

Christmas in the Summer

"I love it when a plan comes together." Do you remember the classic TV show and character that made that line famous? Either way, a plan has recently come together among our leadership at Oak Grove, and I would love for our congregation to join the fun.

I have wanted to do a congregational Advent devotional booklet for some time. We certainly benefit from the Advent devotional published by Brethren Press; and yet we have the spiritual maturity to publish one with contributions from our own membership. Our own talents, combined with those of some of Oak Grove's former pastors, and a few Church of the Brethren denominational and agency staff (who have already agreed to write an entry for us) should create a very meaningful Advent devotional booklet. And this is before we add the contributions from some very talented artists in our congregation. I can easily imagine this project being a significant contribution to our worship life.

Do you think you'd enjoy writing or drawing for this project? I hope you'll consider this invitation. All told, we need 35 entries to cover each day from the first Sunday of Advent (December 3, 2017) through Epiphany (January 6, 2018). Guidelines for writers will be available soon.

Where "the plan starts to come together" involves the recent work of the Christian Education Commission. In an effort to support intergenerational ministry in our congregation, Christian Ed is sponsoring two adult Sunday School classes this summer, in place of our regular format. One of these is a Bible Study class, co-taught by myself and Horace Light. I will be teaching the traditional Advent and Christmas texts in the first part of the summer; then Horace will finish out the summer with a six-week study on the life of the disciples. I am hopeful that these Sunday School lessons on the Advent and Christmas texts can be an aid for those who are interested in writing for the Advent devotional. The lesson outlines and audio recordings will be posted on this webpage for future reference.

If you're interested in writing for our Advent devotional and/or just enjoy Bible Study, please consider our intergenerational study this summer. I look forward to working with you to create our Advent devotional.

Summer Bible Study class schedule:

- June 11: Introduction: The reason for Advent
Jeremiah 33:14-16; Micah 5:2-5a; Zephaniah 3:14-20; Malachi 3:1-4
- June 18: Isaiah of Jerusalem: Isaiah 2:1-5; 7:10-16; 9:2-7; 11:1-10; 35:1-10
- June 25: Isaiah of the Exile: Isaiah 40:1-11; 61:1-4; 64:1-9
- July 2: Matthew 1:1 – 2:23
- July 9: Luke 1:1 – 3:18
- July 16: John 1:1-14

- July 23: Camp Bethel Sunday (no Sunday School)

- July 30 – September 3: *The Life of the Disciples* (Horace Light, teacher)

Guidelines for writers

Writing an entry for our Advent devotional book is not intended to be a difficult project, but it will take a bit of prayer and reflection. Drawing from the shared experiences of our congregation should make for an exciting and meaningful set of reflections this December.

To help you in the process, here are a few guidelines to consider:

1. Take a look at the selected texts in the above list.
 - a. The Old Testament texts in the list are ones that appear in the lectionary for the Sundays in Advent. Some of these are more familiar than others.
 - b. The New Testament texts cover the entire "birth narratives" in Matthew, Luke, and John. You'll need to select a verse or a section within those larger ranges for your writing.
2. Pray about which text you should choose. Ask for God's guidance.
3. Be creative as you consider the text. You do not necessarily need to comment on the entire set of verses. Perhaps a word, or a name, or a theme will seem significant to you, and you'll want to expand on those thoughts. You may wish to write a poem, or a prayer, or even a litany which might be used in worship.
4. Your devotional should fit on one page. This will be approximately 300 words, unless you are writing a poem or a prayer based on the text.
5. To help with your research, the lesson outlines and recordings from our "Advent/Christmas Sunday School class" are available on our website.
6. Please feel free to talk with Pastor Tim about what you're writing for thoughts, suggestions, proofreading.
7. Potential Scripture texts:
 - a. Texts we will use in worship
 - i. Advent 1 (12/3): Isaiah 64:1-9
 - ii. Advent 2 (12/10): Isaiah 40:1-11
 - iii. Advent 3 (12/17): Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; John 1:6-8, 19-28
 - iv. Advent 4 (12/24): Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 1:26-38
 - v. Christmas (12/25): Luke 2:1-20
 - vi. Christmas 1 (12/31): Luke 2:22-40
 - vii. Epiphany (1/6): Matthew 2:1-12
 - b. Other Old Testament texts
 - i. Isaiah: 2:1-5; 7:10-16; 11:1-10; 35:1-10
 - ii. Jeremiah 33:14-16
 - iii. Micah 5:2-5a

iv. Zephaniah 3:14-20

v. Malachi 3:1-4

c. Other New Testament texts

i. Matthew 1:1-17, 18-25; 2:13-15, 16-18, 19-23

ii. Luke 1:5-25, 46-56, 57-66, 67-80; 2:21-38, 39-52; 3:1-18

iii. John 1:1-14