



| **Sunday, December 2**

Faith, Hope, and Love

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13

I am a mother of three. You see Wesley full of joy at church, but many may not know he has an older brother and sister in Heaven, Jacob and Eleanor. All three are a story of faith, hope, and love.

Our twins, Jake and Ellie, were born at just under 24 weeks at just over a pound each. We soon knew that God was calling them to Heaven; that Heaven was better for them than earth. A decision of faith and love. The toughest decision a parent will ever have to make.

They shouldn't have made it to Earth alive. I shouldn't be alive. My water broke at 17 weeks and we should have said our goodbyes then, but we prayed, we loved, and we had hope that we would meet them, and we did.

One week later I was diagnosed with cancer. Our hearts and hands were empty, and now this. What next?

Lots happened in the next few years, but the short story is that in 2014 my friend felt the calling to carry our baby, so she did, and now we have Wesley. An embryo that was frozen for 4 years, was grown healthy by my friend. Our family—broken and complete. A family of five. Faith, hope, and love. It is what gave me the strength to accept and handle the challenges I have faced, and continue to face (after all, I have a toddler!).

Dear God, thank you for giving me the strength to make it through the challenges of life. Thank you for the time you have given us with our children, even if just for a few hours. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to baptize all three of our children and to know we will see them again soon.

- Kerry Olson



| Monday, December 3

The Attitude of Hope

Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.

Psalm 31:24

Do you remember the setting of Jesus's birth? Mary had been visited by the angel Gabriel and was told that even though she was a virgin she would become pregnant and bear the "Son of God." What would have been your attitude?

Joseph had been commanded by the angel of the Lord to take Mary to be his wife even though she was now found to be pregnant. Mary and Joseph were commanded to go Bethlehem so that Caesar Augustus could get his census taken even though she was great with child. They went anyway, with no reservations for accommodations, and ended up in a stable for the birth. Again, what would your attitude have been?

I believe that sometimes hope comes from having the right attitude. Think about it during this Advent season. I heard it once said, "A bad attitude is like a flat tire. You won't go anywhere unless you change it." Don't let the demands of the season take away your attitude of hope.

Hope give us strength and courage as we rely on you. Amen.

- David Buker



| **Tuesday, December 4**

How Many More Days?

*Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and shield.
Our heart is glad in him; because we trust his holy name.
Let your steadfast love, O Lord be upon us, even as we hope in
you.*

Psalm 33:20-22

As the parents of five, we heard many times, "How many more days till Christmas?" They were so eager. We would cross the days of waiting off our calendar to help the children see just how much longer we had to wait. How much longer until Sunday School programs, and tree decorating, and shopping, and special gifts? It is so hard to be patient.

I sometimes feel that way when I pray. It is as though the response to my prayer should fit into my timeline and meet my needs or wishes. As if God answered our requests using our limited understanding of any given situation.

It is so good to be reminded of the words of the Psalmist, calling us to wait patiently, trust completely, and hope, knowing the depth of God's love for each of his children.

Father, we open our hearts to your leading. We are thankful for all of your blessings, even those we don't see or fully understand. Help us to trust that we are always in your loving hands. Our hope is in you. Amen.

- Linda Heath



| **Wednesday, December 5**

Hope, Moving us Along in Life

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

It was July 1968. I was a 19-year-old farm boy nearing the end of my military leave before heading off to Vietnam. I could sense my parents were worried, especially my mom, but dad was also quieter than usual. I remember saying to them something like, "Don't worry. I'm not, and if it's my time, it's my time, but if it's not I'll be back, and I plan on coming back".

Now, as a parent and grandparent, I often think of how emotionless and almost cold that statement really was. I often wish I could put my arms around my parents again and tell them I too was worried, but that we all need to do is put our hope and trust in God and in prayer.

When each of our daughters were born I felt wow, this miracle of life is more than the doing of humankind alone, but it truly is part of God's work. The hope of life is also experienced by any of us who plant seeds or raise livestock. We plant those seeds and then realize that we need to place hope and faith in God in order to harvest the seeds that were sown.

Lord, we pray that this season of Advent is truly a season of hope, the hope that the coming of Jesus brings into our lives. Amen.

- Darrell Larsen



| **Thursday, December 6**

Hope in Despair?

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13

Hope in Despair?

How can that be? Sometimes it seems impossible.

In 2002, my Mother was unexpectedly called to her heavenly home. She was my rock of faith and was suddenly gone. What started out as one of the darkest times in my life, was a turning point in my faith. For it was over the course of my grieving, that I truly learned the importance of faith and hope in eternal life.

As with the loss of my Mother, when I look back on the dark times in my life, I see how God was always there with me, in the people he placed in my life during those times. Sometimes it's people you least expect or barely know, who are there to help you through your despair. God is always with us, no matter how dark life may seem. Hold on to that hope in despair and have faith in knowing we will be reunited with our loved ones, in life eternal.

Heavenly Father, may we remember you are here with us at all times, in all people, and through all of your creation. May we find hope in despair, see your eternal light in times of darkness, and hear your loving voice in times of need. Help us in our faith to know we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. In your Holy Name, Amen!

- Jane Knott



| **Friday, December 7**

No Fear

For Thou, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth.

Psalm 7:5

How many times have you sung “Jesus Loves Me, this I know...” Too many to count, I’m sure. But do you remember the second verse? Let me refresh your memory: “Jesus loves me, he who died, Heaven’s gates to open wide. He will wash away my sin, let his little child come in.” (Written by Anna Bartlett Warner, 1859.)

I think that many people, both very young through very old, don’t remember to keep this hope and this promise in the forefront of their minds. A lot of people think of hope as wishful thinking, but that isn’t what the Bible means by hope. “The Bible means that hope is a firm assurance regarding things that are unclear and unknown. Hope leads to comfort because of our knowledge and the promise of the resurrection.” (Bible.org)

As a child, and now as an adult, I was never afraid of death. I was blessed to have loving Christian parents who taught me from my earliest memory, through music and prayer, that I had nothing to fear if I had Jesus in my heart. At the end of every day we’d pray together:

*Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen.*

There is no fear when there’s hope in our hearts, when we have the firm assurance that we have a forever home waiting for us!

*Precious Lord, we are grateful for your gift of Jesus. Thank you for sending him into the world, for giving us hope in our hearts, and for giving us your promise of eternal life. We eagerly await his coming, especially during this holy and joyful season of Advent.
Amen.*

- Paula Monahan



| **Saturday, December 8**

Advent: Season of Hope

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:12

When is the last time you ‘abounded in hope’? And what does it even mean to “hope”? The Merriam-Webster dictionary says that to hope is to “expect with confidence.” Perhaps for many of us it is a challenge to hope—to expect with confidence—as Paul writes in this letter to the Romans. As we look around at our world, our lives, and our relationships, it may not be difficult to feel a lack of hope or to see reason for despair and discouragement.

Somewhere during the four weeks of Advent we may be distracted from hope and instead be stressed or sidelined by the many preparations for Christmas and all the festivities to come.

But look again at this one sentence from Paul’s letter. We can see that hopefulness does not depend upon our ability to “expect with confidence” alone. As we wait for the coming of the Christ Child we can be assured that our God is indeed a God of hope and by the power of the Holy Spirit will fill us with all joy and peace in believing!

God of hope, as we wait for your coming may we expect with confidence that your Holy Spirit will fill us with joy, peace and hope. Amen.

- Sue Gustner



| **Sunday, December 9**

What then must we do?

Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 5:1-2

When the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy moved from his country home to the city, the urban poverty shocked him. As a man of faith and social conscience, he struggled with how to help the poor. As a result, he wrote the book, "What Then Must We Do?" The title refers to Luke 3:10, when the crowds asked John the Baptist what they must do to show the sincerity of their repentance. In his book, Tolstoy went far beyond John the Baptist's instruction to share with those in need, but his proposals were impractical and ignored by those he sought to influence.

In a world where people continue to endure hardship and suffering, we have hope. As followers of Jesus, we have a clear answer when we ask ourselves, "What must we do?" As Paul tells us, we are to "live in love." And because Jesus came into the world, we're not left on our own to figure out what that means. We have the ultimate role model to whom we can look for guidance as we act in this world as beloved children of God.

Lord, show me this day how to share your love with those around me.

- Peter Eckstrom



| Monday, December 10

Hope for Our Planet

*But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

Amos 5:24

As I look back to my time spent on a camp staff, I circle back to one of my favorite Bible studies. Our theme verse for the summer was Amos 5:24. One of our Bible studies that summer was on Environmental Justice. As Christians, we have a responsibility to care for nature. Without our helping hand, what we enjoy today may not be here for the next generation. As Christians, it's up to us to do what we can to help God's Creation. Our faithfulness is hope for the planet.

*Dear heavenly father, thank you for providing the beauty
around us and help us to protect it.*

- Dale Gohl



| Tuesday, December 11

Hope in our Future

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11

Fifteen years ago, in early December, my Dad came home from a Holiday party for his staff (he was a long-time elementary principal in my hometown) and climbed up on the roof of my parent's house to fix some Christmas lights. While he was outside working on the lights, the phone rang, and my Mom came outside to holler at my Dad to let him know he had a phone call. He didn't answer her, so she went inside to take a message.

At the same time this happened, a family in my parents' small town decided to take a drive with their children to look at the Christmas lights around town. They drove past my parent's house for several blocks and turned onto another street. All of a sudden, the wife told her husband to turn around and go back to where they came from. She couldn't explain why, but just that he needed to turn around and go back. As they drove back toward my parent's house from the opposite direction, they saw a string of lights hanging down from my parent's porch and my Dad laying on the ground with his distinguishing white hair. The wife yelled for her husband to stop as she saw "Mr. Geuy" and ran into the house to tell my Mom to call 911.

This story has always stuck with me. How could the woman know what had happened to my Dad? She didn't, but the Holy Spirit put the thought/feeling into her mind, and thankfully she listened. If they had not turned around, we may have lost my Dad. The doctors said if it had been even 30 minutes longer than when they found him, he wouldn't have made it. He survived a surgery, two and a half months in a coma, lots of rehab, learned how to walk and talk again, and miraculously was able to walk me down the aisle on my wedding day four months after coming out of the coma.

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I am ever grateful for the woman who listened to God on her car ride. The entire experience has taught me how to listen more to him, the power of prayer, and to realize that God has a plan for everything. With a little hope and faith, he can move mountains. I am forever grateful for his love and as we get busy with the holiday season, it is important to remember to open our hearts and eyes as we wait for God to send us Jesus. Nothing can take away our hope. Even during the most trying times of our lives, remember that Jesus brings healing, and the forgiveness of sins, and “plans to give you hope and a future.”

Dear Lord, thank you for having a plan for us. Help us to listen for your voice even when we are overwhelmed, busy, tired, scared, or feeling down. Help us wait and hope for all that God will do in our lives through Christ. Amen.

- Camilla Larson



| **Wednesday, December 12**

God with Us

May the God of hope fill you with all the joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

In Luke 1:26-56, you will find the story of the first Advent—a story of hope and peace.

When I started attending First Lutheran, I made time to attend the Holden Evening Prayer Service during Advent. Whether it was because the musical composition sounded familiar to me, or not, it gave me hope, and a sense of peace. The reflections that go with it help settle me on a sure foundation. We need God's sure foundation now more than ever!

During this Advent season, may the blessings of God shower upon you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

- Claudette Moran



| Thursday, December 13

Let God take Control

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you.

Psalm 56:3

These days there is a lot of fear going around our world. Whether it be fear for others, fear for ourselves, or fear for the human race in general. In these times of fear, put your trust in God and let him show you that you can turn these times of fear into hope.

I get scared a lot, and with my life picking up and with my schedule getting hectic with college visits and big tests and grades, I need to take a step back and figure out how to turn these moments of fear into moments of hope. One method that works for me and may help you to relax and have no fear is to go to an empty room and just sit and think with God for a while, sometimes talking aloud, but mostly sitting in silence and letting God deal with your fears and show you how to move past those fears. To wrap it up, silent reflection is a very good way of letting God take control and show you how to handle fears.

Lord, be present in this silent moment, remind me you are in control. Amen.

- Will Riitters



| **Friday, December 14**

Rest

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

What an invitation! “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” In times of darkness, remembering this verse often leads me directly to God. As Christians, we can be comforted knowing we are not alone; we are not left to figure everything out by ourselves. All the burdens of the world are not ours to bear. That is the gift of faith.

I see it as opportunity, maybe even a luxury, that Jesus offers his followers nothing more than, “Come to me.” As a believer, I know my faith rests on the hopeful promises of God. “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

Advent is the time to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child who will, in time, die on the cross for our sins—suffer in our place. What hope Jesus brings as he proclaims, “I am the resurrection and the life; those who believe in me, though they die, shall live” (John 11:15).

Thank you, God, for always being there to receive my burdens and to lighten my load. During this season of Advent, allow all Christians to be open to the Holy Spirit as promises to Jesus' birth are revealed. Amen.

- Elizabeth Rydeen



| **Saturday, December 15**

The Dawn of a New Day

But as for me, I will sing about your power. Each morning I will sing with joy about your unfailing love. For you have been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress.

Psalm 59:16

I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word.

Psalm 119:147

There's something special about a sunrise. Most mornings my alarm clock wakes me before 5 a.m. While it often takes a bit of motivation to get myself out of bed to meet my friends, once I am outside on my run, I find it is one of the most precious parts of my day. I cannot help but to see God's beauty and hope in the mornings. And for me, when I see the sun rise, it reminds me of new beginnings. I find that I am filled with hope that light has been shed on a new day, with new possibilities and new potential.

But sometimes, with the chaotic schedules and juggling daily activities of my family of five, there are days that I seem to be in never-ending darkness. When I am overwhelmed, confused, unsure, and restless, I often struggle to see the dawn of a new day. It is then that I rely on those friends who meet me at 5:10 a.m. to encourage me with hope to push my faith to the front and remember that God is faithful and he will not leave me in this darkness.

I believe that hope is one of the most important gifts we can give to another person. When we bring hope, we bring life. God has given us the gift of hope every time the sky erupts with light at the break of dawn—just as my running mates give me hope that the finish line is just around the corner. The reliability that the sun will rise in the morning gives me hope. It has never failed coming up on those morning runs. Sure there are mornings where you can't see it because of the clouds, but it is still there.

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God reminds us over and over again in the scripture that he is more reliable than the sun, our hope doesn't hinge on the assurance of the sunrise, but on the faithfulness of the Risen Son. I encourage you to watch a sunrise during this Season of Advent, it will bridge your way to new hope!

*Thank you, Lord, for the hope you send with each new sunrise.
Your mercies and compassions are new every morning! Amen.*

- Debra Yliniemi-Ahlin



| Sunday, December 16

Find Your Strength Within

God will help you overflow with hope in him through the Holy Spirit's power within you.

Romans 15:13

“Perhaps you should look elsewhere.” I heard those words numerous times during a series of medical school interviews, and I was growing weary. With only one more interview remaining, the pressure of failure was mounting. The backup plan had been graduate research in microbiology, but I didn’t want that. I wanted to be a doctor. After failing to demonstrate what made me unique from all the other applicants, I was starting to lose hope.

Prior to the last interview I went home to the family farm to see my parents, seeking encouraging words. While helping my father string a barbed wire through the woods, he commented, “Well... I bet none of those city kids could build a fence in the buckthorn like you.”

Unfortunately, when I met my interviewer in her cluttered office at the university, I still felt unprepared. The MD/PhD asked the same questions they all did, and I answered her with the same well-polished answers that I am sure everyone else had. Finally, she sprang the dreaded question that ended every interview. “So, what makes you different than all the others?”

Out of frustration, and facetiously, I proclaimed, “I’ve picked more rocks and fixed more fences than all of your other applicants.” There. I said it. I sealed my fate with that poor response. I went with the only thing I knew for certain—my background set me apart. The strengths I needed to overcome obstacles, like a good work ethic, commonsense, and an ability to build rapport, were put there long before, by my parents and my Creator.

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Roughly twenty years later I was summoned to the ICU to see a Franciscan Sister who had taken a turn for the worse. We had grown to know one another very well over the years but now her time was running short. As I held her hand, she described growing up on the farm. She, too, had moved on to touch others in a positive way, offering hope to those in need. Nearing the end of our time together she asked if I would pray with her. I invite you to join me as I share with you what she said.

“Dear Lord, continue to bless us with the strengths that you place within us, so that we may overcome the obstacles we face as we bring your healing ministry to others.”

- Mark Moe



| Monday, December 17

Longing Fulfilled

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

Proverbs 13:12

During Advent we Lutherans remember the hope Christ Jesus brought to the world. As Christmas gets closer, we get a little nearer to the moment when light returns, and we start to think about our own personal hopes and longings for the year ahead.

Christ's life brought hope to my world when, as a 6th grader, I lay in my bed feeling more terrible than I'd ever felt in my life. We all know how easy it can be to dismiss hope, lose hope, or even forget the possibility of hope. At that point, hopelessness had entered my life head-on and in full force.

I wondered if I'd get through the intense feelings. My thoughts turned to my responsibilities. Out of the gloom, I thought of the Christmas Eve service. I would be an acolyte for it, lighting the candles, sitting up front behind the pastor, listening to the hymns. With those thoughts, I found hope returning. I could get beyond my sleeplessness.

Reading the proverb above, you might find it puzzling. Is hope the same as longing? What kind of "heartsickness" does it mean? And how does fulfillment create a "tree of life"?

Lord, help us to search our hearts, minds, and souls for answers to our questions. Amen.

- Jonathan Wichmann



| Tuesday, December 18

Christmas is Hope

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11

Christmas is a time of hope; this is about Jesus coming to bring everyone to heaven.

I Hope that everyone has a great, great Christmas.

I hope that nobody argues.

I hope that everyone receives gifts.

I hope that everyone has a good, good meal.

I hope that everyone has happiness.

I pray that everybody can pray that needs prayer. Everybody needs prayer.

Dear God, dear God. Give everyone a good Christmas. Amen.

- Jeff Bigalke



| **Wednesday, December 19**

Confident Hope

Pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him.

Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

Growing up with my two siblings and two close cousins, Christmas was a very special time for all of us. Led by my cousin, Kyle, the 5 of us would prepare and practice a family Christmas program for weeks leading up to Christmas Eve in our grandparent's basement. We had costumes, lines, and music that we would sing. We didn't have scripts, but I can assure you that the several practices between Thanksgiving and Christmas allowed us to perform our parts to perfection (Kyle made sure of that). As we got older, we would play our musical instruments although, with a quartet of three trumpets and a saxophone, I'm sure that the music was only questionably good.

As Christmas Eve arrived, we would first attend our church service complete with the Nativity scene and lines memorized by all of our classmates. Finally, we would then go to Grandpa Ray and Grandma Dees' house for the Christmas play that we practiced for weeks. We would change into our costumes and perform our show with rave reviews from the audience. Some years it was a repeat of the Nativity story complete with a manger and, in 1976, my brother Matt filling the empty manger at 7 weeks of age.

In all of this preparation, we knew that we needed to patiently accomplish certain things in hope for what is so important in a small child's eyes—the presents. In addition to our Christmas play preparations, we also spent months circling pictures in the Sears and JCPenney catalogs that came to our house. We hoped for great things that surely were not a part of the Christmas budget for our parents. Nonetheless, we all confidently circled our wish list desires and prepared for our family Christmas play.

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Today, life is different, and yet so much the same. Our kids search Amazon and hope for treasures in much the same way. They participate in concerts, recitals, and shows. They wait, they prepare, and they hope just as we did. In many ways, I am still like that young girl from Swanville, knowing the prerequisites that need to be completed before we get to see what's in the brightly colored presents wrapped under the tree. Those prerequisites now require me to bake, to buy gifts, wrap them, and make plans so that, when the celebration is at hand, all is perfect just like our Christmas plays performed in our youth. However, now the preparation and those things that I need to patiently accomplish are so different in my adult eyes. I hope, I pray, and I wait patiently for different things. I hope, pray and wait for the coming of Jesus. This older version of that same girl from Swanville now sits in the front pew at church gazing at the empty manger. I wait for the coming of a baby who changes everything. I pray that his arrival will transform me and my family, and I hang on to the hope of better things that only a baby named Jesus can bring. I pray that your Advent season is filled with the confident hope that only your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ can provide for you and your family.

*Dear Jesus, may we confidently hope in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in the power that will soon fill the empty manger.
Amen.*

- Michelle Dahlberg



| Thursday, December 20

Rest in Hope

I will find my rest in God alone. He is the One who gives me hope."

Psalm 62:5

As I sit in a chair at the University of Cincinnati, receiving my 34th infusion, I cannot help but feel hopeful. I am continually surrounded by people who are fighting for their lives but are consistently and constantly filled with hope. I remember Gary, a cancer patient whom I met on my very first infusion. He was a pancreatic cancer patient who was in his 3rd year fighting this disease. As he started to lose his battle he never lost hope. Although he had hope that his cancer would be cured he always had a reassuring hope that if he wasn't cured he would go to be with the Lord. I gave Gary a birthday card with a cross bookmark for his 56th and last birthday. It was a small gesture but to Gary it meant everything. I remember him saying as I turned to leave his room, "Sometimes hope is all we have". Gary demonstrated Paul's words in Romans 5:4: "The strength to go on produces character. Character produces hope."

During this time of Advent, hope is even more apparent with the impending celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. He came into the world so that we may have the hope of eternal life with him. Advent reminds us once again of the promise God made about our salvation. This promise is the true hope beyond any other hope we have. During this Advent season, let us be more encouraged than ever before by our faith that the hope we are striving for each and every day lies in the promise of eternal life with Christ Jesus!

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time of Advent—the time for all of us to embrace hope. Let us slow down our busy lives to enjoy this season of preparation for the birth of our Savior. Let those who are fighting for their very own lives be encouraged by the hope of eternal life with you Lord God. Sometimes hope is all we have. All this we pray in your name. Amen.

- Craig Ahlin



| Friday, December 21

Hope in His Presence

The Lord will keep you from all harm; he will watch over your life. The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Psalm 121:7-8

When I was a little girl in South Dakota we never missed going to Gramma & Grampa Ring's farm for Christmas. My mother had four sisters and two brothers, and my dad was an only child. He lost his mother when he was a freshman in college, so he loved being an adopted member of this large brood. Gramma Ring loved him like a son too, so of course there was never an argument when we all loaded up to go stay at the farm.

Christmas consisted of attending the candlelight service at the Lutheran church in town. When we got home, all the grandkids gathered around the piano and I would accompany everyone on Christmas songs. We ended the night reading the Bible and singing "Away in a Manger" and "Silent Night."

Before going to bed, we'd gather at the kitchen table for Gram's homemade chocolate sauce and ice cream. After a few nights spent with everyone, we would load the car up and start our trek home. Gram and Gramp had a big picture window facing the road. Driving out of the driveway, we would look, and everyone would be standing in the window, waving goodbye. I can still see them, and it always made me so happy. I knew we were loved and, even though we'd drive off and could no longer see them, I felt as if they were with us. On the journey home, my Mom would have us all sing together and I'd look up at the moon and the stars and feel that God was looking down and protecting us as we traveled. I still do that today. I love to look up into the vast sky. I feel so small yet so protected by the Holy Spirit.

*Dear Lord, never let me forget that you keep watch over us in all we do. Help me trust that you are in "all my comings and goings."
Your love is great!*

- Karla Jensen



| **Saturday, December 22**

Love is...

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

1 Corinthians 13:4-13

It's easy to see this scripture as a common wedding verse, but look closer at it. This verse could easily be both a reminder for us of the nature of love and a picture of loved lived out by those in the Christmas story. Imagine Mary as she was told she is pregnant with Christ, getting mocked by others and still replying with kindness. Imagine Joseph, comforting Mary, as he told his family he will still marry her and raise the child. Imagine Elizabeth as her child leapt for joy in her womb, knowing the other child was near. Imagine others at this time, not hearing these words, but seeing them as they came to life and were acted out as Mary and Joseph did what they could to make others know about Jesus and what his role would be, even before he was born and doing the works of God.

During the Christmas season, people may go through a range of emotions. Some find joy and happiness. Others might find sadness and a time of transition for various reasons. Through it all, we must remember the reason for Christmas—love. Christ is the ultimate love, and he was born unto us to save us all. Just as Mary and Joseph waited patiently for this perfect bundle of love to be born, we too must be patient and hopeful as we wait for that day when Christ will come to us. Let us show one another a true form of love as we realize that while the time of Christmas might bring different emotions to different people, we can all gather around the same love and hope—Jesus Christ.

Awesome God, thank you for sending your son to show us the truest form of love, the love and hope that you give us each and every day. Amen.

- Diana Kempenich