



Prayer Devotions

December

Luke 18:1

Pray Always and Never Give Up

Prayer for Persecuted Church

Pray for those in the midst of persecution (Hebrews 13:3, ESV)

Global watchdog Open Doors reports that 322 Christians are killed every month for their faith while millions more suffer persecution on a routine basis.

Please pray that these believers will not only stay committed to the call of Christ but also will respond in love to the evil shown by their aggressors. God's love will open doors for these believers to share the Gospel even more.

This Month's Countries, these are some of the most dangerous countries to follow Jesus:

North Korea

Afghanistan

Somalia

Daily prayers for December... “The Son of God became a man to enable men to become the sons of God.” C. S. Lewis

Saturday, December 1st: ‘Tis the season! We’ve all heard the familiar phrase, “Jesus is the reason for the season.” Would you be shocked if I told you that it’s a half truth? Jesus isn’t just the reason for the season – He’s the reason for every day of your life! Consequently, we need to be especially careful during the hustle and bustle to not lose sight of what really matters. We have an incredible opportunity to impact so many more people we may not always have contact with. Christmas Eve services are some of the most heavily attended of the year. If you work in retail, you know the surge of shoppers you’ll assist. And just being out and about, the volume of people you’ll encounter will be tremendous. Use these opportunities to show others the power of the Spirit living in you, enabling you to be patient, kind, generous, not rude or easily provoked. Demonstrate what it means to make Him the King of your heart in every season so they might also receive the best gift of all. He is the reason. **Gal. 2:20; Jn. 13:13-17**

Sunday, December 2nd: Though stores have had Christmas decorations up since the day after Halloween, though the world seems more focused on good sales than good news, though exams and performances and traditions and parties make this one of the busiest times of year, our faith invites us this week to be still and know that God is near. William Faulkner once wrote, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” Events from the past often intrude into the present in some way. History seems to repeat itself. Isaiah 40:1-2 Isaiah’s people were on the verge of a new future. They had been prisoners of war in Babylon for a whole generation. Now they were finally on their way home, but they worried about repeating mistakes from the past that had led them to exile. Some even believed their imprisonment was punishment from God for sins of the past. God spoke through Isaiah to assure them this was indeed a new day. In the tenderness of God, the past was not only dead, it was also

truly past. Whatever the circumstances that had led them to exile, whatever they feared they had done to merit God's punishment, it was over. God offered them a brand new start. God offers the same new start to us each day. The past is both dead and gone. Behold, God is making all things new. Pray-God of peace, give me your peace to let go of the past and cling to your future, and dream your dream for the world. In Jesus name Amen.

Monday, December 3rd: When my kids were in their teens, I heard some advice that helped me avoid many frustrations, diffused many potentially volatile exchanges, and possibly prevented fractures or worse in our relationship. Simply put, when in a "discussion" over something that does not have damaging eternal consequences, learn to say, "You know, you *could* be right." It was a good way to avoid escalation over something that wasn't really that important. Paul gave the same kind of advice to Timothy when he told him to avoid foolish and ignorant disputes. (2 Tim. 2:23) We would all do well to heed that admonition in all of our conversations. God is more interested in healthy, Godly relationships than He is in who knows more than the other person. We need to value people over proving a point if the point is not going to have an eternal negative consequence in their lives. And as a former principal once told me, sometimes "crazy" has a point! None of us truly has all the answers, so we should learn to listen with loving hearts and open minds. And if necessary, be willing to concede – they *could* be right! 1 Cor.13:12-13; Col. 3:12-15; 1 Cor. 9:19-23

Tuesday, December 4th: Frannie was twelve when she asked her parents, "So much of our homework and projects have to be done on computers, and a lot of the people can't afford them. How can they do it?" The follow up question was, "What can we do to help?" And E2D (Eliminate the Digital Divide) was born, providing computers and Internet service to families that would otherwise be unable to afford them. When the "spirit of the Lord" is upon us, it becomes our responsibility to bring the good news to those who

have less, who are held back, whose hearts are broken. We live out our joy for God's love by sharing that joy with others, particularly those cast aside by the world. That means we have to pay attention, ask difficult questions, and be creative in using our gifts. Joy isn't always expressed in dancing and shouts of praise; sometimes our faithful response to the gifts of Jesus' life is rolling up our sleeves and getting to work. Lord help us to pay attention. Open our eyes, ears, and hearts to the need around us. Stir up our compassion, and empower us that we might live a bold "thank you" to you by the way that we share your love. **Isaiah 61:1-3**

Wednesday, December 5th: Children love the thoughts of Santa Claus bringing presents, and many Christians struggle with how to reconcile jolly old St. Nick with the true meaning of the season. In truth, Nicholas himself would weep at what we have made him into. He was actually a Greek bishop who had been born to wealthy parents who died when he was young, leaving him their vast fortune. Being a humble young man, he secretly gave away his wealth to the poor and followed his calling by following Christ. He helped lead the church through one of the worst times of tribulation in history and was even imprisoned for refusing to denounce Jesus. He was tortured and beaten for years but was finally released through a pardon from the new Emperor Constantine and returned to his hometown. Through his prayers and the example of his faith, many found their salvation in Jesus. Maybe if children (and adults) knew the whole story of this humble and generous bishop in his red robes, they would truly appreciate his contribution to the spirit of Christmas and how it directs attention to the real gift – Jesus. May we remember and follow his example. **Is. 9:6; Prov. 11:24-25; Jn. 3:16-17**

Thursday, December 6th: I'd just moved into a new house. It was late, but I wanted to unpack – to make this lonely, strange place feel like home. A pop rattled the house, knocking out the power. The moonless sky wrapped the house in black velvet. I couldn't find a flashlight or candle. Every creak put me

on edge; I was paralyzed. Finally, my cell phone rang, a blink of light piercing the darkness. Then I was okay. The smidge of light from my old-school flip phone wasn't enough for me to find my toothbrush, but once I knew where it was, I could periodically open it to ease the ache of the inky gloom. Light has a way of wiping away our fear. If the twinkle of a phone can bring hope on an anxious night, imagine the comfort and joy that comes with finding and proclaiming Jesus, the Light of Life, in a dark world. "Get ready," John is saying, "The light's been there all along, but you're about to see it again for the first time." Pray-Holy God, thank you that I do not have to stumble around in the darkness, because you sent the truest light, Jesus Christ, to show your children the way and to give hope for the life to come. I rejoice in your love and pray, that in moments of fear and confusion, I may trust that there is no time that you leave us alone in the darkness, but you are with me. In Jesus name Amen. **John 1:6-8**

Friday, December 7th: My friend and I were recently talking about the armor of God, and she shared some wonderful perspectives that I had never really thought about. She said that she had at one time felt somewhat uncomfortable with the idea of this heavy battle array that seemed more suited to men until God pointed her to Isaiah 61:10 where the prophet proclaimed that he had been clothed with beautiful garments of salvation and a robe of righteousness. This is exactly what the armor of God equips us with – salvation and His character! It all starts with truth, which is the belt that holds together every other piece of the armor, and every piece must be in place in order for us to be fully outfitted to stand firm. These garments are not cumbersome or gender specific – they are beautiful and functional at the same time. We must also remember that the purpose of armor is, of course, to protect us from the enemy's attacks, but soldiers did not go to battle for themselves alone. They were defending a *kingdom* and the freedom of *everyone* it represented. We are in a holy battle. Never discount your need to be fully clothed, and never doubt the beauty and fidelity of the garments He provides. **Eph. 6:11-20; Ps. 18:39**

Saturday, December 8th: I have a favorite blanket. It was knitted for me by a dear friend. It's not the right shape to cover up in, but it is the perfect shape to wrap around me and snuggle down in my favorite chair. My friend calls it a prayer shawl, but I call it a blanket because it's so long that it covers my toes. She prayed for me the whole time she was knitting it. When I wrap up in it, I know I am being held. I am reminded of all the prayers she and others prayed for me. Most importantly, I'm reminded of God's love and presence right there with me. As with David, God's love is always with us. God's love stretches around us, wrapping us up like my favorite blanket. God's love covers us so completely; it is almost like a second skin. No matter what we do, we cannot lose it or get away from it. God shows love for us in God's constant presence. God is always with us. **2 Samuel 7:8-9**

Sunday, December 9th: What do you want for Christmas? You've probably asked and have been asked that question multiple times this season. I always hope to purchase the perfect gift that someone I love especially wants or needs, but few people ever consider what it is that they desperately need more than anything else. One of my favorite movie lines is delivered to Salma Hayek by Matthew Perry when he tells her, "You're everything I never knew I always wanted!" He was so wrapped up in his ambition and preconceived idea of what he thought he wanted that he almost missed the love and fulfillment right in front of him. Isn't that true of so many people? Lots of them will acknowledge that the season is about Jesus, but they don't see their personal need to really know and experience Him and His love and fulfillment for their deepest need. This was true of even the religious leaders at the time of His birth! They knew the Scriptures and were aware of Jesus as teacher, but they refused to experience Him as their Messiah. Don't let yourself or anyone else just be acquainted with Him – accept Him in your heart and acknowledge Him as everything you never knew you always wanted. Every other gift will pale by comparison. **Matt. 6:33; Ps. 16:5-11; Phil. 4:19-10**

Monday, December 10th: When I read stories in the Bible, I sometimes pretend that I don't know what is going to happen, like I am reading them for the very first time. When I read the Bible verses today and pretend I don't know what is happening, my brain glitches and I think "Wait, what?!" What in the world does all of this mean? I imagine what Mary was hearing — or not hearing — since she might not have gotten over an angel standing in the room with her. It got me thinking, I want God to tell me what is going on. I like to know everything in advance. Here, God actually does say what is going to happen, but I'm not sure it helps explain anything. Reading this helps me know that God's plans are so much bigger than I can ever dream, that even if God does explain the plan to me, I think God should start with: "Don't be afraid, I'm about to tell you the craziest thing ever." **Luke 1:30-33, Ephesians 3:20**

Tuesday, December 11th: It's pretty easy to become caught up and consumed by the flurry of activity around us, and this can often lead to anxiety. To be anxious is to be nervous, worried, or afraid of something that *might* happen. Paul gives some sound advice to the Philippians when he tells them they shouldn't be anxious about anything but instead in everything — that means in every circumstance - by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving they should let their requests be made known to God. The definition of supplication is a humble and sincere appeal to somebody who has the power and authority to grant their request. It should be self-evident that the greatest power and authority in all of creation belongs to the Creator Himself! But Paul also stipulates that this should be done with thanksgiving. Think of being at the controls in the cockpit of a 777-200ER with 400 passenger aboard when you suddenly experience turbulent weather. Rather than panic, you have the option to hand the controls over to a very experienced pilot. Wouldn't that be cause for thanksgiving? Paul goes on to say that the result will be that the peace of God, which exceeds all understanding, will guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. So if you find yourself in a situation that begins to overwhelm you, consider letting go of the side-stick and asking the one who has power and authority to take control. Don't forget to thank Him! **Phil. 4:6-7, 19; 2 Tim. 1:12**

Wednesday, December 12th: A favorite book from my childhood is *The Little Engine That Could*. The story is about a little blue train engine that is drafted to deliver presents to the boys and girls on the other side of the mountain when the other, bigger engines either could not or would not help out. Today's prophecy, from the prophet Micah, predicts that an unlikely town, the little town of Bethlehem, would produce a great ruler of Israel. During the Christmas season we tell the story of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Who would have thought that such a small, insignificant place would produce somebody whose message would change the whole world? It makes me wonder what God can do with each of our little, insignificant lives. When we feel like our life is insignificant. We can ask the Lord to remind us that He is able to use our life in ways we never expected. **Micah 5:2-5a**

Thursday, December 13th: God delivered a solemn pronouncement through the prophet Jeremiah to Babylon and Leb Kamai, which was actually code for Chaldea and Babylon and literally meant *the midst of those who rise up against Me*. His word was that He was going to arouse the spirit of a destroyer and dispatch foreigners who would devastate her land. Babylon symbolizes pride, idolatry, cruelty, and greed; and God makes no bones about how He feels about any who dwell there. If we take an honest look at our country, we have to concede that arrogance, many forms of idolatry, unkindness, and self-indulgence are becoming more and more prevalent. However, we have a choice as to how we will live our lives. We cannot allow ourselves to fall into the lures of Babylon. We all struggle with one or all of these things at times, but the litmus test is where we choose to dwell. History shows that Babylon was indeed destroyed, and we would be wise to examine our own hearts and then to pray for our churches and country to humble themselves before Him. Lord, we confess our sin and ask for mercy and revival in us and in America. **1 Tim. 6:2-11; 1 Cor. 10:13**

Friday, December 14th: For those dealing with heavy issues, this can be a very difficult time of year. Everyone around them seems to be so joyful and expectant, yet they are weighed down with grief, hopelessness, or a sense of isolation and despair. The stark contrast between what they are seeing versus feeling can push them even deeper into that dark place of depression. But there is hope, and it is found in the person of Jesus, the Light of the world who has come that none should remain in darkness. Pray that those who are struggling will find encouragement and a door to restoration through the Darkness to Hope service tonight. Sometimes all you need is to know that you're not alone and to hear the stories of others who have come out on the other side of desperation into the peace and comfort that only a loving Savior can provide. **Jn. 12:46; Ps. 40:1-3, 34:18-19**

Saturday, December 15th: The first group of people to receive the news of the Christ child's birth were shepherds, the dirt-covered caretakers of smelly sheep. Chosen over priests and kings, the shepherds — who had farm smarts but little to no wealth and education — were also the first to visit the baby. Their retelling of the encounter with the multitude of angels makes Mary's heart soar and amazes all who hear. The plain, ordinary shepherds were the perfect inaugural spokesmen for an extraordinary event. Even now, God chooses us, despite our status in life, to tell the Christmas story. How have you encountered the birth of the Christ child this week or this season leading up to Christmas? How might you retell to others what you've seen and heard of that experience? How might you glorify and praise God for what you've witnessed? Ponder how you have seen Gods presence in my life and world. Pray that you that you would share His wondrous works with others. **Luke 2:15-20**

Sunday, December 16th: You may have heard the story of the janitor who was asked to be the innkeeper in the children's Christmas pageant. His only line was, "I'm sorry, there's no room in the inn." However, moved by the story as it unfolded, when Joseph asked him for a room, he blurted out, "Come on in!" During the busyness of this season, with all the gift buying, parties to attend, and plans to spend special time with family, it's easy to become preoccupied and distracted. Neal Maxwell once said that each of us is an innkeeper who decides if there is room for Jesus. Pray that we won't lose the real gift in all the wrappings and let your heart be so moved by the story that you'll not only make room for Him but make His place preeminent. **Matt. 6:33; John 3:16-17;**

Eph. 5:15-17

Monday, December 17th: "Huh??" That's the likely reaction of the original hearers of this story. Luke's story is totally counter-cultural to what folks were expecting. If a new king was to be born, surely it would take place at the palace in Jerusalem. If angels were appearing, surely it would be to the chief priests. But instead the message comes to low-class shepherds, who should go to a barn and look in a feed trough for the new king. Luke keeps telling stories like this. God uses unexpected places and people. I believe Luke is right, even today. Where is Jesus most likely to show up today? Not at City Hall, the corporate office, or (dare I say it?) even at our churches. Try the city bus stop, the soup kitchen, the homeless shelter, resource center/food pantry. Who hears the angel's message? Not the executive, the politician, or sometimes even the preacher. It's the crew collecting garbage, the check-out clerk, the guy sleeping under the bridge. So what's our job? Go and look for Jesus there, of course! **Luke 2:6-14**

Tuesday, December 18th: One of the tactics lions use in hunting prey is to divide and conquer – to isolate members of the herd that have wandered away and are out of community. No wonder the devil is depicted as a roaring

lion seeking whom he may devour. Isn't that one of his best tactics with us – waiting until we're most vulnerable and separated from any support system? Or seeking to cause disagreements and disunity? That's because he knows that when we are in unity, we have real power. One sandbag in front of your door may slow down the water trying to destroy your home, but a whole pile of sandbags can stop the flood from even getting past the threshold. We need to be aware of his schemes and first be intentional about being in community with other believers and then seek how we can break down the barriers of division and instead strive for unity. **1 Pet. 5:8; Heb 10:24-25; 1 Cor. 1:10**

Wednesday, December 19th: Mary and Joseph bring little Jesus to the temple for the customary Jewish rituals. But when Simeon takes Jesus in his arms, he understands what a wonderful gift he is holding. This is not just another baby. This is the Messiah — a gift of salvation for the Jews, the Gentiles, for everyone! It is important that we also acknowledge the gifts we hold in our arms, gifts given by God for the benefit of everyone. What are the gifts that you hold? Maybe it's an experience you had, the story of which can instruct or comfort others. Maybe it's a talent or skill that you possess, which God can use to change the world for the better. Maybe it's a resource you have, like money, or knowledge, or possessions that God can use to change a life or a community. Like Simeon, when we are living lives that are devout and looking forward to the consolation of God's people, the Holy Spirit rests upon us too. **Luke 2:25, 28-33**

Thursday, December 20th: Peace on earth, good will toward men. We proclaim it, we sing it, but do we really think about just what it is that the angels were announcing on that holy night? The peace that is being proclaimed refers to the presence of God – not the absence of conflict, which is how some interpret this proclamation. First and foremost, it was declaring the birth of Messiah's provision of peace with God for men with whom He is pleased. That includes everyone who accepts Him and His path to salvation

through Christ. Once you have peace *with* God, you can then experience the peace *of* God. This is the assurance that Immanuel – God with us – will be right beside us to comfort and guide in the midst of any conflict or trials we may experience. And He tells us that in this world we *will* have tribulations, but we are to take courage because He has overcome the world! Praise God for the gift of Jesus who came to give us true, eternal peace that we are promised! **Luke 2:14; John 16:33; Eph. 2:14-16**

Friday, December 21st: The psalms are basically song lyrics. These particular lyrics sing the majesty and splendor of God. We're urged to rejoice because our God is most powerful, creator of the universe, revered before all, and the righteous judge of the world. And yet, when we look at our calendar, we know that in just a few days we'll celebrate the birth of Jesus, who came in a scene that looks nothing like the majestic, triumphant picture that the psalm describes. Jesus, the Almighty, will arrive by a teenage mom and a... let's say... "step dad" in a smelly barn and in relative secrecy. What does this mean? Perhaps it means that even while we celebrate God's power and, well, AWESOMENESS, we also have to recognize that sometimes, maybe lots of times, God chooses to act in subtle, unusual, and unexpected ways. And if that's true, maybe God will continue to use more unexpected and unqualified people — even us — to do powerful and amazing things in the world today.
Psalm 96

Saturday, December 22nd: We are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus, but hands and feet don't function very well if the body isn't being fed. And no matter how nutritious and satisfying the meal, once a week being spoon fed is not going to equip us to fulfill our purpose. Those who are satisfied with just being fed by someone else are called infants, and we know infants need to grow up and start feeding themselves solid food and taking responsibility for their own development. Reading God's word daily and spending time with Him in prayer are essential to our spiritual health, and those who are sincere about following and serving Him demonstrate their sincerity through serving and honoring times when we are called as a body to join in corporate prayer. The power of a healthy, vibrant body calling out to God in unity is exponential and electrifying, and it honors Him. A strong church is the product of well-fed bodies willing to be active hands and feet. Pray for God to motivate you to be proactive in nourishing your own health and the body of Pure Heart.

Heb. 5:12-14; Eph. 4:13-16; Acts 4:31

Sunday, December 23rd: Psalm 107 begins with, "Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever." The psalmist then goes on to tell of the trials and rebellion of God's people, how He delivered them, and then four times proclaims, "Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" You get the distinct impression that the writer is lamenting the fact that despite the undeniable goodness of God and how He satisfies the longing soul, breaks the chains of bondage, and calms our storms, we need to be reminded that He is the One who has saved and continues to save us from all our distresses. Christmas should be a dramatic reminder to us of how far He is willing to go to rescue us from ourselves. Oh, give thanks to the Lord for His unfathomable goodness, mercy and grace! Then tell others about His marvelous works. **Ps. 9:1; Heb. 12:28**

Monday, December 24th: Preparing for Christmas requires everyone's cooperation. Sometimes it sounds more like commands: Wrap the presents! Trim the tree! Sing in the choir! Wash the dishes! Pick up your brother at the airport! Cook the family meal! Clean your room! Go to church! We don't know much about Joseph, but the little we know speaks of a quietly faithful man: "He did as the angel of the Lord commanded him...." Even with reservations, Joseph cooperated with God's plan, was wed to Mary, and became the father of God's very own son. His loyalty speaks to the possible benefits of responding with faithfulness to what is commanded. Lord, as we prepare for Christmas, open our ears to hear what you would have us to do. Give us the courage and loyalty to respond to your commands with the same quiet faithfulness as Joseph did.

Tuesday, December 25th: For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given! His name is Immanuel – God with us! No wonder the shepherds were overwhelmed and just had to see for themselves who this was that the angels were proclaiming to *them* – shepherds, of all people! Some of the lowliest of all members of society. And yet these were the ones to whom the angel proclaimed, "...for today there has been born *for you* a Savior." And then a multitude of angels joined this messenger and began praising God, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among *men with whom He is pleased.*" (emphasis has been added) Why did God choose them? What was it about them that made Him pleased? Maybe part of it was because they were doing what they were called to do – they were guarding and caring for those assigned to their care. In other words, they were being obedient. And when the angels departed, the shepherds went straight to Bethlehem to confirm the report, and then began telling others about this great wonder! May He find us today in obedience and in awe that He would choose *us*! Then let us be so filled with His wonder that we can't help but share the good tidings of great joy with all who will listen, praising and glorifying God as we return to what He has called us to do, even if it's not so glamorous. After all, He chose us, He is God with us, and when we believe and are obeying, He says He is pleased with us! Merry Christmas!! **Luke 2:8-20; Heb. 11:1-2, 6; Phil. 2:12-1**

Wednesday, December 26th: Some days you're a courageous warrior, fighting for justice and taking evil down. On those days, fight on! God is with you! Other days you're a wise comforter, spreading healing and hugs to people God loves. On those days, love on! God is with you! Then there are days when you don't feel courageous or wise. You feel worn out. Or scared. Or embarrassed. Or weak as a baby. On those days, remember, God is with you. God has not stopped blessing the world through your life. You are a blessing just by being yourself. You don't have to be a warrior or a comforter every day. God's power and majesty are above the heavens, throughout the earth, and present in the smallest and weakest of us all the time. Lord- Thank you for blessing us with creative energy to do your work in the world. On days when strength is low, help us to lean on you, trusting that you are blessing the world through our lives. **Psalm 8:1-2**

Thursday, December 27th: Praise God for those who have decided to spend part of their Christmas break in Mexico to help provide a home for a family in need. Keep in mind that this family has put in hours of community service to qualify for receiving a house, and to demonstrate how God can use this act of kindness in His name to build up community, the recipient of the last house built expressed his desire to join with the team in building the next house. As our team works alongside those from the community, the love of God is expressed and His kingdom is being built up. The poor in terms of material wealth are becoming rich in the knowledge of Him and His power and gifting in their own lives and community. It's not a hand out, which implies they are incapable of anything on their own. Instead it is empowering them to fulfill their calling in Him. **1 Pet. 4:10, 3:15; Ps. 96:3**

Friday, December 28th: There are some experiences in human life that leave us utterly and profoundly changed. The coming of God to earth in the person of Jesus Christ is just such an event. Now, being charged with carrying the message of hope to the world, we can never be silent. Until God's kingdom comes on this earth, we work to build up the highways that lead others to him, to lift up lives of grace and purpose, dedicated to ushering in the gospel way of life. This is what the coming of Messiah means for us, and we cannot rest until our whole world reflects God's deep and abiding love for all humankind. **Isaiah 62:6-12**

Saturday, December 29th: You can't take it with you – we've all heard this in reference to those miserly folks who pinch every penny. But I would argue that you can take it with you! When you use what God has blessed you with to support evangelistic missions that are spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, especially to unreached people groups, and seeing the fruit of redeemed souls, then you have definitely invested in something that you will be able to "take with you" into His heavenly kingdom. How we invest our time and resources reveals where our treasure is, and when we devote them to the advancement of His kingdom for His glory, we are storing up riches in heaven that can *never* be taken away. Let's determine to invest wisely so we will have much to take with us! **Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Tim. 6:17-19**

Sunday, December 30th: Throughout Christmastide, as we continue to celebrate the birth of the Christ-child and give thanks that an all-powerful God chose to come among us as one of us, we sing joyful praises to God! But we humans are not the only ones to praise God. All creation praises God: the sun and moon, the cows and the birds, the trees and the hills, the wind and frost - all in their own way give praise to God. Just as the star, and the animals, and the people gathered together around the baby Jesus in awe and adoration over 2000 years ago, creation still gathers to praise and adore our God. Notice the world around you today: the crunch of snow beneath your feet, the vibrant colors of the sunset, the sound of waves on a shore, and wonder, “How is creation giving praise to God today?” **Psalm 148**

Monday, December 31st: As 2018 comes to an end and 2019 begins, it's easy to want to erase all the “bad things” we've experienced. We often want to start the new year fresh, holding onto only the good and joy-filled memories. But today's poem from Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is a season and a time for both the good and the bad. In the course of our lives, we will experience both joy and pain, laughter and tears, new life and death. And through it all, God promises to be with us, holding us when we weep, rejoicing with us when we dance. God is Emmanuel, “God with us.” As you look back on this past year, when did you feel closest to God? When did you feel farthest from God? How have you experienced God's love and grace for you through the trials and the triumphs of life? God, thank you for being with us this year through the difficult times and the happy times. Help us to trust you through all the seasons of life, knowing that you love us deeply and unconditionally.
Ecclesiastes 3:1-8