

Advent Anticipations

Poems for

Meditation



**By Friends of
First United Methodist Church**

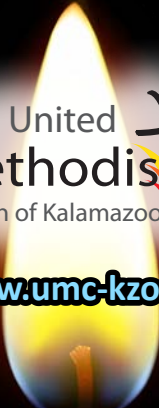
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The images on these pages are all collages of (highly edited) original, public domain, and/or purchased stock photographs. These images, working synergistically with the poems and ponderings, are intended to inspire a meditative experience during Advent and beyond.



First United
Methodist
Church of Kalamazoo



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I Prepare My Heart for the Manger: Reflecting on Advent Through Poetry

Advent is a season of anticipating, waiting, and hoping. Beginning four Sundays prior to Christmas and ending on Christmas Eve, Advent helps us prepare for the coming, or “advent,” of the Christ child at Christmas.

As Christians, we are called to prepare during this time, in the waning light of winter. But how do we do this important work? We wait, we notice, we see. We write and read haiku. What? Haiku?

A few years back, some of us prepared for Advent by writing haiku (three line poems), list poems, and even using lines from other works to create our own. As part of a First United Methodist Church’s 2016 Adult Academy Class, a dozen or so of us prepared our hearts for the manger over four weeks by reflecting on Advent through poetry. The title of the class—the same title as this introduction—was inspired by the poem “Shepherd’s Song at Christmas,” in which the poet Langston Hughes (1902-1967) writes:

What shall I bring to the Manger?
I will bring my heart
And give my heart to Him.
I will bring my heart
To the Manger.

Using poetry, and guided by Jennifer Clark, we reflected on the Advent themes of waiting, noticing, preparing, wondering, and journeying. *Advent Anticipations:*

Poems for Meditations contains two dozen original works by FUMC members and friends who participated in one or more of these Advent poetry sessions and allowed us to use their poems for this project. Thank you Anonymous, Mollie Clements, Mary Ann Doll, Julie Doll, Mary Whittaker Duncan, Carol Hodges, Richard Long, Judy Ross, Dale Rowe, Jan Schoenherr, Sally Stevens, Lisa Stucky, Mark Stucky, Andrew Vorbrich, and Shelly Wisdom-Long.

Mark Stucky became the driving force in giving life to these poems beyond the class. As a technical writer with design and desktop publishing experience, he pulled everyone's efforts together into one beautiful work.

Our hope is that during the waning light of winter, these poems, ponderings, and images will serve as an instrument that can help us prepare to experience, celebrate, and share God's love.

I Believe

by Jan Schoenherr



I believe that darkness comes to all of us

I believe it is possible to rest in darkness

**I believe in the knowledge that darkness here
means light somewhere else**

**I believe that a small flicker of light has the power
to break through darkness**

I believe in the light of the Christ candle on my Advent wreath

**I believe that darkness
does not have the last word**

**I believe in the Word, the beginning of everything,
the end of darkness.**

Prayerful Ponderings

What is the relationship between the dark and the light?

Are you afraid of the dark?

Waiting and Entering

by Jennifer Clark

Scattered throughout the country are keys
waiting for hands that have hidden them.

Quietly, without complaint,
they pass the time—
resting inside faux rocks,
lounging on ledges and under dusty mats,
hanging from hooks and rusty nails,
sitting under the infamous chipped flowerpots
of this world.



When their time finally comes
thin, grooved bodies
must be pressed into remembering;
they have to be jiggled, turned, cajoled,
and convinced to crack open
this moment for which they were made.



Prayerful Ponderings

What are keys to your heart?

What opens up the Advent season for you?

Waiting for...

by Richard Long

Up close, it draws you in
without word or even murmur. Waiting.

Waiting for what? For quiet,
for love, for death, for life?

We move to it, it has no name.

We see it glimmer in the silence –
and yield to its emptiness.

Prayerful Ponderings

What are you waiting for?

What in Advent is inviting you in?

When you feel distracted and the world clamors for
your attention, can you take some time to be still?
To fill up on silence and listen? What do you hear?

Blazing Open

by Sally Stevens

Blazing open

Do you love this world?

Blazing open

Do you love your neighbor?

Blazing open

Do you love your family?

Blazing open

Do you love yourself?

Prayerful Ponderings

What do you burn for? What do you do with your love?

What door in your life needs opening?

Morning

by Judy Ross

See the moving sun trying to break into light.
The dark resists but finally gives in.
Outside, the birds begin to chirp, with reservation.
A cat waits patiently below the feeder,
enveloped in its own blackness.
Finally, brightness pierces through.
Another day—what now?

Prayerful Ponderings

What now for you?

Within you, what still resists? What needs to give in?

Let Thy daylight come

by Anonymous

**Let Thy daylight come down
and cease my running around town**

**Hear the birds and songs of trees
Remind me to take a knee**

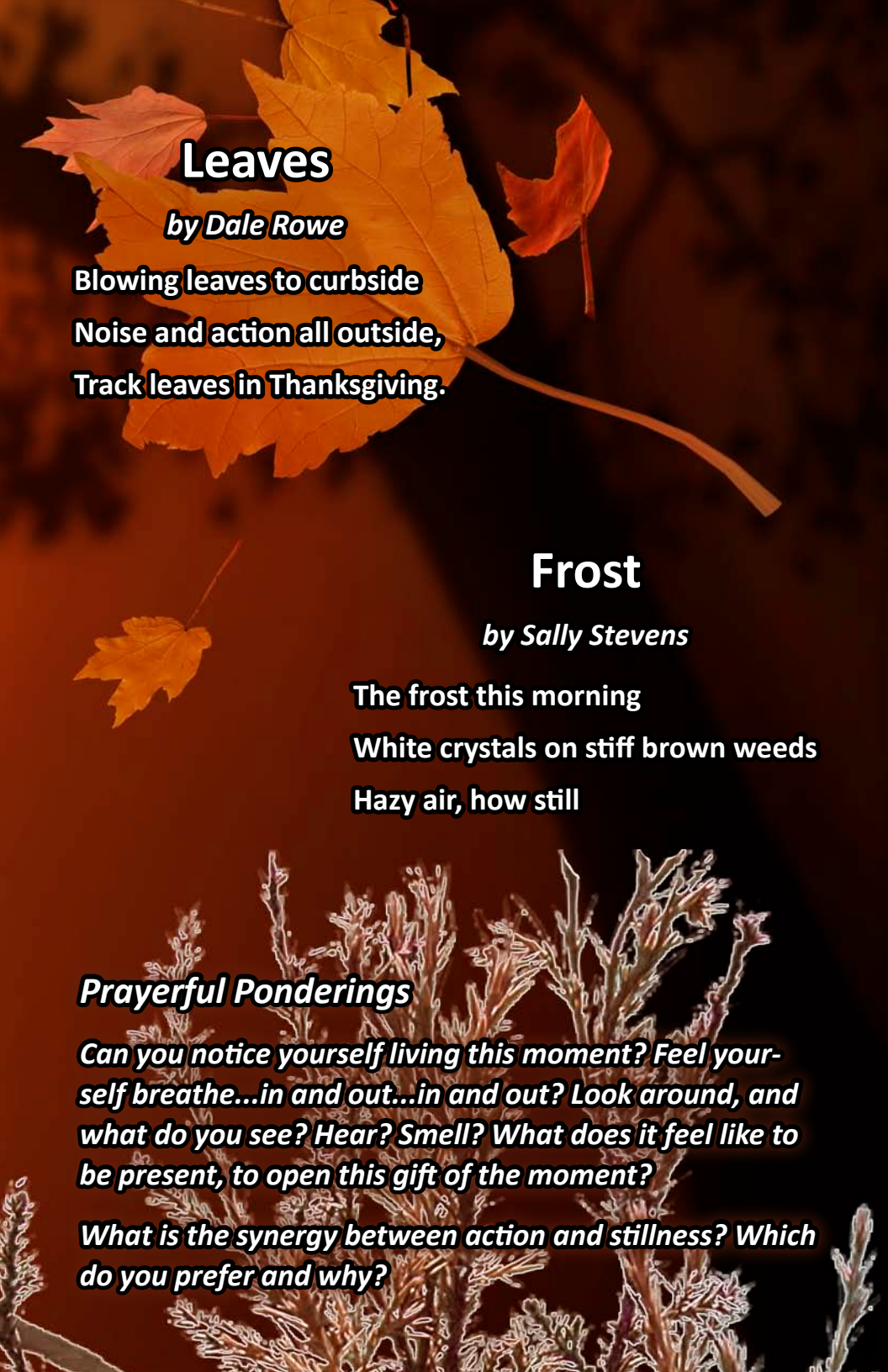
**It is those who surround
from whom I need to hear their sound**

**Humble me, dear Lord and friend,
to focus on you to the end.**

Prayerful Ponderings

What do you hear? What are you focused on?

***Can you stop your business for a moment? What helps
you feel centered?***



Leaves

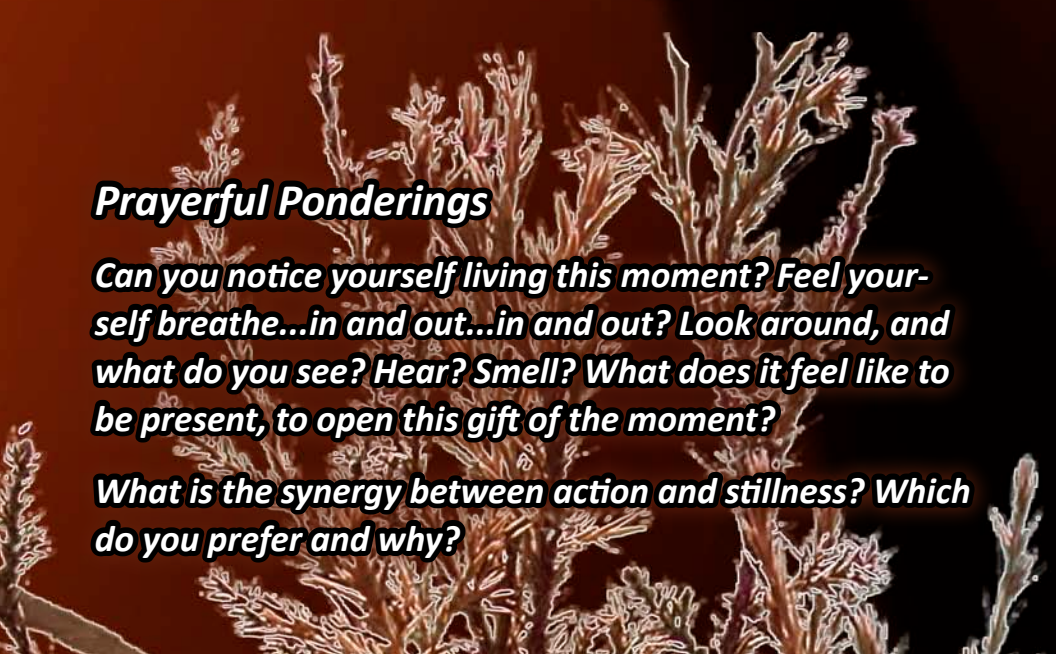
by Dale Rowe

**Blowing leaves to curbside
Noise and action all outside,
Track leaves in Thanksgiving.**

Frost

by Sally Stevens

**The frost this morning
White crystals on stiff brown weeds
Hazy air, how still**



Prayerful Ponderings

Can you notice yourself living this moment? Feel yourself breathe...in and out...in and out? Look around, and what do you see? Hear? Smell? What does it feel like to be present, to open this gift of the moment?

What is the synergy between action and stillness? Which do you prefer and why?

Advent

by Jan Schoenherr

The journey of immigrants

Pilgrims of the soul

Reach out and respond

Welcome the emerging gifts

Watch, linger

Dwell in God's peace.

Prayerful Ponderings

Why was there no room for Mary and Joseph at the inn? Who are we keeping out?

*What can we do to be more welcoming?
How can we make room for others?*



A hand is shown pouring water from the top left into a dry, cracked landscape. The water is captured mid-pour, creating a dynamic, splashing effect. The landscape is a vast, flat expanse of parched, yellowish-brown earth with deep, irregular cracks. The sky above is a deep, dark blue, suggesting a clear night or a very dry, clear day. The overall scene conveys a sense of thirst and the need for water.

Neighbors

by Lisa Stucky

Brick tower of neighbors

Kingdom village

Emerging pilgrim

Journey not done

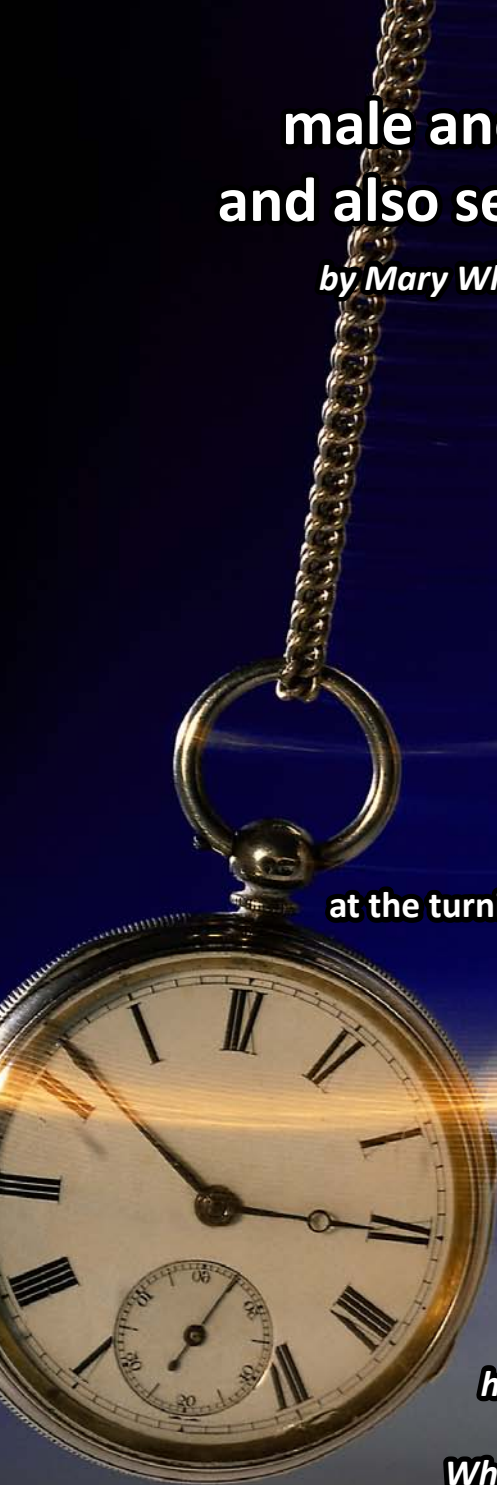
Reach out

Respond

How has God reached out to us?

How do we respond?

How can we give "a cup of cold water" to those who thirst?



male and its mate, and also seven of every

by Mary Whittaker Duncan

possible concern and worry

burden my

apparently endless walk

traversing the terrain of

disappointment

at the turning back of progress and time.

Prayerful Ponderings

***How can we be expected to
have hope or succeed at a task
when nothing makes sense?***

What brings hope for the future?

How do we attain a higher perspective?

“Thousands of deaths”*

by Shelly Wisdom-Long

Just turn on the news,
open the web,
read the latest blog,
view the tweets of the world...
Death is everywhere.
In violence and accident,
and yes, even in blessing and joy.

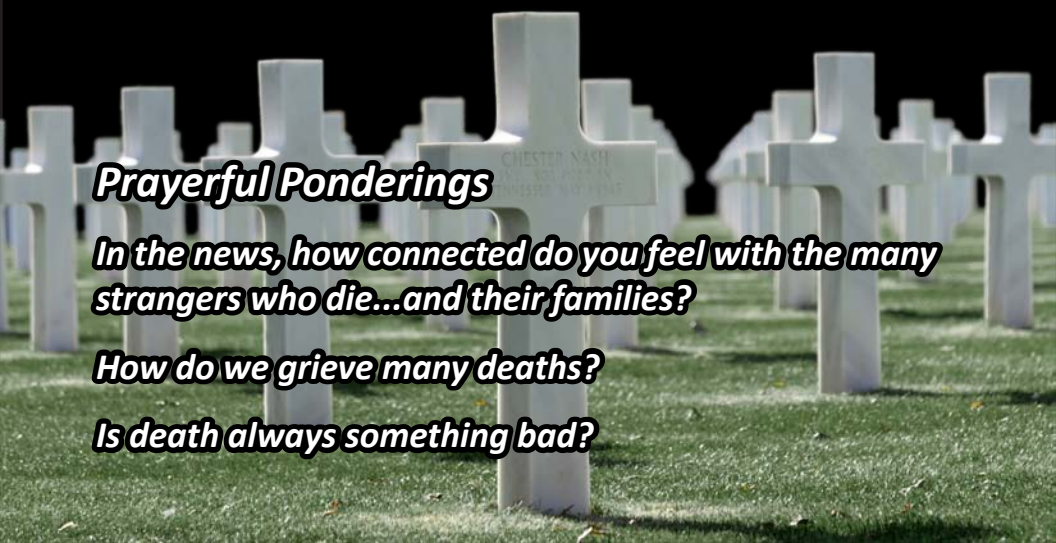
From **The Big Book of Exit Strategies by Jamaal May.*

Prayerful Ponderings

In the news, how connected do you feel with the many strangers who die...and their families?

How do we grieve many deaths?

Is death always something bad?



In My Mind...

by Shelly Wisdom-Long

In my mind I see possibilities;

In my mind I struggle with reality.

In my mind I play Mozart;

In my mind I hear Hanon, badly.

In my mind I know great fear;

In my mind I realize the comfort of family.

In my mind I know peace;

In my mind I still feel tension.

In my mind I say, "no, it can't be..."

Yet in my heart, God says, "yes."

Prayerful Ponderings

What is in your mind?

What is in God's mind for you?

I Make...

by Richard Long

**I make the stars and morn,
I make light and mist and shadow,
I make the Spirit-self,
I make all that is.
I make wind.
I make silence.
I make the smell of earth, lingering
In the wind.**

Prayerful Ponderings

Who made you?

***How are you using the gifts
that God has formed in you?***



I am from...

by Dale Rowe

I am from Flint, Michigan.

From General Motors and post war industrial recovery,

I am part of a generation booming

out of our parents' need to produce,

from love—a family

and a new car every year.

I'm from Christmases celebrated in new subdivision homes,

and churches, Protestant and Catholic near each

other,

From neighborhoods filled with kids

bursting schools (some temporary), playgrounds and

live nativity scenes,

From singing carols with my father and mother,

brother and sisters sitting out of the cold in our

Chevrolet.

I'm from six people living and growing in a three bedroom,

one bath home,

And from a boy impatiently dreaming

of my success, and getting out!

traveling the world's oceans and continents,

oblivious to my idyllic childhood.



Prayerful Ponderings

Where are you from? What things in childhood did you take for granted? When should we stay...and exit? How has hope shaped your life? Your relationships?

Interpreting Actions

by Dale Rowe

A loss of interest in interpreting the actions of others.

This is a fault of the doctor in me.

This is a result of the elections.

This is a purpose of survival.

This is not always a way to win friends.

This is a way of loving others.

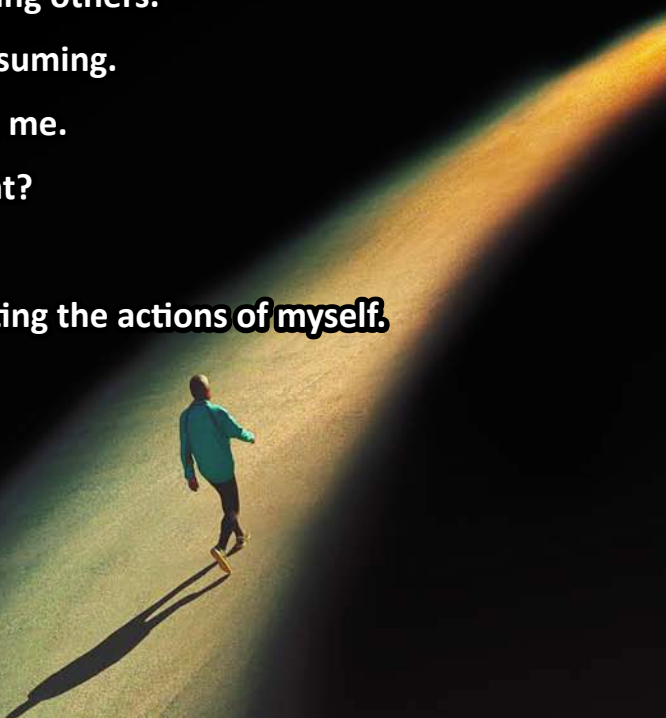
This cannot be consuming.

This is forever with me.

Can I stop in Advent?

Can I, Can I, will I?

Here I am interpreting the actions of myself.

A person in a green jacket and dark pants is walking away from the viewer on a path. A large, bright beam of light from the upper right corner illuminates the path and the person, creating a long shadow on the ground. The background is dark.

Prayerful Ponderings

What actions are (or are not) you interpreting? What consumes you? What things are restricting you? What can you stop and let go of during Advent?

On having two adult children in a small house during a prolonged job search

by Mary Whittaker Duncan

**I see that we get frustrated
and that space is tight.**

**I see that we rarely have
leftovers to take for lunch.**

I see that one bathroom is not enough.

I see that time will change how I used to see.

**I see that close quarters
tighten connection.**

**I see that meals eaten together long outlast
the appeal of an easy lunch.**

I see that I will grieve when one bathroom is enough.

Prayerful Ponderings

What burdens in your life were blessings in disguise?

How can you reframe the challenges in your life?

Incarnation - God Speaks

by Mary Ann Doll

**"That sucks" you say
Being born in the hay.**

"Why this way?" you say.

**"It's my way" I say.
Ponder.**

Growth

by Julie E. Doll

**Kicks inside my womb
interrupt my task at hand
three lives, intertwined**

Prayerful Ponderings

***Are you open to it being God's way, not your way?
Can you peacefully accept the journey and travel with
your and your loved ones' pain, loneliness, and joy?***

***How is God working in your life? What is kicking inside
of you? What tasks in your life need interrupting?***



In his own reflection, an exact copy

by Judy Ross

We see, but do we really?

Perhaps he also comes as a little child.

Lost and looking, alone, but already
knowing his presence.

I can see you clearly now,
in her eyes.

Prayerful Ponderings

***What do you see? What
does Jesus “look like” to
you? What do you see in
the people around you?***

What clarifies vision?



I Wonder

by Mollie Clements

**I wonder
if the mistakes I made as a mother
can ever be redeemed.**

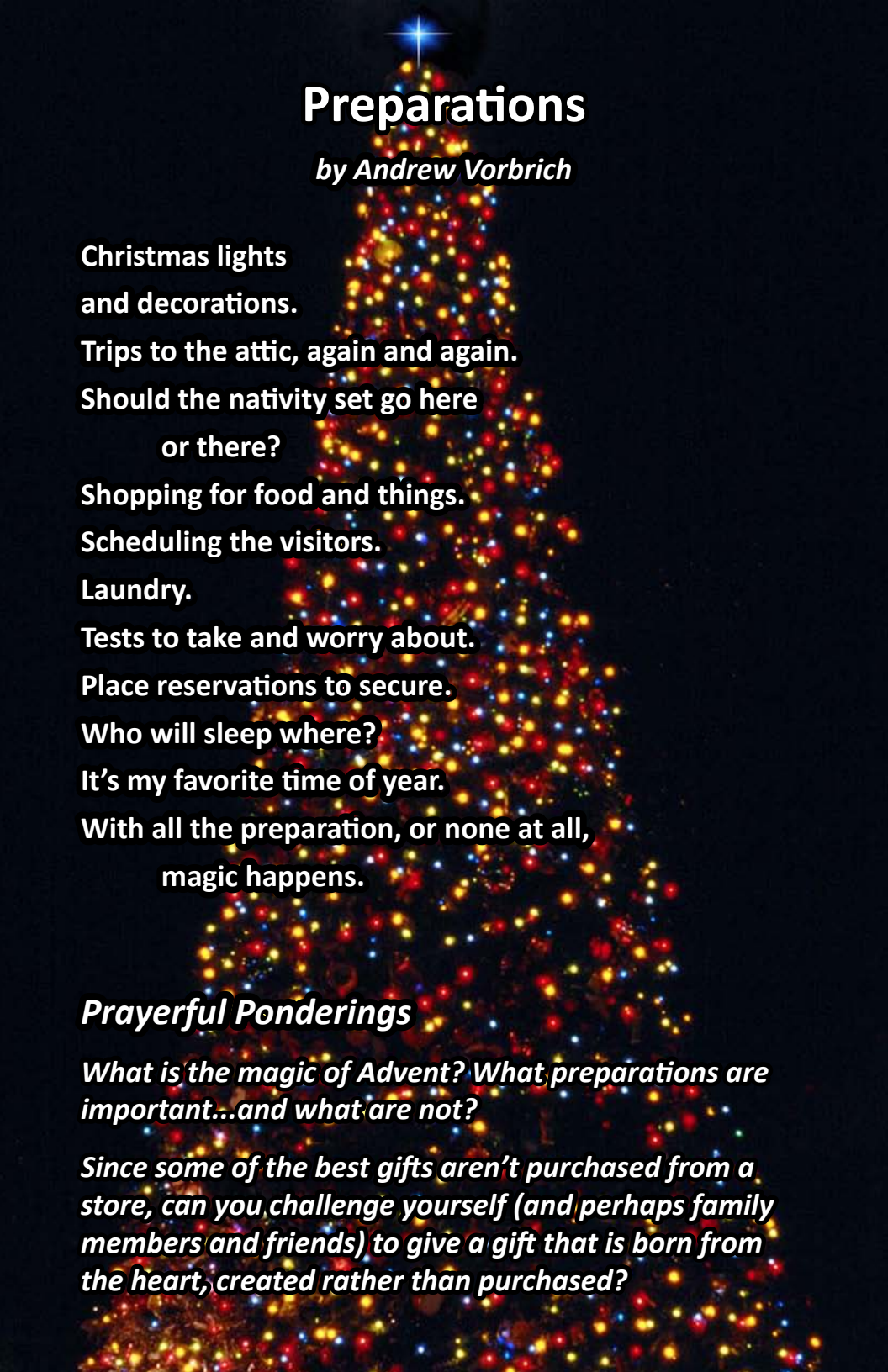
**I wonder
how the passion for loving the world
allowed me to exclude my children
to the extent of their being the sacrifice
and not myself.**

**I wonder
when the beckoning of globality
became overbearing to the
simplicity of utter compassion.**

Prayerful Ponderings

***What is balance between family and others, between
local and global?***

***Is there something you have not forgiven yourself for?
Something you have done, or not done, that causes you
pain? Can you forgive yourself and let it go? What can
redeem your mistakes?***



Preparations

by Andrew Vorbrich

Christmas lights
and decorations.

Trips to the attic, again and again.

Should the nativity set go here
or there?

Shopping for food and things.

Scheduling the visitors.

Laundry.

Tests to take and worry about.

Place reservations to secure.

Who will sleep where?

It's my favorite time of year.

With all the preparation, or none at all,
magic happens.

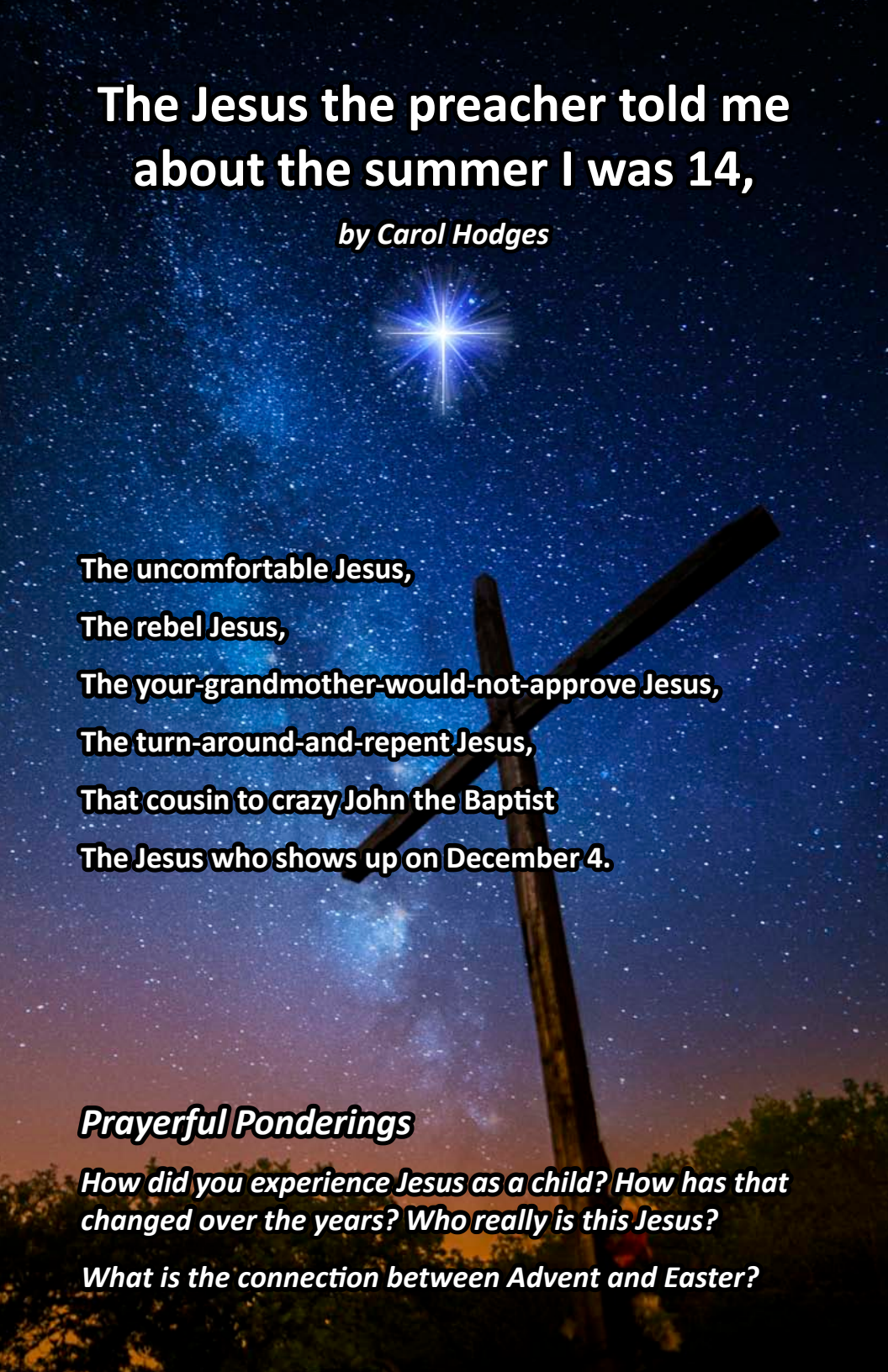
Prayerful Ponderings

What is the magic of Advent? What preparations are important...and what are not?

Since some of the best gifts aren't purchased from a store, can you challenge yourself (and perhaps family members and friends) to give a gift that is born from the heart, created rather than purchased?

The Jesus the preacher told me about the summer I was 14,

by Carol Hodges



**The uncomfortable Jesus,
The rebel Jesus,
The your-grandmother-would-not-approve Jesus,
The turn-around-and-repent Jesus,
That cousin to crazy John the Baptist
The Jesus who shows up on December 4.**

Prayerful Ponderings

How did you experience Jesus as a child? How has that changed over the years? Who really is this Jesus?

What is the connection between Advent and Easter?

Star of Wondering

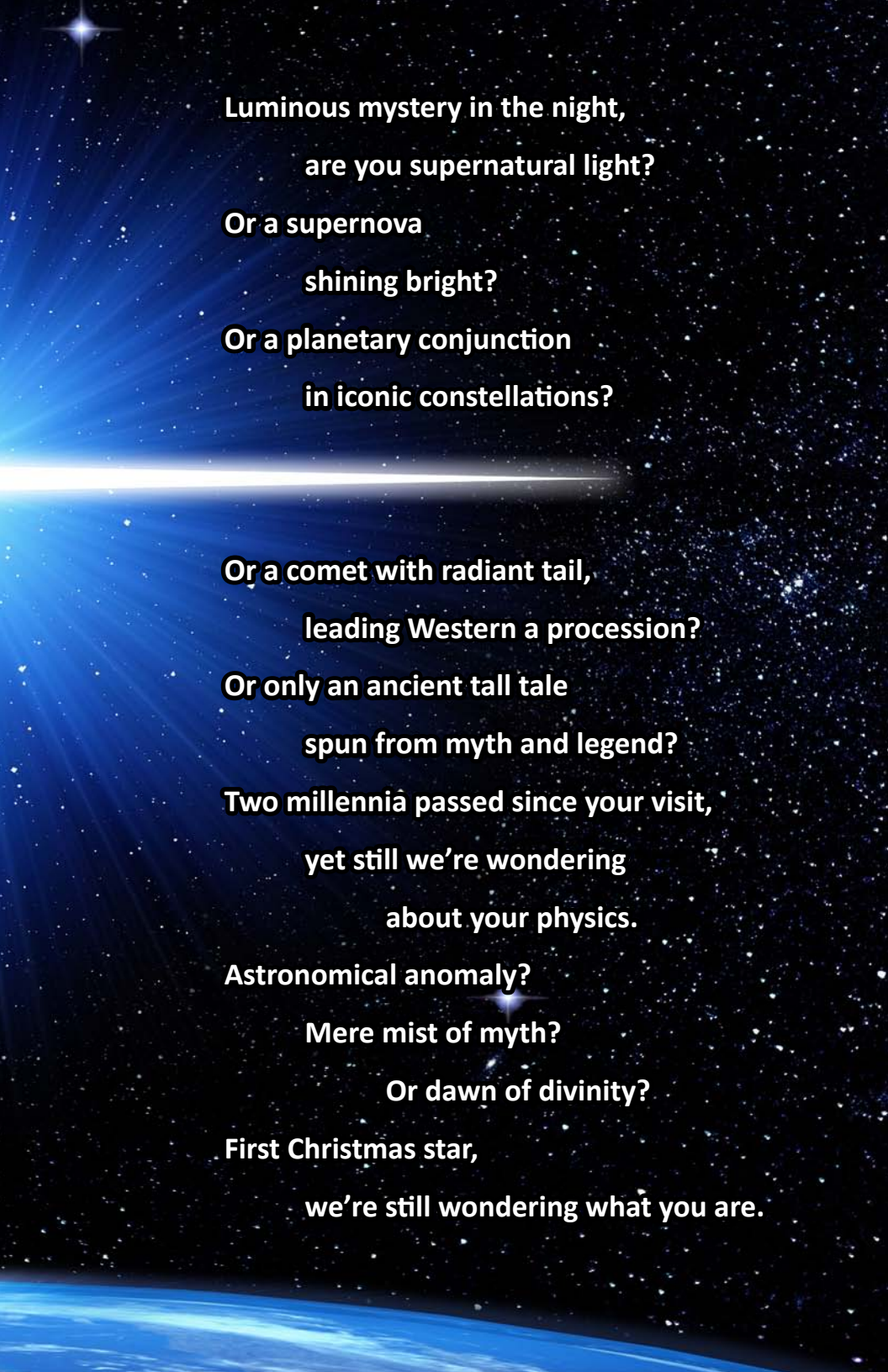
by Mark Stucky

Prayerful Ponderings

What are the “physics” of wonder?

***Does “explanation” of a “miracle”
help...or hinder?***

***What does the story (in Matthew 2)
of the mysterious star, a guiding light
in the darkness, mean for us today?***



Luminous mystery in the night,
are you supernatural light?

Or a supernova
shining bright?

Or a planetary conjunction
in iconic constellations?

Or a comet with radiant tail,
leading Western a procession?

Or only an ancient tall tale
spun from myth and legend?

Two millennia passed since your visit,
yet still we're wondering
about your physics.

Astronomical anomaly?
Mere mist of myth?

Or dawn of divinity?

First Christmas star,
we're still wondering what you are.

The image features a newborn baby's head and shoulders, held gently in two cupped hands. The baby has light brown hair and is looking towards the camera. The background is a vibrant blue with a bright white starburst or cross-like light source at the top center, creating a sense of divine light or hope. The overall composition is centered and symmetrical.

Anticipations...

Fulfilled

Additional Ponderings

We find ourselves in the waning light of winter. We experience growing darkness, and darkness can be seen as a limitation. Yet, God calls us to be an Advent people: a people who see limits as possibilities to go beyond. How do we approach limitations? Can we see possibilities in the limitations?

Months before Bethlehem, in learning she is chosen by God to give birth to the Messiah, Mary received both a blessing and a burden. To receive God's blessing is also to accept the burden of it, the necessary sacrifices. What are our burdens? Can we see them as blessings?

During Advent, we prepare for a spiritual journey to Bethlehem. As with any trip, we must leave things behind. What will we shrug off and leave behind? What will we take?

In Bethlehem, the divine light found a resting place in a manger. The word "manger" comes from a Latin root meaning "to eat." As we journey toward the promise of the manger—to be fed with acceptance, love, and peace—do we reach out and seek nourishment from others? Do we offer acceptance, love, and peace to others as they, too, journey?

Bethlehem was visited by shepherds on a mission. Shepherds weren't considered important, but God invited shepherds to welcome the baby Jesus. In our time, who is not considered important? How can we welcome them and let them know they are part of God's family?

We have all experienced burdensome times. Advent season reminds us that when hard times hit, we aren't called to play it safe. Like Mary and the shepherds, we are called to step out of our comfort zone.

Outside our comfort zone, we prepare for God to do something new in and through our lives. What is unfamiliar and different, can feel scary. What scary new gift is given to you this day? What will you do with it?

As we prepare and wait, we hope. What do you hope for yourself? For your friends and family? For your church? For the world?

Today, try praying a new way. If you usually pray quietly, pray aloud. If you pray timidly, be bold. Pray in a different location or at a different time. Do you use your hands to pray? If not, give your hand permission to write a prayer.

An Advent Prayer

As Christians, we are called to be expectant, not just during this Advent season, but every day:

God, you are light and life. As we wait expectantly, help us be children of light in the midst of darkness. Help us lean into our limits and see where you are taking us. God, give us the courage to venture like you, into this messy, fleshy world.

Amen.