

## **ADVENT DEVOTIONS 2021**

### **Indiana-Kentucky Synod**

### **Inspire. Ignite. Invite.**

These Advent Devotions are provided to you as a gift from the participants of the IK Synod Spiritual Renewal Process – Inspire. Ignite. Invite. Siblings in Christ from 10 congregations have been meeting monthly via Zoom in three cohorts to participate in the second year of this process – Ignite 2021. During the year we have learned more about the Holy Spirit, focusing on aspects of the Holy Spirit – interceding, fruit of the Spirit, comforting, stirring, renewing, inspiring, empowering, discerning and creating. These Spirit themes are reflected throughout the devotions. What a joy to continue to grow relationships with others across the synod, to share our encounters with God through testimonies, and to continue to deepen our relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Thank you to the leadership team for Inspire. Ignite. Invite. – Mr. Jon Dahl, Gethsemane, Indianapolis, IN; Pr. Daryl Emowrey, Calvary, Angola, IN; Pr. Amy Beitelchees-Albers, Augustana and Grace, Elkhart, IN; and Pr. Nancy Nyland, Director for Evangelical Mission. And an immense thank you to Carol Ann Webb, Administrative Assistant, who edited and formatted this devotional collection.

### **Week One (November 29 – December 4) “Being, Interceding, Comforting Spirit”**

#### **Being Spirit**

**Monday, November 29:** *Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased. Luke 3: 21-22 (New Revised Standard Version)*

Most of my life I have been a people-pleaser. This might be because I am a first-born daughter or maybe it is because my dad modeled this because he never said “no” to anyone. While it is nice to please others, for most of us it is even more important to make our parents proud. In these verses, we see God unequivocally and publicly stating how pleased he is with Jesus. There is also the Holy Spirit that comes as a dove, emphasizing the “I am well pleased” statement. It is difficult to imagine what someone in the crowd that day might have thought, but there is no doubt that all attention would be on Jesus and it would be hard to misinterpret the message.

During the holiday season there is a lot of fun and joy, and there are simultaneously obligations we fulfill primarily to please others. This may not be wholly bad as Luke goes on after this passage to detail Jesus’ ancestry through Joseph – highlighting his connection to other people. Other people and our relationships to them matter. However, in these verses, God being pleased comes first – even before the detailed description of Jesus’ earthly family’s heritage. As Christians, God has also claimed us as his beloved through the gift of the Holy Spirit, who will be with us always. What might it look like this holiday season if we put pleasing Him in the forefront, before we work to please anyone else?

**Prayer:** Lord, remind me that I am your child, your beloved. Help me to live into pleasing you before anyone else.

Jeanette – Cohort 4: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Calvary Lutheran Church, Angola, IN

**Tuesday, November 30:** *Jesus said to his disciples: If you love me, you will do as I command. Then I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you. The Spirit will show you what is true. The people of this world cannot accept the Spirit, because they don't see or know him. But you know the Spirit, who is with you and will keep on living in you.* John 14:15-17 (Contemporary English Version)

Asking for help can be a difficult thing. Whether it is something small or something big, people sometimes struggle to accept help when they are in need of assistance. This can be because we want to feel self-reliant or that we expect ourselves to be perfect. Or maybe we do not want to burden others with our own needs. But it is okay to ask for help when we need it. Whether we are struggling with homework or have suffered an injury, reaching out to others for aid is okay.

Reaching out is especially true when it comes to God. God is greater than any obstacle that we will ever face. He does not think that any problem you are facing is a burden; He wants you to come to him for help. God will always be there – the Being Spirit – listening for your troubles and being there to provide love and comfort when you need it. You just have to ask.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for sending your Spirit to always be with us. Please wrap your loving arms around those who need your help. Please comfort those who are struggling but are too afraid to ask for help.

Brittany – Cohort 4: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Shiloh Lutheran Church, Walton, IN

## Interceding Spirit

**Wednesday, December 1:** *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.* Romans 8:26-27 (New Revised Standard Version)

The season of Advent just began. Yet, Christmas trees, decorations, and sales for gifts began before Halloween and sales were in full swing well before Thanksgiving. Last year at this time, we were hoping we would remain healthy and get to see our families during the holidays. And we gave thanks for Zoom calls, games, on-line shopping, and a quiet Christmas. This year, I have read more than once that Christmas might be ruined by delays in the supply chain.

This assumption misses the clear point for faithful followers of Jesus. Christmas is when we celebrate the birth of baby Jesus, born of Mary, a baby who changed the way God understands and encounters us and the way we encounter God. It is a time for us to sit in the presence of God, and wait, listen, and pray to see what God has in store for us. This is the time to fully trust God.

We live in a broken world; so much pain is within and around us; the problems seem too great for us to solve. Yet, when we sit and take time daily with our God, crying out our deepest hopes and dreams, the Holy Spirit intercedes and knows our greatest desires, and points us in the direction of Jesus. So, we can clearly see one step forward. And know we are surrounded by a community who loves us and wants to join with us together to bring Christ's light, love, hope, and justice into this world.

**Prayer:** Dear Interceding Spirit, fall down upon us as we sit with you in prayer. Plant seeds of clarity for how we can use our gifts in service to you, while we wait and hope for your love and justice to reign on earth. Amen.

Joy – Cohort 3: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Bethel Lutheran Church, Gary, IN

**Thursday, December 2:** *And the Spirit immediately drove [Jesus] out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.* Mark 1:12-13 (New Revised Standard Version)

Before retiring, I worked for a large, multinational insurance company based in Australia. I began my career with a local company, but due to acquisitions and company spin offs, I found myself employed by a mammoth firm.

In 2009, to streamline operations, changes occurred, consolidating offices and forming work teams specializing in various areas. Working as clerical support in the claims department, I was teamed with that department in Wisconsin. I learned many new tasks but was very nervous about the change. Since I was in my late 50s and not confident about “starting over” in a new job, I prayed about the situation, “turning it over” to the Lord – and the Interceding Spirit prevailed on my behalf. I soon found my footing and settled into the new routine.

In 2012, the claims department, companywide, was being spun off to a subsidiary and we learned we would have to reapply for our jobs. I was 59 years old, and the thought of looking for a new job terrified me. Once again, I turned to the Lord; I prayed that I would go wherever he led me, and I placed all my faith in the guidance of the Spirit.

Long story short, I retained my job, and was even able to work from home after the local office closed in 2016. I never dreamed back in 2009 that I would be able to retire when I chose to and would not be forced to leave due to a Company decision.

**Prayer:** Oh Lord, be with us as we face our own daily temptations. Strengthen us with the Interceding Spirit so that we may overcome these temptations and truly live the life you desire us, as Children of God, to lead.

Alice – Cohort 1: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Indianapolis, IN

## Comforting Spirit

**Friday December 3:** *Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit.”* Luke 1:11-15 (New Revised Standard Version)

One common struggle many people have is that of impatience. We tend to want what we want when we want it. In our fast-paced society, we are used to instant everything. A full meal can be microwaved in minutes, text messages can be sent worldwide in seconds, news travels the minute it happens, and for many of us, everything we want or need is only a short drive to the nearest Walmart.

I consider myself a Type A personality and tend to fall into the above category of person. For the most part, I like to be the one in control with all the answers. All of this fosters an environment of wanting everything when I want it.

But we all know the Lord does not work this way. Zechariah and Elizabeth are perfect examples of those who are patient with God and His timing. Their comfort didn’t come from getting what they wanted, but from the Holy Spirit, who supported them during their long wait. The Lord responded to their prayers according to Godly wisdom. He sent an angel to Zechariah to let him know he heard their prayers, and their faithfulness was rewarded with a son.

God's Truth can only come forth at His time and not always when we want or expect it. I invite you to reflect upon your patience with God's will and surrender your impatience today. Trust in Him and never cease praying.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me sense your Comforting Spirit every day and keep me steadfast in prayer. Amen.

Becky – Cohort 3: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Faith Lutheran Church, Logansport, IN

**Saturday, December 4:** *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.*

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 (New Revised Standard Version)

This verse is often used in funeral services. In 3 short verses, a form of "console" is used 6 times – a safe bet that it's a key point. Coming from the Latin meaning to soothe, Merriam-Webster defines it as "to alleviate the grief, sense of loss or trouble of." As we move into Advent, I think of the many people who will not be present at our holidays this year for many reasons. There is, and will be, such a sense of grief and loss – visible and invisible.

And yet we, as Jesus People, are not alone. Our Triune God comes to us to console and soothe and accompany us in and through it all. We are given Hope. The Hope of Advent as we await our Lord's return. The Hope of the resurrection, knowing that death is not the last word. As abundant were Christ's sufferings, equally abundant is our consolation. And we are to share that consolation with others, being Christ to them.

In the midst of all that the holidays bring, may the Comforting Spirit surround your Advent journey abundantly with the Hope of Christ our Lord. May you share that Hope with others and may you experience Peace.

**Prayer:** Merciful Father, Hope-giving Savior and Comforting Spirit, be with us. Console us who grieve, who do not feel the joy or excitement of Advent and Christmas, who just are trying to get through another day. Help us to see others who are hurting and use us to console them. Let us experience your presence, your Hope, always. Amen.

Amy – Leadership Team: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Elkhart, IN

## **Week Two (December 6 - December 11) "Creating, Stirring, Renewing Spirit"**

### **Creating Spirit**

**Monday, December 6:** *The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David... The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.*

Luke 1:30-32, 35 (New Revised Standard Version)

In the fall of 2017, I worked with two individuals, that were not members of our congregation, to create a community garden at our church. Reflecting on the combination of things that happened during just three days, I believe the Holy Spirit was with us as we made creative garden development decisions.

We are in an urban area that is identified as a “food desert.” Our goals were not just to provide food for families in need, but to provide education for individuals to help them produce their own fresh vegetables, to build community, and to develop meaningful relationships with individuals in our community.

We’ve just completed our fourth year of production. Unlike some community gardens we have never had a problem with keeping volunteers. Over 90% of our garden volunteers are from the community and are not members of our congregation. The Creating Holy Spirit was with our congregation as we identified our mission as “Living Christ’s love within a changing world,” and as we developed our plans to help individuals in need.

Because of relationships that have been developed because of the garden, doors have opened during this past year that will lead to quality of life improvements in our neighborhood. It is amazing what the Holy Spirit can do.

God created the child that will be called Holy, Son of God. God, through the Holy Spirit, is also the creator of many ways for our congregation to spread his Word while providing food to those in need.

**Prayer:** God our Creator, you show us the path of life. Cultivate healthy congregations that tell of and enact your reconciling love through the Creating Spirit. Amen.

Bruce – Cohort 1: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Bethany Lutheran Church, Indianapolis, IN

**Tuesday, December 7:**

*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*

*The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.*

Isaiah 11:1-2 (New Revised Standard Version)

This scripture reminds me of new beginnings. Plants sprouting from roots, animals and humans being born. All shall have the Creating Spirit of the LORD rest upon them. I am like a branch of my mother. Just as the Holy Spirit provided shelter and protected her, so am I sheltered and protected by the Spirit. The Spirit guided her as I am guided by the Spirit. She was a smart woman with more common sense than learned education. I consider myself to have more learned education, but common sense often provides appropriate results. Just as the Spirit rested on her, I am comforted that the Spirit rests on me.

Today, when I face challenges, I rely on the LORD to provide the wisdom and understanding to resolve the situation. I start from scratch, breaking the challenge down to its simplest form. Then with the Spirit as my guide, I reflect on each part, piece by piece, until the challenge is resolved. This process requires patience and listening to the Spirit. When I try to rush to a conclusion, generally the result is a disaster. When I trust in the Spirit, the result is not only correct, but satisfying.

**Prayer:** LORD, continue to give me the strength and wisdom to be a light for shoots to come. Amen.

Florzell – Cohort 3: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Bethel Lutheran Church, Gary, IN

## Stirring Spirit

**Wednesday, December 8:** *As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."* Luke 3: 15-16 (New Revised Standard Version)

John the Baptizer experienced the Holy Spirit's "stirring up." The Spirit gave John the word of God, to proclaim the salvation of God to the crowds who lived in the Jordan River region. His message was heard by those suffering daily hardship under the reign and oppression of Emperor Tiberius Claudius Caesar.

The Spirit of God stirred up great expectation within the people: to be freed of oppression and live lives of hope, joy, and peace. Their savior was coming! They would finally receive their long-awaited messiah. He would liberate them by killing their oppressors and placing himself upon the emperor's throne.

But the people misunderstood what John proclaimed and they misinterpreted the stirring of the Spirit. Salvation is not granted by a messiah's sword, nor by baptism water alone. Christ Jesus, Emmanuel, is Messiah and Savior who conquers sin and death by grace and love.

**Prayer:** Come, Holy Spirit! Come, Lord Jesus! May we be stirred to follow you always, loving and serving others for your sake and for your kingdom. Amen.

Jill – Cohort 4: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
St. Mark Lutheran Church, Batesville IN

**Thursday, December 9:** *In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.* Acts 1:1-2 (New Revised Standard Version)

"Look what they're doing," I said to my husband, struck by the guiding principles that this church I had never heard of, Faith Lutheran of Logansport, had on their website. They probably didn't think those principles would one day be read, in the middle of a pandemic, by a prospective pastor in Illinois. They said they listened to and for the Holy Spirit. Hmm, interesting. I knew God was up to something. And it wasn't isolated.

The Spirit was stirring down the road at St. Peter's in Camden, too. Here is how the church describes themselves: "Walking with Jesus, Sharing God's Love." Hmm. And what did they have to say to a prospective minister? "Our Pastor will have double the fun and double the love." Who were these people who dared to speak so boldly of love? Interesting again.

Sometimes just a few words testify to the Holy Spirit's powerful stirring. We see this at the very beginning of Acts, a book describing how the Spirit worked through the disciples, spreading the church worldwide, and bringing people to faith. Jesus gives the Spirit to his disciples, and the match is lit.

Theophilus means *friend of God* in Greek. It might be a specific person or any follower of Jesus. The author passes Jesus' story on to us and we do the same in turn, stirring each other to faith and action. The Stirring Spirit takes our efforts and multiplies them, reaching people across time and space in ways we can't imagine.

I'm proof, testifying to you, dear reader.

**Prayer:** God of love, help us to notice where your Spirit is stirring, that we might take part in your work. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Kristen – Cohort 3: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Faith Lutheran Church, Logansport, IN

## Renewing Spirit

**Friday, December 10:** *If the Spirit is the source of our life, we must also allow the Spirit to direct every aspect of our lives.* Galatians 5:25 (The Passion Translation)

When I heard this passage, I thought of these lyrics from the song “Begin with the End in Mind” by Lecrae:

You share the Gospel, that’s cool what you do that for?  
Got a brand new life, tell me, who that for?

Both this passage and the lyrics above remind me that this life God gives us is meant to be shared in a way that points back to the love and life we have received. Unfortunately, this is not always the way I use this gift. I know that my words and actions are not always building others (or myself) up in love. Despite the breath of the Spirit filling my lungs and sharing with me all that is needed for me to move and live, I disregard this source of life.

For some reason, the chaos and turbulence of life pull me in, and I react out of pain, anger, and hurt in ways that only perpetuate those things I wish were not my experience to begin with. The good news is that even when this happens and I find my life is not being directed by the Spirit, the Spirit continues to offer life. At any moment, I can remember this truth – that my life is sustained by the Spirit – and use the gift of my life to point to God’s love again. This Christmas, may we all remember this gift of life the Spirit has wrapped for us and placed under the tree of the cross.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for sending your Renewing Spirit to be our source of life. Help us follow your Spirit’s beckoning as we seek to use this precious gift you have given us to celebrate and share the love you have revealed to us through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Daryl – Leadership and Cohort 4: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Calvary Lutheran Church, Angola, IN

**Saturday, December 11:** *So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death... Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So, letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.* Romans 8:1-2, 5-6 (New Living Translation)

I bought a Christmas leash to walk my dog last week. It’s red with white stripes, like a candy cane. The saying is “Get a new lease on life,” but maybe it’s never too late to have a new “leash” on life, especially at Christmas.

Leashes are used to guide and keep one on the right path. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we walk in righteousness. We have hope and are encouraged as God’s promises are fulfilled. Jesus came down from Heaven to live among us and we, through baptism, belong to Him.

We’re not condemned but forgiven. We rejoice even as we face challenges in our world. Joy replaces our doubts and fears. Christ has freed us from death, through His resurrection.

As my little pup and I meander through our neighborhood I see the holiday decorations, faces of neighbors, and hear nature singing all around. Squirrels scamper, and snowflakes swirl, as a Christmas carol dances in my mind. I hear children’s laughter. All these reflections reaffirm that God is present in His Creation, and we prepare for the birth of The Prince of Peace.

Worldly commercialism dims in comparison to the Biblical account of His birth. The new mind we acquire by the Spirit's leash on our life leads us to a sanctified journey through this life. We give of ourselves to help others. Blessings return to us. Through sharing, friendships develop. With the Spirit's guidance, we live in the Presence of eternal life.

**Prayer:** Glorious God, help us enjoy the abundance of eternal life by living in your grace and following the Way of Jesus through the guidance of the Renewing Spirit. Amen.

Judy – Cohort 4: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
St. Mark Lutheran Church, Batesville, Indiana

## **Week Three (December 13 – December 18) “Gifting Spirit (Fruit of the Spirit)”**

### **Gifting Spirit (Fruit of the Spirit)**

**Monday, December 13:** *Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.* John 15:4-5 (New Revised Standard Version)

During this season of Advent many of us are spending hours preparing our hearts for Christmas. That preparation often includes lovingly selecting a special gift for a family member or friend.

My father, raised during the Depression, loved to share with all who would listen his favorite Christmas memory. What started when he was about five years old and continued for several childhood years, he would find one simple, but special, package labeled with his name under the family's sparsely decorated Christmas tree. My father would describe the excitement and joy of unwrapping that one gift to find a wonderful toy his parents had lovingly made especially for him. However, twelve days after Christmas, the special toy would “disappear,” only to reappear the following year - again on Christmas morning, again under the tree, and again lovingly wrapped with his name on it.

The gift of the Holy Spirit came into each of our lives at our baptism, but our spiritual life is “re-gifted” over and over again – just like my father's Christmas toy. The Spirit of comfort, giving, and discernment are among the many packages that are labeled with our name. As children of God, we are the branches attached to the vine that are watered and nourished by the Holy Spirit. The fruit we grow and share with the world is the fruit of the Holy Spirit promised to us – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Thanks be to God!

**Prayer:** Come Holy Spirit, into our hearts. Continue to persistently nourish our lives to bear much fruit.

Noel – Cohort 3: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Carmel, IN

**Tuesday, December 14:** *While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.* Romans 7:5-6 (New Revised Standard Version)



Several months ago, one of our Inspire. Ignite. Invite. participants offered an excellent observation about seeing the Holy Spirit at work in nature. We wanted to give her story a place in the Advent devotion as a place to begin unpacking this challenging scripture from Romans.

During one of our sessions, Kathy described the Monarch butterfly chrysalises she saw outside her home. She reflected on how it was rare for her to see them and that they were subject to predators. In this case, a few of the Monarch butterflies emerged and began their southern migration. In many ways, the butterfly is an excellent symbol for today's scripture. The butterfly can represent our "new life of the Spirit." In spite of the danger of "bearing fruit for death," we are saved to this new life to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit blesses us with the presence of Spirit-filled people. Thank you, Kathy, for sharing your gifts and fruit with us and may God continue to bless you with the Holy Spirit.

**Prayer:** Thank you, Gifting Spirit, for showing us your wisdom in nature and for gifting us with fruit for God's kingdom.

Leadership Team – Inspire. Ignite. Invite.

**Wednesday, December 15:** *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen. For by its elders obtained approval. Through faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God so that things that are seen were not made of things that are not visible.* Hebrews 11: 1-3 (Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version)

How do you speak to God? Do you speak to God as an acquaintance, a friend or as someone who you pass on the street with a smile or a nod? Do you talk with God as a family member with unconditional love and acceptance? Do you encounter God as the maker of all things seen and unseen? Or perhaps, you seldom notice God, because you are in your own little world and not really in need of anything at the moment. When you are in need of direction, in a time of uncertainty, experiencing pain or loneliness, or filled with joy and thanksgiving and you seek out God, do you expect an immediate answer?

God's Gifting Spirit dwells in us and hears our every thought and prayer spoken out loud, silently in our hearts, with a group of people, or alone. In faith, we listen for God's answer to our prayer. Our wise and loving God knows us, listens to us, and responds to our prayers. Sometimes we hear the Spirit answering "Yes," sometimes, "No," and sometimes "Wait." Take time to listen to the Spirit in your daily life. The next time you are stopped at a stop light, waiting for your coffee to brew, in line at the grocery store or sitting quietly, listen to God's Spirit with faith, hope and peace.

**Prayer:** Father, we know you hear our every word. We humbly ask that you teach us to hear your words as you speak, asking that you put our hearts and minds at peace. You are the creator of all that is seen and unseen and we put our eternal trust in you. Amen.

Cheryl – Cohort 1: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Bethany Lutheran Church, Indianapolis, IN

**Thursday, December 16:** *When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."* Luke 1:41-42 (New Revised Standard Version)

When I hear this Bible verse I think about the birth of my children and grandchildren. I have two sons and seven grandchildren. I can remember feeling the movement of my children in my womb: oh, what a joyful feeling!

I was present in the hospital for the birth of most of my grandchildren. If not present, I was on my way and arrived shortly after the birth. The birth of a child is one of God's wonderful miracles. To look at the precious, beautiful miracle of a new born is amazing. Each time is like the first time. God gives us these wonderful children to love and to cherish. It is a great gift to give birth – a gift from God. We are called to protect and care for these gifts from the Gifting Spirit.

**Prayer:** Dear Father, thank you for the birth of your Son and thank you for the miracle to the world of giving birth. Amen.

Charolette – Cohort 3: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Bethel Lutheran Church, Gary, IN

**Friday, December 17:** *If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*  
1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (New Revised Standard Version)

As a seventh grader at a parochial school, I sang in the choir. Our repertoire included "The Gift of Love," which sets an adaptation of today's reading to an English folk melody. Forty years later, this song still plays in my head whenever this scripture is read.

Giving is a watchword for this season. Starting in early November, we face a bombardment of ads encouraging us to shop for gifts, and there are appeals to make donations from Giving Tuesday all the way to New Year's Eve.

This can skew our motivation to give in a less noble direction, to a sense of obligation or a desire to please others, for example. I remember reading an essay a few years ago which claimed that the steady stream of alarming news had motivated people to make donations out of a sense of panic or rage. At one time or another, I have fallen prey to all of these.

Today's reading reminds us from where our motivations should flow. Regardless of what we do, say, or give, love should be the foundation. Love for God and neighbor forms the law that calls us to account. Love is at the heart of the gospel that saves us. Love is a gift that the Holy Spirit bestows upon us to guide us in our faith. Take time today to welcome the Holy Spirit into your heart so that you may share the love with others.

**Prayer:** Holy Spirit, guide me in all that I do, so that I do these things out of love, just as you love us.

P.J. Hinton – Cohort 1: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Indianapolis, IN

**Saturday, December 18:** *As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.* Colossians 3:12 (New Revised Standard Version)

Throughout all my life, I have felt chosen by God. God has called me to different ministries at all stages of my life. I always find comfort in knowing I am holy and beloved because God said so. I don't have to listen to the voices around me or my inner voice to know that. As a holy and beloved child of God, I am asked to clothe

myself with exceptionally positive virtues in this passage. In Colossians, there is no contrast with vices, only a listing of virtues.

Some days it is easier to clothe myself with these virtues but other days, especially when I am being challenged by what I consider difficult people, it is more demanding. And yet, God still considers me holy and beloved, which makes me strive to clothe myself with the virtues God wants for me. Even on those days when I am around difficult people, I find that if I focus on clothing myself with compassion, kindness, meekness, and patience, then dealing with those difficult people is easier.

I will continue to clothe myself with God's virtues because God considers me holy and beloved. By doing that, I will reflect what it means to have a new life in Christ.

**Prayer:** Faithful God, be present with us daily. Gifting Spirit, help us to clothe ourselves with your gifts of compassion, kindness, meekness, and patience. Amen.

Sharon – Cohort 4: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Shiloh Lutheran Church, Walton, IN

## **Week Four (December 20 – December 25) “Inspiring, Empowering, Discerning Spirit”**

### **Inspiring Spirit/Empowering Spirit**

#### **Monday, December 20:**

*God, make a fresh start in me,  
shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.  
Don't throw me out with the trash,  
or fail to breathe holiness in me.  
Bring me back from gray exile,  
put a fresh wind in my sails!*  
Psalm 51:10-12 (*The Message*)

I once walked in and through the world, believing that I could bring order to chaos. It was part of my job to alleviate all potential areas of disharmony within the organization. I failed. Each time I believed I could fix a problem, another would overtake it, and chaos would again ensue. Professional and personal isolation strained relationships and left me often feeling alone, exiled, and heartbroken. In the dark, I would cry out for help, for a fresh start, for a genesis so I could once again know the certainty of Christ's hope, grace, peace, and love. In these gray days of the COVID exile, we pause in the stillness of the season and feel the Inspiring Spirit, the Empowering Spirit, breathe new life out of the chaos that overwhelms us.

#### **Prayer:**

Healer of broken spirits, breath into me all things new and cast away the chaos of my life.  
Eternal grace, open me to know that you alone are holy; you alone are God.  
Lord of eternity, shape my heart to trust you and away from my hubris.  
Prince of Peace, do not forsake me, but guide me in your ways. Amen.

Creighton – Cohort 3: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
St. Paul Lutheran Church – Crossroads, Batesville, Indiana

**Tuesday, December 21:** *After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”* Matthew 2:1-2 (New International Version)

I have traveled many miles and many places during my lifetime in search of pleasure. I have been to England, Ireland, Scotland, Mexico, Alaska, Hawaii, and many more places, just to name a few. I was willing to be uncomfortable at times just to get to my destination. The truth is, for many years, I was unwilling to travel far or experience discomfort in another very important journey – the journey to find and worship Jesus.

In Matthew 2:1-2 we see that the Magi passionately sought the truth over a long journey from the east. Church historians suggest they traveled perhaps a thousand miles over many days, perhaps even years. It was most likely an expensive and difficult journey but apparently their desire to discover this “king” who was about to come into the world was stronger than any discomfort they might experience. They were quite clear about their intentions to find and worship this newborn king.

It took me many years and many life lessons before I intentionally made the choice to travel any distance, at any price, through discomfort and even sorrow to find our King of Kings. Jesus came to this earth to walk a difficult journey for us and He walked to His death in order that we may live eternally in joy. As we celebrate our King’s birth, let us not forget to honor His journey. May the Holy Spirit inspire and empower each of us to spend our lifetime searching for the newborn King, Jesus Christ.

**Prayer:** Father God, may the wisdom of the Magi live in our hearts and guide us to our Savior and King, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mary Pat – Cohort 4: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Shiloh Lutheran Church, Walton, IN

**Wednesday, December 22:** *When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.* Mark 13:11 (New Revised Standard Version)

I have always been a person who likes to plan things out. I have put my faith in preparation to ensure that I fulfill my responsibilities and make good on my commitments. Today’s verse helps me understand that it is not my careful preparation, but instead it is the blessings of the Inspiring Spirit in which I must put my faith.

In today’s reading, Jesus reassures me that as I follow the Holy Spirit into potentially difficult situations, I do not have to worry about what I am going to say because the Holy Spirit will speak through me. How liberating to know I can trust in God to provide the words when I might otherwise labor over what I should say or write.

My faith is strengthened as I look back on the most difficult times of my life and realize that during these times the Empowering Spirit was with me, providing the words and speaking through me. This gives me courage to pursue my faith with confidence.

**Prayer:** Lord, as I face trials and tribulations, grant me the faith to speak the words I am given as it is not I who speak, but the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Greg – Cohort 3: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Bethel Lutheran Church, Gary, IN

**Thursday, December 23:** *I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.* John 14:25-26 (New Revised Standard Version)

Thoughts matter! What I think determines how I act. I think that the driver who cut me off must have done it intentionally, and, just like that, I'm now angry. I've become another dangerous driver. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit reminds me of Jesus and Jesus' teaching. Jesus taught about neighbor love. When that reminder sinks into my awareness, into my thoughts, other drivers become my neighbor. They can now become the object of neighbor love rather than a competitor for open highway space.

Thoughts matter. Immersing myself in Jesus' teaching and all of scripture makes me more open to the Inspiring Spirit's reminders. However, inappropriate thoughts also emerge. I can turn these thoughts over to God, increasing the chances that my actions become befitting of a disciple of Jesus. Does this always happen? No! While the Holy Spirit's reminders don't always get through or change my actions, the Empowering Spirit continues to do the work of constantly reminding me, empowering me.

**Prayer:** Come, Holy Spirit! Kindle in me the fire of Your love.

Jon - Leadership Team: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Indianapolis, IN

## Discerning Spirit

**Friday, December 24:** *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.* Romans 12:2 (New Revised Standard Version)

Baguio City is 2,799 feet up a mountain. It doesn't snow there – it's the tropics. You get 12 hours of day and 12 hours of night, temperatures 70° to 80° with bright sun, or hard rain. As Christmas approached, a group of US Peace Corps volunteers, hoping to find a little seasonal change, arrived in Baguio December 23, looking for room in an Inn. The Inn was nestled in pine trees, the air cooled to 55°. It was beginning to look and feel like Christmas!

Next day someone noticed a small Lutheran church offering a Christmas Eve service. Consternation arose – the closest any had been to church in almost a year in the Philippines was the home of Baptist missionaries in the capital city of our province. Mrs. Case made glazed doughnuts every Saturday and welcomed homesick Americans. But now we were faced with real church. There was no question in my mind because I missed my parents. My father was a pastor.

Some of us went to church. We sang hymns, heard the familiar reading from Luke 2, but was it nostalgia or returning to the Body of Christ? I spent three years thinking about that, but then I had to answer. We passed through Indonesia on our way home, and a woman called to me across a government office we were in, "Are you saved?" With some hesitation I called back over the heads of several workers, "Yes!" "Praise the Lord!" she replied. My mind was blown!

**Prayer:** Lord, we cannot be removed from you. Discerning Spirit, you renew our minds and give us all that is good and acceptable and perfect. Let us notice without a doubt when you do this – and praise you!

Marcia – Cohort 4: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
Calvary Lutheran Church, Angola, IN

**Saturday, December 25:** *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.* Luke 2:15-18 (New Revised Standard Version)

The stress and anxiety of not being good enough is a very real thing for me. Trying to measure up or please everyone is, at most times, an impossible task. The advent season brings that stress and anxiety to a whole different level. Hearing the Christmas story each year, I tend to question whether or not I am a good enough mother, wife, friend, or Christian in the eyes of God. Am I worthy to receive the wondrous gift that has been given through Jesus' birth?

I wonder if at some point along the way Mary may have questioned the same thing. The last line in this scripture is, for me, the point where Mary decides that she is good enough. It is through the Discerning Spirit that I am reminded that I am a beloved child of God and, in his eyes, I am good enough.

**Prayer:** May the power of the Holy Spirit help us to realize that we are good enough.

Laura – Cohort 3: Inspire. Ignite. Invite.  
St. Paul Lutheran Church – Crossroads, Batesville, Indiana