportunities, and the everyday ways we care for one another, we've been reminded that faith is not simply something we talk about on Sunday mornings. It is something we carry into our homes, our relationships, and our communities.

There is a great deal of uncertainty in our world. Even in our personal lives, we may be carrying worries, grief, exhaustion, or the weight of things we cannot control. But Advent reminds us of something important: God does not wait for the world to become peaceful or for our lives to be perfectly arranged before coming near.

God comes into the middle of it all. Mary and Joseph did not have everything figured out. The shepherds were simply going about their ordinary work. Yet God was doing something extraordinary.

This devotional invites us to reflect on hope, peace, joy, and love—not simply as familiar Advent words, but as gifts we can recognize and practice in everyday life. Each day includes a Scripture reference, a reflection, a question, and a prayer. You do not need to have all the answers or arrive at Christmas feeling especially holy. Simply come as you are.

May we continue to be a community that makes room for one another, extends grace generously, and carries God's love beyond the walls of our church. Through every season, every change, and every ordinary moment, God is still coming near.

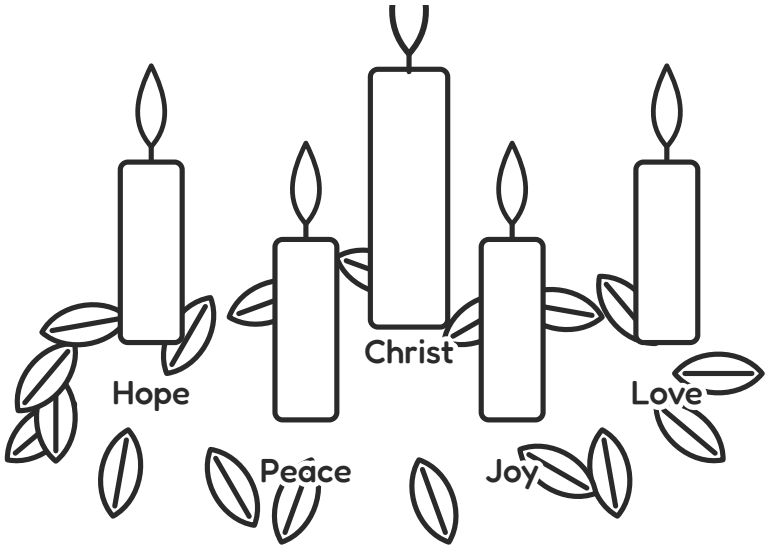
With gratitude and Advent blessings,
Jillian Gatewood, Director of Christian Formation

Using This Devotional

Each day offers a **Scripture** to read in your own Bible, a short **reflection**, **a question to carry** through the day, space to **journal**, a simple **practice**, and a **prayer**. Read alone, with a spouse or friend, or alongside the family activity book. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you are.

The Advent Wreath

Each Sunday we light a new candle. You might color one here each week as you go.



Hope November 29 – December 5 · Hope does not require us to know what happens next. It invites us to trust that God is present even when the way forward is unclear.

Peace December 6–12 · Peace is more than the absence of conflict. It is the work of making room for one another and honoring human dignity.

Joy December 13–19 · Joy is not constant happiness. It is discovering God's goodness amid ordinary, imperfect life.

Love December 20–24 · God's love enters our world, crosses boundaries, and invites us to love beyond the limits we create.

Hope When We Cannot See the Way. *Hope does not require us to know what happens next. It invites us to trust that God is present even when the way forward is unclear.*

Hope Begins Here

READ Isaiah 9:2

Advent begins in the dark. Before the manger, the angels, and the shepherds, there is a world waiting for something to change. Perhaps that sounds familiar. We look at the news and wonder about our families, our communities, and the future of the church. It is tempting to believe hope must wait until things improve.

But Isaiah speaks of people who see light while they are still walking in darkness. The promise arrives before every problem is solved. Hope is not pretending everything is fine. It is trusting that God has not abandoned us, even when the world feels difficult to understand.

As we light the first Advent candle, we do not claim to know what comes next. We remember that darkness does not get the final word. Sometimes hope begins with the smallest light—and the willingness to notice it.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

Where do you most need hope this Advent season?

Practice: Light a candle at dinner tonight and name one place where you need hope.

Light the first Advent candle, the candle of Hope.

Prayer: *God of hope, meet us in our uncertainty. Help us recognize your light and trust that you are with us. Amen.*

When the Future Feels Unclear

READ Romans 15:13

There is much about the world that feels uncertain. We see it in headlines and hear it in conversations with friends. We feel it when we wonder what kind of world our children and grandchildren will inherit. Sometimes everything seems to change faster than we can keep up.

We want answers and reassurance. We want to see the whole road before taking the next step. But Advent begins with waiting, not certainty. The people of Scripture knew fear and longing, yet the promise remained: God had not forgotten them.

We cannot know what the coming year will bring or what the church will look like decades from now. We cannot fix every division. But we can keep showing up, loving one another, and looking for God's presence. Perhaps hope begins not in knowing what comes next, but in remembering who walks with us.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

What uncertainty are you carrying, and how might you invite God into it?

Practice: Write down one uncertainty you are carrying. Pray about it each morning this week.

Prayer: *God of hope, when we cannot see the future, remind us we do not walk alone. Give us courage for the next faithful step. Amen.*

Faithful in the Small Things

READ Micah 6:8

Sometimes the needs of the world seem too large for us to do anything about. We hear about suffering and division, and we wonder what difference one person—or one congregation—can make.

This year, people at Tuckahoe have taught, welcomed, donated, served, listened, and cared for neighbors. Some of that work has been visible; much of it has happened quietly. A conversation after worship, a meal delivered, a child welcomed by name: these are not insignificant things.

Micah reminds us that faithfulness often looks ordinary: doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. We may not change the whole world today, but we can change something in someone's day. Hope enters our communities through people willing to notice a need and respond with love. The small things are often where faithful living begins.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

What small act of kindness or justice can you offer today?

Practice: Offer one small act of kindness or justice today, without needing anyone to notice.

Prayer: *God, when the world's needs overwhelm us, show us the next loving thing we can do. Amen.*

There Is Room for Questions

READ Luke 1:26–38

When the angel tells Mary that she will have a child, Mary asks how this can be. She does not know how the future will unfold. I love that her question belongs in the Christmas story. Sometimes we treat questions as signs of weak faith, as if faithful people should always know what comes next. Mary reminds us otherwise.

This year at Tuckahoe, we have considered the changing religious landscape, what belonging means, and how the Presbyterian Church might reach people in meaningful ways. These questions do not come with easy answers. But asking them can be an act of faith. It means we care enough to listen, learn, and remain open to where God may lead.

Mary did not receive a detailed plan. She received an invitation to trust. Advent offers us something similar: not certainty about the future, but assurance that God will be present within it.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

What question about faith, the church, or your life are you carrying into Advent?

Practice: Write down a question you are carrying into Advent. Share it with a friend or bring it to a class.

Prayer: *God, thank you for welcoming our questions. Give us curiosity, courage, and trust when the path is unclear. Amen.*

The Courage to Begin Again

READ Isaiah 43:19

Change can be difficult, even when we believe something new may be good. We love familiar traditions, routines, and places that have shaped us. Churches do, too. We treasure the ways we have worshiped, learned, served, and gathered across generations.

But Scripture reminds us that God is not finished creating. God continues to work through new people and unexpected opportunities. That does not mean everything old must be discarded. We can honor what has been while remaining open to what might become.

Advent is a season of surprising beginnings. God's promise enters the world through a child, and suddenly the future holds possibilities no one could fully imagine. Perhaps God is inviting us to loosen our grip just enough to notice something new: a relationship, a way to serve, a conversation, or a different understanding of faithfulness. We can carry gratitude for the past and hope for the future at the same time.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

Where might God be inviting you to welcome something new?

Practice: Try one new thing this week: a new route, a new recipe, or a conversation with someone new.

Prayer: *God of new beginnings, help us treasure the past without fearing the future. Open our hearts to your work among us. Amen.*

Hope Is Something We Practice

READ Romans 12:12

We often think of hope as a feeling we either have or do not have. But Scripture invites us to practice hope. We practice it when we pray for someone who is struggling, serve a neighbor, or teach children about God's love without knowing how those lessons will shape their lives.

None of these actions guarantees that everything will turn out the way we want. Yet each one says that we believe God's love is still at work. In a discouraging world, that matters.

We do not have to wait until we feel hopeful to act with hope. Sometimes the action comes first. Sometimes, in the simple act of showing up, listening, and helping, we discover hope growing within us. A hopeful life is not one without sorrow or doubt. It is one that continues to make room for goodness even when the outcome is uncertain.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

How can you practice hope today, even if you do not feel hopeful?

Practice: Pray by name for someone who is struggling. Then let them know you are thinking of them.

Prayer: *God, teach us to practice hope through love, prayer, and faithful action. Amen.*

We Do Not Walk Alone

READ Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

One gift of belonging to a church is that we do not have to walk through life alone. We celebrate, grieve, ask questions, pray, and sometimes simply sit beside one another when words are hard to find. Community is not always easy. We bring different experiences and opinions, and we will not always agree.

But belonging does not require us to be alike. It asks us to recognize that we need one another. This year at Tuckahoe, people have gathered in classrooms, worship, mission, and around tables. Each gathering reminds us that faith is not meant to be lived entirely alone.

Mary did not make her journey alone. Joseph walked beside her; Elizabeth offered encouragement; shepherds would soon become part of the story. God's promise was received within a community. Perhaps one of the greatest gifts we can offer this Advent is helping someone know they are seen, valued, and not alone.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

Who has helped you belong? Who might need that same gift from you?

Practice: Send a note to someone who has helped you belong.

Prayer: *God, thank you for those who walk beside us. Help us make room for others. Amen.*

Peace That Makes Room. *Peace is more than the absence of conflict. It is the work of making room for one another and honoring human dignity.*

A Different Kind of Peace

READ Isaiah 11:1–10

Isaiah imagines a world in which the vulnerable are safe and creatures that would normally threaten one another live side by side. It is beautiful—and it can feel impossible. We live amid disagreements that become divisions and fears that shape relationships.

But Isaiah invites us to imagine more. God's peace is not simply everyone being quiet or avoiding hard conversations. It is a world where relationships are restored and people can live without fear. That kind of peace asks something of us. It shapes how we speak, how we respond to difference, and whether we are willing to make room for people whose lives do not resemble our own.

As we light the second Advent candle, we remember that peace is both God's promise and our calling. We cannot create Isaiah's vision by ourselves, but we can begin living toward it in the ways we treat one another today.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

What would practicing peace look like in one relationship this week?

Practice: Name one relationship where you can practice peace this week, and take one step toward it.

Light the second Advent candle, the candle of Peace.

Prayer: *God of peace, teach us to build understanding, protect dignity, and make room for one another. Amen.*

Loving People We Disagree With

READ Matthew 5:1–12

We live in a world where disagreement can feel unavoidable—in politics, our communities, and sometimes at the dinner table. Loving people who see the world differently is not easy. It is simpler to surround ourselves with those who think like we do. But Jesus blesses the peacemakers.

This fall, Tuckahoe explored how Christian faith shapes our shared life, public conversations, and respect for human dignity. We were reminded that our faith is revealed not only in what we believe but in how we treat others. Peacemaking does not mean ignoring injustice or abandoning convictions. It means remembering that the person across from us is still made in God's image.

Each person carries experiences, fears, and hopes we may not understand. This Advent, perhaps we can offer our communities the gift of listening with humility, speaking truth with kindness, and refusing to let disagreement erase another person's humanity.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

How might your faith shape your response to someone you disagree with?

Practice: In your next disagreement, listen first and ask one honest question before responding.

Prayer: *God, give us courage to stand for what is right, humility to listen, and compassion for others. Amen.*

The Tables We Set

READ Luke 14:12–14

Jesus often taught about God's kingdom through stories about meals. Tables are where people gather and relationships grow. They can also be places of exclusion. Who is invited? Who has a seat? Who remains outside?

We all have tables, literal and figurative. We share meals with people we know and feel comfortable with. We sit with familiar friends and sometimes assume someone else will welcome the newcomer. Most of us do not mean to leave people out, but our habits can make our circles smaller than we realize.

Jesus invites us to practice hospitality beyond what is familiar or convenient. Advent reminds us that God's love is not reserved for a select few. It reaches outward. Preparing for Christmas may include asking whether our own tables have room for someone new. A simple invitation can become a powerful sign of belonging.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

Who might be waiting for an invitation or a place to belong?

Practice: Invite someone new to share a meal, a cup of coffee, or a seat beside you in worship.

Prayer: *Welcoming God, widen our tables and our hearts. Help us notice those who feel overlooked. Amen.*

Grace Is Not Always Fair

READ Matthew 20:1–16

In Jesus' parable of the vineyard workers, some work all day and others arrive much later. At the end, everyone receives the same pay. It does not seem fair. We understand the frustration of those who worked longest.

As we explored this story at Tuckahoe, we faced a difficult question: Why can it be hard to celebrate when someone else receives grace? We welcome mercy for ourselves, but sometimes question whether another person deserves it. Jesus challenges our tendency to measure God's generosity by our own rules.

Advent reminds us that Jesus comes as a gift, not as a reward humanity has earned. God's love is generous, and it reaches beyond our calculations. Perhaps this season we can practice gratitude instead of comparison. Someone else receiving grace does not mean there is less grace for us. There is enough of God's love for everyone.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

Whose experience of grace is difficult for you to celebrate?

Practice: When you notice yourself comparing, stop and give thanks for someone else's good news.

Prayer: *Generous God, forgive us when we place limits on your love. Teach us to extend the grace we receive. Amen.*

Peace Begins With Listening

READ James 1:19

Most of us know what it feels like to speak with someone who is only waiting for their turn to talk. Perhaps we have been that person ourselves. We hear a few words, decide what we think, and begin planning our response before the other person finishes.

Listening requires patience and humility. It asks us to consider that we may not know everything about another person's experience. But listening is also one of the simplest ways to show love. It tells someone that their story matters.

We do not have to agree with everything we hear, and we cannot solve every problem. Sometimes we simply need to be present. In a world full of arguments and competing voices, listening can become an act of peace. This Advent, perhaps we can offer someone the gift of being truly heard.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

Who needs you to listen without immediately offering advice?

Practice: In your next conversation, listen without offering advice. Simply let the other person be heard.

Prayer: *God, quiet the noise within us. Teach us to listen with patience and compassion. Amen.*

Making Room for Rest

READ Matthew 11:28–30

December can be exhausting. There are gifts to buy, gatherings to attend, meals to prepare, and traditions to preserve. Even joyful things can become another list of obligations. For some, the season also brings grief, financial pressure, loneliness, or the weight of a difficult year.

Jesus offers a simple invitation to those who are weary. Not only to people who have finished everything, and not only to those who feel joyful and ready. The invitation is for all who carry burdens.

Advent does not ask us to pretend we have endless energy. Sometimes preparing our hearts for Christmas means doing less, not more. It may mean saying no to one more commitment, sitting quietly, or enjoying something simple without guilt. Rest is not a failure to be productive. It reminds us that we are human, loved, and not responsible for holding the world together.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

What could you set aside this week to make room for rest?

Practice: Cross one nonessential task off your list this week. Use that time to rest without guilt.

Prayer: *Gentle God, meet us in our weariness. Help us release the pressure to do everything. Amen.*

Peace in Our Own Homes

READ Colossians 3:12–15

It is one thing to talk about peace in the world and another to practice it at home. Our closest relationships are often where patience is tested. We get tired, misunderstand one another, and say things more sharply than we intend. Sometimes the people we love receive the least patient version of ourselves.

Paul encourages compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness. These are not simply nice ideas; they are practices that shape our ordinary lives. Compassion notices struggle. Patience makes room for mistakes. Forgiveness refuses to let every hurt become the final word.

Peace at home does not mean everyone always agrees. It means we continue choosing to care for one another, even when life is messy. This Advent, perhaps the most meaningful gift we offer our families is a little more patience, a sincere apology, or a willingness to begin again.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

What would bring more kindness or patience into your home this week?

Practice: Offer a little more patience at home today: a sincere apology, a kind word, or a fresh start.

Prayer: *God of peace, help us practice your love in the places where we live each day. Amen.*

Joy in the Middle of It All. *Joy is not constant happiness. It is discovering God's goodness amid ordinary, imperfect life.*

Joy Does Not Require a Perfect Life

READ Philippians 4:4–9

When Paul encourages believers to rejoice, he is not writing from a life free of hardship. He knows uncertainty and disappointment. Yet he urges people to notice what is true, honorable, just, and worthy of praise.

This is not an invitation to ignore what is wrong. It is a reminder that what is wrong is not the only thing that is real. There is still goodness: people showing kindness, moments of laughter, beauty, and connection. Joy does not require us to pretend life is perfect. It can arrive in the middle of difficulty through a child's laughter, a familiar song, or a meal shared around a crowded table.

As we light the third Advent candle, we make room for joy—not because everything is easy, but because God is with us in all of it. Sorrow and gratitude can both have a place in our hearts.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

What small moment of joy have you experienced recently?

Practice: Write down three small moments of joy from this past week.
Light the third Advent candle, the candle of Joy.

Prayer: *God of joy, help us notice goodness even when life feels heavy. Amen.*

The Gift of Being Together

READ Acts 2:42–47

There is something special about gathering around a table. Maybe it is the food, the conversation, or simply slowing down long enough to enjoy being together. Throughout this year at Tuckahoe, we have shared meals, celebrated traditions, gathered for fellowship, and connected across generations. From Friendsgiving to conversations after worship, these moments remind us that church is more than attending a service.

The early followers of Jesus gathered in homes, broke bread, prayed, and cared for one another. Their community was built not only through formal teaching but through ordinary connection. Sometimes we worry so much about the future of the church that we overlook the gifts already among us: friendships, volunteers, children's laughter, and familiar faces who make a place feel like home.

These are not small things. They are part of belonging. God often meets us through the people gathered around us.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

What gathering has brought you joy? Who might you invite to share a meal?

Practice: Linger after worship, or invite someone to share a meal with you this week.

Prayer: *God of community, thank you for the gift of belonging. Help us make room for others. Amen.*

Children Have Something to Teach Us

READ Matthew 18:1–5

Children ask questions adults may have stopped asking. They notice things we overlook and sometimes offer simple answers to questions we have made complicated. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus places a child among the disciples and challenges their ideas about greatness.

At Tuckahoe, we have watched children explore Bible stories, create, play, pray, and discover what it means to follow Jesus. We have seen youth build friendships, serve others, and ask important questions. Christian Formation is not simply passing information from one generation to another. It is learning together. Adults bring experience. Children bring curiosity. Youth challenge us to consider whether the faith we describe is the faith we live.

Children are not merely the future of the church. They belong to the church now. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, may we make room to hear our youngest disciples. God may have something to teach us through them.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

What has a child or young person taught you about faith this year?

Practice: Ask a child or young person what Christmas means to them. Listen closely to the answer.

Prayer: *God, help us nurture children and youth while remaining open to their wisdom and wonder. Amen.*

Joy in Unexpected Places

READ Luke 1:39–45

When Mary visits Elizabeth, joy fills the encounter. Neither woman knows exactly what the future will hold. There will be uncertainty and challenges ahead. Yet they recognize something worth celebrating right now.

Sometimes joy comes before we have all the answers. We often postpone celebration until work is finished, a problem is solved, or life settles down. But Mary and Elizabeth remind us that joy can be found along the way. We can celebrate signs of God's goodness even while carrying questions about what comes next.

Perhaps joy is not something waiting only at the end of the journey. Sometimes it is a gift that helps us keep going. A phone call, encouraging word, unexpected visit, or shared laugh can become a reminder that God is still at work. We do not have to wait for perfect circumstances to give thanks.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

What good thing deserves to be celebrated, even if life is unsettled?

Practice: Call or visit someone simply to celebrate something good, even if life is unsettled.

Prayer: *God of joy, help us recognize and celebrate your gifts along the way. Amen.*

The Joy of Giving

READ 2 Corinthians 9:6–12

When we think about giving in Advent, we may think first of presents and wrapping paper. But generosity takes many forms: clothing donated, a child helped to prepare for school, time volunteered, or encouragement offered when someone needs it.

Throughout this year, Tuckahoe has cared for neighbors through mission partnerships, clothing collections, support for children and families, and the work of volunteers. These efforts are not simply projects to complete. They are about people: a child who feels prepared, a family that knows someone cares, a neighbor who feels seen.

We cannot meet every need, and there will always be more work than any congregation can do alone. But generosity is not about doing everything. It is about faithfully offering what we can. As we celebrate God's gift in Jesus, we are invited to share God's love through the ordinary resources and opportunities placed in our hands.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

What time, resources, or encouragement can you offer someone this season?

Practice: Give your time, resources, or encouragement to one neighbor this week.

Prayer: *Generous God, help us share what we have with open hearts. May others feel valued through our care. Amen.*

When Joy Feels Far Away

READ Psalm 34:18

Not everyone enters Christmas feeling joyful. For some, the season brings reminders of people who are no longer here. For others, it highlights strained relationships, unmet hopes, or struggles that remain unresolved. The pressure to feel cheerful can make those experiences harder.

Scripture does not ask us to hide sorrow. The Psalms hold honest expressions of grief, fear, anger, and longing. They remind us that we can bring our whole selves before God, including the parts that do not feel joyful.

The promise of Advent is not that sadness disappears when Christmas arrives. It is that God comes near in our sadness, too. There is room for tears, memories, and the complicated experience of feeling grateful and heartbroken at once. We do not have to manufacture joy to be faithful. Sometimes honesty itself becomes a form of prayer.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

What emotion might you need to bring honestly before God?

Practice: Remember someone who is grieving this season with a note, a call, or a visit.

Prayer: *Compassionate God, be near to those who grieve or feel lonely this Christmas. Amen.*

Notice What Is Good

READ Psalm 118:24

Some days joy is easy to recognize. Other days we must look more carefully. Headlines, responsibilities, worries, and endless lists can make it difficult to notice what is right in front of us.

Perhaps one simple spiritual practice is learning to pay attention: to the kindness of a stranger, the beauty of winter light, people laughing together, or the quiet comfort of a familiar place. These moments do not demand our attention the way problems do, but they matter.

Gratitude does not require us to deny difficulty. It reminds us that difficulty is not the whole story. As this third week of Advent closes, pause and look around. Notice what is good. Give thanks for what is here. God's presence is not limited to extraordinary moments. Sometimes it is found in the ordinary beauty of today.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

What three small things can you give thanks for today?

Practice: Take a slow walk and notice what is good. Name three things you are thankful for.

Prayer: *God of joy, slow us down enough to notice beauty, kindness, and goodness. Amen.*

Love That Reaches Beyond Us. *God's love enters our world, crosses boundaries, and invites us to love beyond the limits we create.*

Love Makes Room

READ Luke 2:1–7

The story of Jesus' birth is so familiar that we sometimes forget how surprising it is. God enters the world through a child born far from the comforts we might expect for a king. No grand palace, no royal celebration—only a young family and a manger.

God's love does not depend on impressive surroundings or perfect circumstances. God comes into the ordinary, complicated reality of human life. Perhaps that tells us something about the love we are called to practice. Love makes room. It welcomes people whose lives differ from our own and notices those who might otherwise be overlooked. It recognizes that dignity and belonging are not things people should have to earn.

As we light the fourth Advent candle, we remember that God's love reaches farther than our expectations. We are invited to let our own love do the same.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

Where might God be asking you to make more room for someone?

Practice: Make room for someone who might feel forgotten this week.

Light the fourth Advent candle, the candle of Love.

Prayer: *Loving God, thank you for coming near in Jesus. Open our hearts to those who feel forgotten. Amen.*

Love Beyond Our Comfort Zones

READ Matthew 22:34–40

Love God. Love your neighbor. It sounds simple, but it may be one of the most challenging things Jesus asks of us. Earlier this year, as we explored this passage in worship and Christian Formation, we were reminded that Jesus places love at the center of our faith—not only as a feeling, but as a way of life.

It is easy to love people who agree with us and make us comfortable. It becomes harder when someone sees the world differently or challenges our expectations. Yet Jesus does not tell us to love only the neighbors we like. He calls us to look beyond our own experiences, listen, and recognize the dignity of every person.

Advent reminds us that God's love does not remain distant. It moves toward us and enters the complications of human life. As Christmas approaches, we are invited to move toward others with compassion, too. Love is not only something we believe. It is something we practice.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

Where is God asking you to love beyond your comfort zone?

Practice: Do one loving thing for a neighbor whose life looks different from your own.

Prayer: *God, help us love our neighbors with patience, compassion, and courage. Amen.*

The People We Overlook

READ Luke 2:8–14

The first people to hear the angels announce Jesus' birth are shepherds. Not kings or religious leaders, but people working through the night, carrying out ordinary responsibilities. They are the ones who receive extraordinary news.

This is one of the beautiful surprises of Christmas. God's announcement does not begin with the powerful. It begins with people who might easily be overlooked. Who do we overlook in our own communities? Whose work makes our lives possible but rarely receives recognition? Who might feel invisible in a season focused on celebration?

The shepherds remind us that every person matters to God—not because of status, accomplishments, or influence, but because they are beloved. A kind word, a sincere thank-you, an invitation, or a moment of attention can help someone feel seen. Sometimes love begins with noticing.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

Who might feel overlooked this Christmas, and how can you help them feel seen?

Practice: Thank someone whose work is often overlooked: a cashier, a custodian, a delivery driver.

Prayer: *God, open our eyes to the people around us and teach us to honor their dignity. Amen.*

The Love We Carry Forward

READ 1 John 4:7–12

As another year closes, we look back on celebrations, challenges, relationships, and experiences that changed us. Some things turned out as we hoped; others did not. Every year holds a mixture of beginnings and endings.

First John reminds us that God's love becomes visible through the way we care for others. Our words and actions can help people experience something of God's presence. We cannot control everything that will happen in the coming year. But we can choose what we carry forward: compassion, generosity, patience, hospitality, forgiveness, and a willingness to begin again.

These gifts do not end when Christmas decorations are put away. They can shape how we live throughout the year. The love we have received becomes a love we share, in our homes, our church, and the wider community.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

What lesson about love do you want to carry into the new year?

Practice: Write down one lesson about love that you want to carry into the new year.

Prayer: *God, thank you for the love we have received and shared. Help us carry it into the days ahead. Amen.*

God With Us

READ Matthew 1:22–23

Tonight we gather around a familiar story. We hear about Mary and Joseph, shepherds and angels, and a child born in Bethlehem. We sing songs, light candles, and remember the promise of Christmas: Emmanuel, God with us.

Those words hold the heart of the story. God does not remain distant from human struggles. In Jesus, God enters a world filled with uncertainty, suffering, beauty, love, and hope—a world much like our own. We do not have to wait until our lives are settled or our hearts perfectly prepared to welcome Christ. God comes near as we are, in our joy and grief, confidence and questions, celebrations and ordinary routines.

Throughout Advent we have reflected on hope, peace, joy, and love. Tonight we remember that these are not simply ideals we must achieve. They are gifts made known through Christ's presence. The world is not perfect. Our lives are not perfect. But God is with us.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

What does Emmanuel—God with us—mean to you tonight?

Practice: Sit quietly in candlelight tonight and pray the words, "Emmanuel, God with us."

Prayer: *Emmanuel, meet us wherever we are and help us carry the light of Christ into the world. Amen.*

Christmas Day. *The Word became flesh and lived among us.*

Still, God Comes Near

READ John 1:1–5, 14

Christmas has arrived. For some, today will be filled with family, laughter, meals, and familiar traditions. For others, it may be quieter. There may be an empty chair, a loved one far away, or circumstances that make this year feel different. Whatever today holds, the promise remains: God comes near.

Not only when life is joyful or we feel certain. God comes near in the middle of our real lives. The Word becomes flesh and lives among us. The light shines in the darkness. Throughout Advent we have considered how to practice hope, make peace, recognize joy, and extend love beyond ourselves. Those invitations do not end today.

The coming year will bring new questions and changes. There will be moments when hope feels strong and others when we struggle to find it. But we do not enter those days alone. God is still present, still loving, still calling us toward one another, still bringing light into the world. Still, God comes near.

A QUESTION TO CARRY

How will you carry the hope, peace, joy, and love of Christmas into the coming year?

Practice: Share hope, peace, joy, and love with someone today, in whatever way you can.

Light the Christ candle.

Prayer: *Loving God, thank you for Jesus Christ. Help us carry your hope into uncertainty, peace into division, joy into ordinary days, and love into every relationship. Amen.*

A Blessing for the Days Ahead

As another Advent season comes to a close, we give thanks for the journey we have shared: for people who walked beside us, children and youth who helped us see faith through new eyes, conversations that challenged us, laughter around tables, prayers in difficult moments, and countless acts of kindness.

We give thanks for all the ways God has been present among us, both in moments we recognized and those we may have overlooked. As we look toward a new year, we acknowledge that change is part of life. People come and go. Ministries grow and evolve. New opportunities emerge, and familiar seasons come to an end.

We may not know exactly what lies ahead for our families, communities, or church. But we can trust that the God who has been faithful in the past will continue to be present in the future. The work of loving our neighbors continues. The invitation to extend grace remains. The call to welcome, serve, learn, and grow does not end with a particular season or chapter.

So may we move forward with grateful hearts. May we honor the stories and relationships that have shaped us while remaining open to the new things God may be doing. May we continue to make room for one another, especially when the world encourages us to draw lines and build walls.

May we find courage when the future feels uncertain, peace when life feels divided, joy in ordinary moments, and love that reaches beyond ourselves. Wherever the coming year leads, may we remember the promise at the heart of Christmas: We do not walk alone. God has been with us. God is with us now. And God will continue to be with us in all the days ahead.

Still, God comes near. Amen.

With Gratitude

For the many ways the Tuckahoe Presbyterian Church family has shared God's love through worship, learning, fellowship, service, and care for one another. May these reflections remind us that even in a changing world, God's presence remains constant and God's work among us continues.

Carrying It Forward

How will you carry hope, peace, joy, and love into the coming year?

Hope

Peace

Joy

Love

Tuckahoe Presbyterian Church · Richmond, Virginia · Advent 2026
Scripture references from the NRSVue. A family activity book companion is also available.