



# **The Work of Christmas:**

## **A Reflection and Missions Guide**

### **During the 12 Days of Christmas**



When the song of the angels is stilled,  
when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and princes are home,  
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,  
the work of Christmas begins:  
to find the lost,  
to heal the broken,  
to feed the hungry,  
to release the prisoner,  
to rebuild the nations,  
to bring peace among the people,  
to make music in the heart.

-Howard Thurman

From *The Mood of Christmas & Other Celebrations*

## **The Work of Christmas**

### **A Reflection and Missions Guide during the 12 days of Christmas**

#### **Introduction:**

The season between Christmas and Epiphany is known as Christmastide, or the 12 days of Christmas. It is also a time where we remember that the Work of Christmas is just beginning as we reflect on the hope that arrives with the birth of Christ on earth. We remember the ways in which Christ taught us to care for the poor, to free the oppressed, and to love God and to love neighbor.

Throughout the 12 Days of Christmas, the Transforming the World Program Area at First Church invites you to reflect on how to participate in that work. We are comprised of our Urban Outreach committee, our Church & Society / Social Justice committee, our Global Missions committee, and our Climate Justice Working Group. On the following pages, you will find passages from the daily lectionary readings alongside reflections on social justice issues that are important to First Church, as we discuss how to engage in the work of Missions so that we can live out our faith by seeking peace and justice in the World.

Special Thanks to members of our Transforming the World Program Area that have provided reflections and steps to take action. And we are grateful for the Transforming the World committees. The work that these committees do all year long inspires this Work of Christmas Reflection and Missions Guide.

## **Day 1: December 25<sup>th</sup> (Christmas Day)**

**Author:** *Cynthia Lockwood, Global Missions Committee Team Member*

**Focus:** *A Place at the Inn*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 52:7-10 (NRSVeu)

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

### **Reflection:**

People may know of Jean Ferguson as the founder of our Shared Breakfast program, but she also did other projects at First Church too. In 2003, she realized that Seattle was locked up on Christmas causing a lack of places for a person to find warmth and shelter, similar to what Mary and Joseph found when they got into Bethlehem that night long ago.

With her guidance on Christmas, First Church became a safe, warm place where people could read the paper, snack on Christmas treats, sip on hot beverages, and watch some TV. I knew Jean from Disciple Class. I found myself being “added” to her list of volunteers. My assignment: TV area. I often crocheted while watching TV, so I brought that along with me. I soon found this space to be a gathering of women laughing and talking. I no longer felt like a volunteer.

Jean told me that she looked up to see me crocheting and the camaraderie that had formed saying it had nearly brought her to tears. Her goal had been to provide a place where people could feel included... and at home.

That year I was having a very dark, lonely Christmas. I had always shared Christmas with my friend Keith, but he succumbed to AIDS the previous year. This year, I luckily spent Christmas with my UK “family.” But in 2003, I found myself with no one to celebrate with and no place to go. I woke up Christmas morning to no Xmas tree, no stocking lovingly filled with oranges, new socks, a new toothbrush, a \$1 lottery ticket and gold chocolate coins.

That evening as I was walking home to my tiny studio apartment on Capitol Hill, I realized that I too had been in need of a “A Day at the Inn”. I wondered if this was why I was “added” to Jean’s volunteer list?

### **Reflection Questions:**

People have different paths and journeys, how have they affected you? Have you ever found yourself just as much in need as the people you are serving?

### **Prayer:**

Please God help guide us through these journeys and allow us to reflect on how they have helped us. Alone is a common journey and felt most during Christmas. Please allow us to help others as we help ourselves. Amen.

**Day 2: December 26<sup>th</sup> (St. Stephen's Day)**  
**Author: Reagan Page, Transforming the World Co-Chair**  
**Focus: Gender Justice**

**Scripture:** Luke 1:46-55 (NRSVue)

**Mary's Song of Praise:** And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for God has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is God's name; indeed, God's mercy is for those who fear God from generation to generation.

God has shown strength with God's arm; God has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. God has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. God has come to the aid of God's child Israel, in remembrance of God's mercy, according to the promise God made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to God's descendants forever."

**Reflection:**

The Magnificat is such a powerful message from Mary that is often forgotten (or erased) as many women's accomplishments are. She would have been looked down upon for being pregnant and unmarried (as many women still are). Her acknowledgement of what she was doing for the world is often downplayed (e.g. Mary Did You Know), but the Magnificat praises God for what they do through her.

Women are less likely to be political or workplace leaders, less likely to complete education, less likely to own land, have less legal rights than men, are more likely to experience gender-based violence, more likely to face hunger, and more likely to feel the effects of climate change. There are plenty of powerful women like Mary in the world who aren't able to contribute because they don't have the tools, education, finances, rights, or life.

**Take Action:**

Educate yourself! Some of my favorite media regarding gender justice is Half the Sky (book/movie), Equal Means Equal (movie), and the Council on Foreign Relations podcast episode "Who Runs the World?... Not Women"

**Prayer:**

Help our souls to magnify the Lord and rejoice in our savior. Let us recognize the blessing that Mary actively received and lift up the lowly that she speaks of. Amen.

**Day 3: December 27<sup>th</sup> (St. John's Day)**  
**Author: Jackie Celin, Transforming the World Co-Chair**  
**Focus: Short Term Mission**

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 2:1-8 (NRSVue)

**Hannah's Prayer:** Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God. My mouth derides my enemies because I rejoice in your victory. There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.

Talk no more so very proudly; let not arrogance come from your mouth, for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by God actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.

The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The Lord kills and brings to life; God brings down to Sheol and raises up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; God brings low; God also exalts. God raises up the poor from the dust; God lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them God has set the world.

**Reflection:**

Earlier this month, my former Associate Pastor from my time as a youth passed away. She was very important to my Christian formation, having a major role leading and teaching the youth at our church, and taking us through our Confirmation. She taught us how to live a life devoted to God by treating one another in our world with respect. She showed us how to share the love and compassion of Christ. She also instilled in us the importance of engaging in acts of service to our community and to those in need, by giving back of ourselves to do the work God calls us to do. I was fortunate in my youth to be able to participate in several short-term missions trips with her, and even into early adulthood.

While I was in Haiti about ten years ago on a 12-month Mission Volunteer assignment, she led a group of youth as a Michigan District Superintendent, to one of our partner United Methodist organizations in Haiti. I was grateful for the opportunity to meet up with her and her team for a couple of days. I will always remember that as my last mission trip with her, glad to see her in action once again, being a Christian role model for the next generation of disciples.

Short term mission is a cornerstone of the United Methodist Church. It isn't only about helping others, it is also about the ways we are formed in our faith and in our relationship with God as we recognize the injustices that exist in our world and our active participation to create change. It is also about building relationships and connections with each other, both with those that are on our team, and with those who we are in ministry with, wherever we might be going, because we recognize that each person brings their own gifts and blessings to the work.

**Reflection Questions and Take Action:**

- Who are some of the people in your life that have been critical to your Christian formation?
- What have they taught you about engaging in service work?
- Have you ever participated in a Short-Term Mission trip? If so, what did you learn about yourself on that trip and your relationship with God and one another?
- If you have never participated in Short-Term Mission before, is this something you would like to consider?

The Global Missions team is working on creating Mission Trip opportunities for 2024 and looking ahead to 2025.

We are considering planning a week-long trip to the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) depot in Louisiana to help them prepare the Hygiene and Disaster Response Kits that churches from across the country donate and send in.

We are also considering a trip with Sierra Service Projects to Southern Oregon that is focused on community-based projects that make necessary home repairs accessible to historically underserved residents.

Further, knowing the challenges with committing to a whole week, we are also looking into opportunities for some long weekend mission retreats, possibly to the coast for beach clean-up activities, or to Detroit to work with a United Methodist based organization, Cass Community Social Services.

Please click the link below to let us know if you have any interest in any of these opportunities. We would love to hear from you!

<https://firstchurchseattle.breezechms.com/form/f500d3>

**Prayer:**

Holy One, we give you thanks for those people you have placed in our lives that have taught us how to follow you. Give us the courage and strength to step out of our comfort zones and try something new so that we can, together, seek ways to care for the most vulnerable in our midst. Amen.

**Day 4: December 28<sup>th</sup> (Holy Innocents Day)**  
**Author: Reagan Page, Transforming the World Program Area**  
**Focus: Immigration**

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 31:15-17 (NRSVue)

Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more. Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, says the Lord: they shall come back from the land of the enemy; there is hope for your future, says the Lord: your children shall come back to their own country.

**Reflection:**

Seattle is a city with a 20 percent immigrant population, from people who are undocumented to people who now have citizenship. Many have fled their homes in search of a better life, but are met here with xenophobia, racism, detention, or deportation.

As the children of God, we are called to welcome the foreigner and provide for them. This can be through a variety of ways, be it helping refugees resettle, teaching English and citizenship classes, or advocating for a more just immigration system.

**Take Action:**

Advocate for the just treatment of immigrants, no matter their status.

There are a lot of great organizations in Washington that help with immigration rights, including the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (<https://www.nwirp.org/>) and One America (<https://weareoneamerica.org/>)

**Prayer:**

Lord, help your children find safety wherever they are. Give us the strength to work for the safety of those who are without. Amen.

**Day 5: December 29<sup>th</sup>**  
**Author: *Transforming the World Program Area***  
**Focus: *LGBTQIA+ Justice***

**Scripture:** Matthew 12:46-50 (NRSVue)

***The True Kindred of Jesus:*** While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, “Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”

But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” And pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

**Reflection:**

Our United Methodist Social Principles state, “we affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We therefore work toward societies in which each person’s value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened.” (Social Principles, Section 162). Sadly, many within our own denomination haven’t held to these principles and have instead caused much harm and discrimination to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Our General Board of Church & Society writes, “The United Methodist Church is in a time of deep discernment over how to recognize and welcome LGBTQ people as part of the life and ministry of the Church. Tragically, many communities have failed to guarantee basic human rights and instead – all too often under the pretense of religious belief – institutionalize and codify discrimination against LGBTQ people. As a church we “deplore acts of hate and violence against groups or persons based on ... sexual orientation [or] gender identity.” (Social Principles, Section 162).

According to the United Nations, 76 countries criminalize consensual same sex relationships and in seven countries the penalty may be death. Bullying and threats of violence against people who are, or are perceived to be, LGBTQ contribute to cultures of fear and shame. As a result, LGBTQ people have a higher risk of suicide and a higher risk of sexual and gender-based violence. Discrimination and dehumanization by individuals, institutions and societies, rob LGBTQ people of their God-given dignity.

As followers of Jesus Christ — whose ministry embraced those who society rejected and marginalized — we commit ourselves to being a church in ministry for and with all people.” (<https://www.umcjustice.org/what-we-care-about/civil-and-human-rights/lgbtq-rights>)

**Reflection Questions and Take Action:**

We are a reconciling church, but did you know that you can also become a reconciling individual? You can sign-up with the Reconciling Ministries movement at the link below. (<https://rmnetwork.org/rum/>).

The General Board of Church & Society also suggests doing the following three items:



- Listen openly to the stories and experiences of people whose lived experience is different than your own.
- Create safe spaces for young people to talk about their Christian faith where they are supported as they navigate challenges they experience growing into adulthood (e.g. dating, bullying, peer pressure, drug use, etc.).
- Advocate for laws protecting the dignity and rights of people of all sexual orientations.

**Prayer:**

Marvelous Wonder, we are grateful for the ways you have created each of us in your own image. Help us to live each day in the joy of knowing we are each your beloved child. Help us to see this in one another always. Amen.

**Day 6: December 30<sup>th</sup>**  
**Author: Tom Carlson, Climate Justice Working Group Chair**  
**Focus: Creation/Earth**

**Scripture:** Psalm 148:7-14 (NRSVue)

Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all  
deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his  
command!

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Wild  
animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!  
Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of  
the earth! Young men and women alike, old and young  
together!

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for God's name alone  
is exalted; God's glory is above earth and heaven.

God has raised up a horn for God's people, praise for all  
God's faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to God.  
Praise the Lord!

**Reflection:**

If your house was on fire, would you not rush to save it? If you were diagnosed with a life-threatening disease, would you not seek a cure?

Such is the predicament of humanity as we lag in taking action to stem climate change and our destruction of nature. The Earth is on fire, and nature is losing its ability to sustain life. We are hurtling toward an unlivable future. (See [2023 Global Tipping Points Report](#), [UN Secretary-General's Speech at World Climate Action Summit](#), ) This is the greatest moral challenge that humanity has ever faced.

Christians and people of all other faith traditions trust in a loving Creator who has entrusted us to live in harmony with creation. We believe “the Earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof” (Psalm 24), and not ours (or our rulers) to exploit. We can draw on this faith for vision, guidance, courage, and strength to take action. In [Climate Church-Climate World](#), Rev. Jim Antal calls on us to embrace a shared calling with new approaches to worship, preaching, witnessing, and other spiritual practices that honor creation and cultivate hope.

Though too little continues to be done, there will be even greater damage if we don’t act. We can rise to the challenge. [The Sentences of the COP 28 Deal Won’t Save the Planet–We Will](#). We can add our voices and leadership to a climate justice movement that is blossoming locally and around the globe. We can help prevent things from getting much worse, adapt to climate change impacts, and demand justice for the loss suffered by the most vulnerable and least responsible.

**Take Action:**

Follow a local climate justice organization such as [350 Seattle](#), or Third Act Washington Working Group: <https://thirdact.org/working-groups/puget-sound/>

Track and advocate for climate-responsible legislation in the January-February 2024 session of the Washington State legislature. Sign up for weekly alerts from the 350WA Civic Action Team: <https://www.350wa.org/cat>

**Prayer:**

Loving Creator, we ask you to stir our hearts into action. As global temperatures increase, inspire us with ways we can make a difference in our homes, church congregations, communities, and the world around us. We pray for your prompting where we can do more to love our neighbor. Amen.

**Day 7: December 31<sup>th</sup> (New Year's Eve)**  
**Author: *Transforming the World Program Area***  
**Focus: *Racial Justice***

**Scripture:** Luke 2:25-35 (NRSVue)

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

**Reflection:**

The United Women in Faith (formerly United Methodist Women) of the United Methodist Church Racial Justice committee states; "United Women in Faith is deeply committed to the ongoing work of racial justice. We strive to be in right relationship with one another; we work together for the transformation of church and world, following the teaching and example of Jesus Christ."

These are the ways they plan to unite their efforts within the United Methodist Church to put that vision into action, as United Methodists in every place across the land:

1. Eliminate all forms of institutional racism in the total ministry of the church, giving special attention to those institutions that we support, beginning with their employment policies, purchasing practices, environmental policies and availability of services and facilities.
2. Create opportunities in local churches to deal honestly with the existing racist attitudes and social distance between members, deepening the Christian commitment to be the church where all racial groups and economic classes come together.
3. Increase efforts to recruit people of all races into the membership of The United Methodist Church and provide leadership development opportunities without discrimination.
4. Establish workshops and seminars in local churches to study, understand and appreciate the historical and cultural contributions of each race to the church and community.
5. Raise local churches' awareness of the continuing needs for equal education, housing, employment, medical care and environmental justice for all members of the community,

and to create opportunities to work for these things across racial lines.

6. Work for the development and implementation of national and international policies to protect the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of all people such as through support of the ratification of United Nations covenants on human rights.
7. Support and participate in the worldwide struggle for liberation in church and community.
8. Facilitate nomination and election processes that include all racial groups by employing a system that prioritizes leadership opportunities of people from communities that are disproportionately impacted by the ongoing legacy of racial injustice, and use measures to align our vision for racial justice with actions that accelerate racial equality.  
(<https://uwfaith.org/what-we-do/serve-and-advocate/racial-justice/>)

### **Reflection Questions and Take Action:**

What actions above resonate with you?

And, Plan a day with a small group of friends or family to visit a museum that addresses issues of racism and colonization, such as;

- the Duwamish Long House in West Seattle (<https://www.duwamishtribe.org/longhouse>),
- Northwest African American Museum in Seattle (<https://www.naamnw.org/>),
- the Wing Luke Museum on pan-Asian art and history in Seattle's International District (<https://www.wingluke.org/>),
- or the White River Valley Museum in Auburn (<https://www.wrvmuseum.org/>)

### **Prayer:**

Prince of Peace, we confess the ways we have caused harm and ask for forgiveness. Help us learn about past wrongs and help us to do the hard work we need to do to change our systems and institutions so that all are treated equally, as we learn how to share your love and compassion with everyone. Amen.

**Day 8: January 1<sup>st</sup> (New Year's Day/Holy Name of Jesus Day)**  
**Author: Katie Harris, Global Missions Committee Team Member**  
**Focus: Food Justice**

**Scripture:** Luke 2:15-21 (NRSVue)

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."

So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

**Reflection:**

A central part of the nativity story is the coming of the humble shepherds, the first visitors to pay homage to the Christ Child. While shepherding was undoubtedly a commonplace occupation in the time of Jesus' birth, our modern lives in a city like Seattle often feel disconnected from a traditional land-based livelihood such as this. Consider your own family - how many generations back do you have to go to come across a farmer or pastoralist?

Nevertheless, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization found that in 2019, 1.23 billion people were engaged in food and livestock agriculture or in food production systems worldwide. More than three times that figure, or almost half the world's population, live in households linked to agrifood systems. Even here in Washington, agrifood systems provide 164,000 jobs (WSDA 2022).

The disassociation of modern consumption from the systems of production of our food and other agricultural goods is related to many social issues, from workforce inequality to insufficient nutrition to pollution, land degradation, and increasing carbon emissions. Reintegrating ourselves into these food systems is one way we can do the work of God.

**Take Action:**

Make a New Year's resolution of something you will do in 2024 to further food justice. Here are some ideas:

- Support an organization that works for farmworkers' rights
- Donate to an international organization that benefits farmers or combats malnutrition
- Commit to making local, seasonal choices at the grocery store
- Grow a vegetable garden or start a backyard chicken coop
- Make a meal plan to enhance your family's nutrition and/or to eliminate food waste

**Prayer:**

Give thanks before a meal today: Lord, we thank you for the food set before us today. We thank you for the land and water that enabled it to grow, for the hands that harvested it, and for the

hands that prepared it. We ask that you bless this food to the nourishment of our bodies, and our bodies to your service. Amen.

**Day 9: January 2<sup>nd</sup>**  
**Author: *Transforming the World Program Area***  
**Focus: *World Peace***

**Scripture:** James 3:13-18 (NRSVue)

**Two Kinds of Wisdom:** Who is wise and knowledgeable among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be arrogant and lie about the truth.

This is not wisdom that comes down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

**Reflection:**

Our General Board of Church and Society (a United Methodist Agency) writes; “We know the presence of political and social turmoil can be caused by a number of issues including economic disparity, environmental degradation, gender inequality, racism and xenophobia, and illness and disease.

If we want peace, we must be committed to disrupting these conditions and systems that perpetuate injustice. The United Methodist Social Principles state, “As disciples of Christ, we are called to love our enemies, seek justice, and serve as reconcilers of conflict. We must insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to work together to resolve by peaceful means every dispute that arises between or among them.” (Social Principles 165.C).

If we are to live into our mission of transforming the world, we must prioritize collaboration among nations, work to reduce the use and need for weapons, and foster just, equitable and durable solutions to the root causes of conflict.” (<https://www.umcjustice.org/what-we-care-about/peace-with-justice>)

**Take Action:**

As Christians, we engage in faith-based advocacy to resolve injustices we see in the world. You are encouraged to fill out this Action Alert to Tell Congress to call for a ceasefire in Israel and Palestine. (<https://www.umcjustice.org/news-and-stories/action-alert-tell-congress-to-call-for-a-ceasefire-in-israel-and-palestine-1858>)

**Prayer:**

Merciful Lord, We pray today for peace everywhere. Give us the wisdom we need to resolve our conflicts with conversation and not weapons. Help us to see we are each precious in your sight. Amen.



**Day 10: January 3<sup>rd</sup>**  
**Author: Sue Porter, Former Missionary,**  
**Church & Society and Urban Outreach Committee Member**  
**Focus: Voting Rights**

**Scripture:** James 4:1-10 (The Message)

**Get Serious:** Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves. You lust for what you don't have and are willing to kill to get it. You want what isn't yours and will risk violence to get your hands on it.

You wouldn't think of just asking God for it, would you? And why not? Because you know you'd be asking for what you have no right to. You're spoiled children, each wanting your own way.

You're cheating on God. If all you want is your own way, flirting with the world every chance you get, you end up enemies of God and God's way. And do you suppose God doesn't care? The proverb has it that "God's a fiercely jealous lover." And what God gives in love is far better than anything else you'll find. It's common knowledge that "God goes against the willful proud; God gives grace to the willing humble."

So let God work God's will in you. Yell a loud no to the Devil and watch him make himself scarce. Say a quiet yes to God and God will be there in no time. Quit dabbling in sin. Purify your inner life. Quit playing the field. Hit bottom, and cry your eyes out. The fun and games are over. Get serious, really serious. Get down on your knees before God; it's the only way you'll get on your feet.

**Reflection:**

Voting rights and voting access is of national importance. Our democracy depends on it and there are many examples of schemes that violate a person's right to vote or dilute a group of people's votes. Some of the strategies are obvious while others are subtle.

**Take Action:**

What can you do? The Church and Society/Social Justice Committee is sponsoring a Postcard Writing Lunch and Learn Sunday, February 4<sup>th</sup> from 12noon – 1pm. The postcards were developed by Reclaim Our Vote (<https://www.centerforcommonground.org/reclaim-our-vote>) and go to people who are having their voting access denied.

ROV is a grassroots, mostly volunteer-run campaign that focuses on increasing Black voter turnout through post-carding, texting, and phone banking. Presenting will be Megan Krampitz and Lisa Wyler, the two Washington State organizers for Center for Common Ground/Reclaim Our Vote. They will talk about the upcoming primary elections being targeted for the campaign and why they are important. They will also tell us about the other activities ROV does throughout the year to educate and support communities in their efforts to engage people in the political process.

At the end they will explain the postcard format and we'll have a chance to write postcards ourselves! Join us!

**Prayer:**

Creator God, you are a God of inclusion and not exclusion. We can see examples in Jesus who heals those considered untouchable or speaks to the outcast. We thank you for the examples of your love and acceptance of everyone in your kin-dom. We pray that those wanting to prevent others from exercising their right to participate in democracy see the harm it does to us all. We

pray that the postcards we write let people know that their voice is important and their vote needs to be counted. Amen.

**Day 11: January 4<sup>th</sup>**  
**Author: Jackie Celin, *Transforming the World Co-Chair***  
**Focus: *Advocacy through Partnership***

**Scripture:** Proverbs 3:1-12 (NRSVue)

**Admonition to Trust and Honor God:** My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will give you. Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will find favor and high regard in the sight of God and of people.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge God, and God will make straight your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body.

Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine. My child, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of God's reproof, for the Lord reproves the one God loves, as a parent the son in whom God delights.

**Reflection:**

We are stronger when we partner together! One of First Church's partner organizations is the Faith Action Network (FAN) in Washington State. FAN is a "statewide, multifaith partnership striving for just, compassionate, and sustainable communities through courageous advocacy and public action." (<https://fanwa.org/>)

Over 167 faith communities across the state partner together to tackle the big issues in our state as we fight for economic justice, climate justice, healthcare access, gun responsibility, immigrant rights, reforming the criminal justice system, and so much more.

We participate in that work in many ways. One way is by attending Interfaith Advocacy Day, sponsored through FAN, at our State Capitol in Olympia where we get to meet with our State Senators and Congress members to tell them the issues that matter to us, as people of faith. It is a day of learning, of partnering, and a day of action.

**Take Action:**

Plan ahead and Participate in Faith Action Network's Interfaith Advocacy Day 2024, taking place on February 8th at our State Capitol in Olympia.

Click here to register for the event or to register for online learning opportunities with FAN in January, including, the FAN Legislative Preview on Jan 7th, and Advocacy 101 on Jan 10th or 11th. (<https://fanwa.org/interfaith-advocacy-day/>)

**Prayer:**

Star-Child, guide us in your just and righteous ways. Give us strength for the journey as we advocate for those that are too often pushed to the margins. Help us to see how the work of the many amplifies the work of the few as we seek together our common goals centered through our faith. Amen.

**Day 12: January 5<sup>th</sup>**  
**Author: Church & Society / Social Justice Committee**  
**Focus: Homelessness/Houselessness and Hunger**

**Scripture:** Proverbs 22:1-9 (NRSVue)

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold. The rich and the poor have this in common: the Lord is the maker of them all. The clever see danger and hide, but the simple go on and suffer for it.

The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life. Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; the cautious will keep far from them. Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.

The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender. Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of anger will fail. Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.

**Reflection:**

At First Church, one of our four areas of focus is: "Seeking to act in solidarity with the Hungry and Homeless." We feel called to work towards issues addressing food and housing security. Later this month, on Sunday January 21st, our Church and Society / Social Justice committee will be hosting a Transforming the World Quarterly Event after worship with a focus on homelessness and houselessness in Seattle.

Melinda Raebyne will be our guest speaker as she talks about her recent documentary film, "Stories of US: Camp Second Chance." Attendees will be given the link ahead of the event to watch the film. The film shows a homeless encampment in West Seattle where Melinda embedded herself for a week in the middle of winter. The documentary will help participants relate compassionately to those experiencing homelessness, as well as show how encampment members self-organized their living.

Additionally, Anneleen Severynen, Nurse Manager of healthcare for the homeless will speak about the myths and statistics about those without secure housing, especially with an emphasis on delivery of healthcare services and Jody Rauch, Senior Manager for Member and Civic Engagement, Coalition on Homelessness, will speak on what we can do to advocate for services for the homeless, especially systemic improvements. She will also address policy issues in providing support for moving people into supportive housing. This is a great way for you to learn more about this issue and ways you can get involved.

This will be a hybrid lunch and learn Meaningful Movie Project event. Lunch will be provided for those that attend in person. Meaningful Movies Project will also be showing another film (online only) on the Thursday before (January 18th), titled, *Razing Liberty Square*, which is a documentary film demonstrating how public housing residents in Miami, FL, were pushed out to make room for higher income people who had previously lived near the beaches.

**Take Action:**

Attend our upcoming Lunch & Learn Event on January 21<sup>st</sup> - look for it in upcoming newsletters for more information about registering.

And, volunteer at our Shared Breakfast ministry program that provides a warm meal every Sunday morning to anyone that is hungry. Check-out our Shared Breakfast website shown at the link below for more information on the Shared Breakfast program and for ways to get involved.

<https://firstchurchseattle.org/gather/serve/shared-breakfast/>

And, look for future sign-up opportunities to volunteer with Food Lifeline through the Global Missions Committee.

**Prayer:**

Divine spirit of life, grant us hope for a future where everyone will be fed and where everyone will have a warm place to live. Lead us in the work of changing our systems that hold so many in poverty, throughout our city, throughout our nation, and throughout our world. Remind us to never give up on trying to create a better tomorrow for those struggling. In your name we pray. Amen.

## **Epiphany!: January 6<sup>th</sup>**

### **Scripture:** Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.' "

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

### **Reflection:**

Today is Epiphany! The Magi have arrived and seen Christ. We too seek Christ, in our spiritual centers, in that place within each of us that touches our heart, our mind, our body, and our soul. We too seek Christ in how to work towards justice in our world.

Jesus turns our hearts and our attention towards those that cry out, the Holy Spirit guides us with wisdom and courage to take the next steps, and God carries and supports us among the hardships. The Work of Christmas is still not complete, it is only beginning anew. That bright star that guided the Magi on their journey led them to the light eternal of Christ that now remains with us. Let the light of Christ continue to lead you to live a life of peace, love, hope, joy, and justice grounded in faith.

### **Reflection Questions and Take Action:**

Epiphany means manifestation or appearance. We often liken it to the image of a light bulb suddenly turning on. Aha! As you were reading through these stories and reflections these past 12 days, did you have any Epiphanies? Was there a Social Issue that was tugging at your heart? Were you called to action?

As we remember the valuable gifts that the Magi brought to Christ, what will you be able to offer God this year for the world and your community, through acts of service and advocacy? Click the link below to note any activities of First Church you are interested in learning more about.

<https://firstchurchseattle.breezechms.com/form/2e970562>

### **Prayer:**

Loving and Merciful God, who forgets not a single creature and offers grace to all: instill in us your never-ending compassion and sense of concern for all the world, so that we may see the ways in which others are needlessly suffering and seek ways to change it; after all, may we remember we are all your children. Amen.