

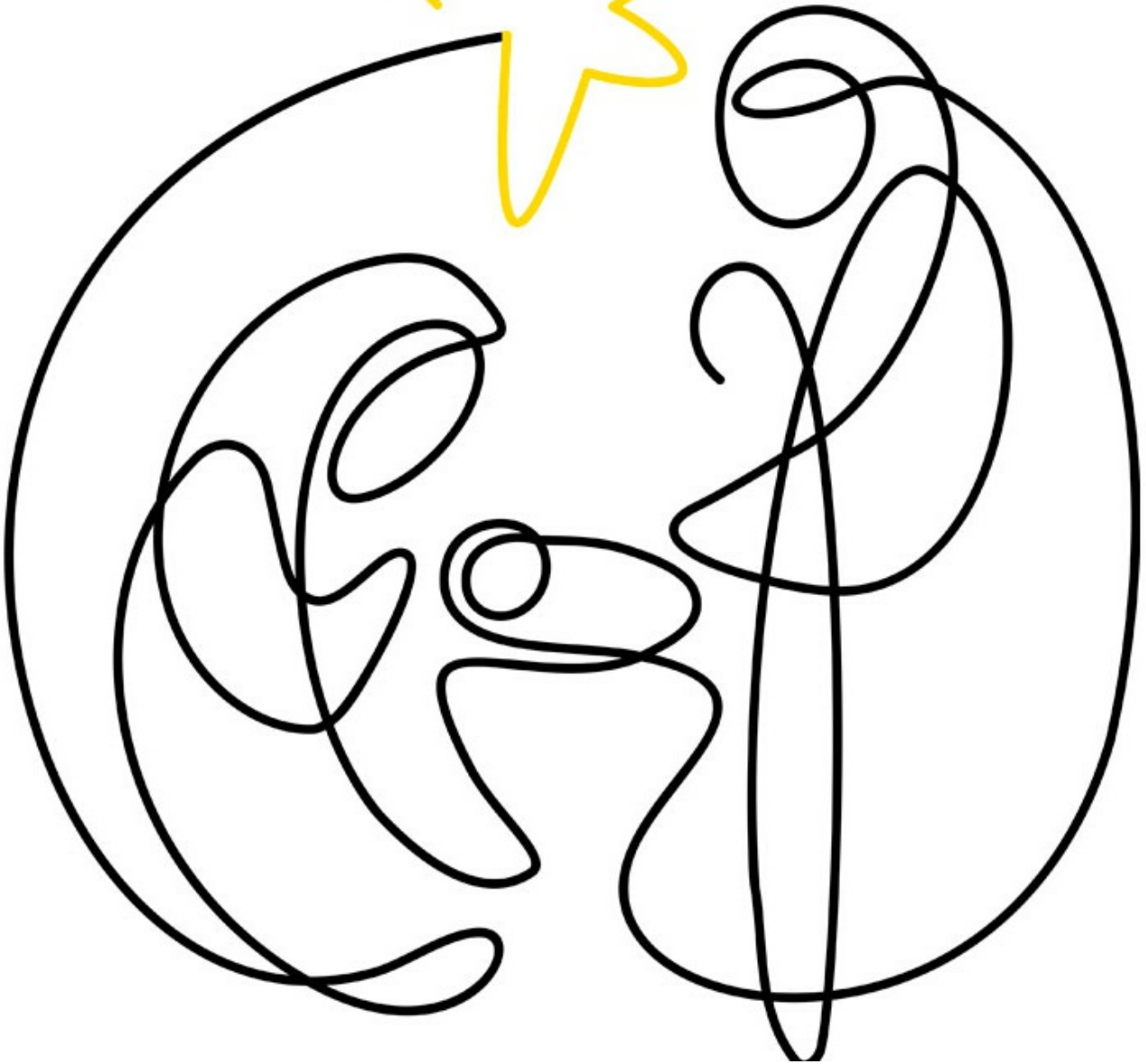


ADVENT PROGRAM

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ADVENT DEVOTIONAL DECEMBER 5, 2024

Weekly theme: Hope

SCRIPTURE

1 THESSALONIANS 3:1-13

1 Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we decided to be left alone in Athens; 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith, 3 so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions. Indeed, you yourselves know that this is what we are destined for. 4 In fact, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; so it turned out, as you know. 5 For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith; I was afraid that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor had been in vain.

6 But Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us — just as we long to see you. 7 For this reason, brothers and sisters, during all our distress and persecution we have been encouraged about you through your faith. 8 For we now live, if you continue to stand firm in the Lord. 9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before

our God because of you? 10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. 13 And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

DEVOTION

The Rev. Robin Sharp '18

In this earliest of his letters, Paul is overjoyed to learn of the faith and love that continues to thrive in this Thessalonian community of Christ's followers. Having to flee the city after preaching only three Sabbaths, this apostle was anxious to know if his teachings had taken root in such a short time. Was the soil fertile enough to allow the seed to grow? Were the souls of the people open to Jesus Christ and his Good News? Was this fledgling community of faith keen to hear the truth in Christ's teachings, turning their lives around to love the Lord their God and to love their neighbor as themselves?

They were. Timothy's visit to Thessalonica on behalf of Paul established that Christianity had taken root in this European city. The words and ministry were spreading. Verse eight—"For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord"—is not simply about Paul and Timothy being satisfied with the results of their mission. It is much deeper. The "we" points to all people following Jesus everywhere and at every time, enriching others in Christ's love. It demonstrates a living and growing faith. And "standing firm in the Lord" offers a glimpse of being strong enough to overcome the bondage of "living in the world."

This is the hope for those who fear that the reign of Christ is in peril. When standing "firm in the Lord," the world is assured Christ lives.

PRAYER

Ever-living Christ,

What can be said that will make a difference in the life of another? Will a gentle prayer together help them know Christ? Will holding their hand while they face conflict and despair tell them Jesus does care? Does preaching a bold sermon on loving the Messiah introduce them to a new way of life?

Today we are reminded, Lord: when we stand firm in your name, you do the work, and we are your instruments. That is what makes the difference. Amen.

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