

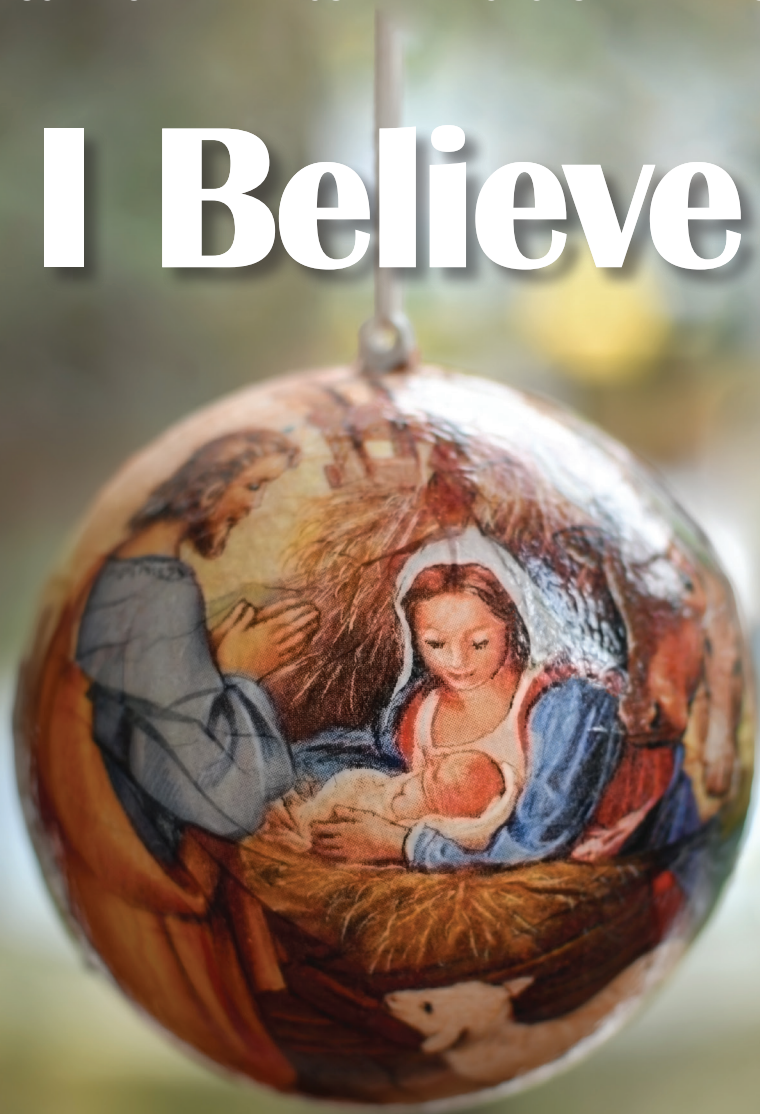


Society of St. Andrew
GLEANING AMERICA'S FIELDS
FEEDING AMERICA'S HUNGRY

Advent 2024

SCRIPTURE READINGS • REFLECTIONS • PRAYERS

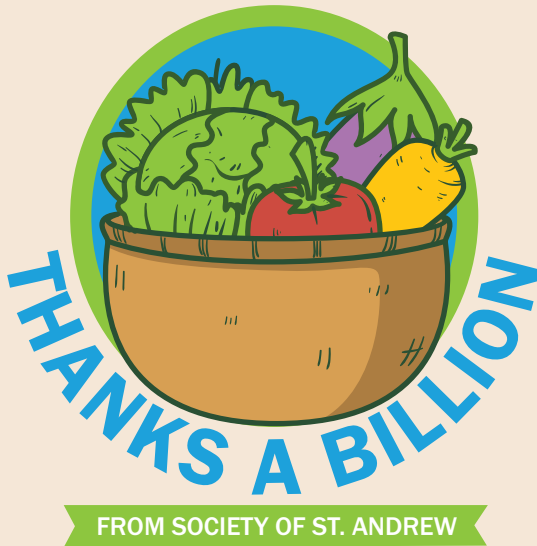
I Believe



The Society of St. Andrew, the largest gleaning organization in the United States, celebrates the billionth pound of food shared with people in need.

This historic hunger relief milestone, 45 years in the making, exemplifies a commitment to reducing food waste and ending hunger. SoSA would like to thank the hard work of gleaners, volunteers, and staff, and the unwavering generosity of donors, farmers, and supporters.

Thank you to all who have made this milestone possible!



The Society of St. Andrew's mission is to bring people together to harvest and share healthy food, reduce food waste, and build caring communities by offering nourishment to hungry neighbors. The Society of St. Andrew (SoSA) was founded in 1983 and is based in Big Island, VA. SoSA works with farmers to harvest unmarketable fruits and vegetables and organizes volunteers to pick, pack, and transport healthy produce to local feeding agencies such as food banks, free church pantries, shelters, and other nonprofits across the state. To learn more, visit EndHunger.org



Society of St. Andrew

**GLEANING AMERICA'S FIELDS
FEEDING AMERICA'S HUNGRY**

God's peace and blessings to you as we enter this holy Advent season! Advent, the beginning of the Christian year, is a season for quiet reflection, anticipation, and preparation for the day of celebration and remembrance of Christ's coming into the world. With abundant preparations leading up to Christmas, it is easy to get lost in busy activities and forget the true meaning of Christmas or why we believe.

Make time to reflect this season with the Society of St. Andrew's 2024 Advent devotional booklet, "I BELIEVE." Twenty-five devotions, written by lay and clergy, describe personal interpretations of Mark 9:23 or another favorite verse about believing. Why do you believe? Have you had a crisis of belief? What makes you believe? It's important during Advent and throughout our lives to know what and WHY we believe.

As your spiritual hungers are fed by "I BELIEVE" this Advent season, please consider giving back to help the Society of St. Andrew meet the physical needs of others with a monetary contribution that will provide healthy nourishing food for people in greatest need, right here in the United States. Perhaps you will give an amount equal to what you would spend on a gift for a coworker or your child's teacher. Perhaps you will take advantage of SoSA's Alternative Christmas cards to help feed people. You could set aside a tithe of your Christmas budget to provide fresh food for hungry neighbors through the Society of St. Andrew.

Again, thank you for sharing "I BELIEVE" devotional materials, for telling others about the Society of St. Andrew's gleanings and feeding ministries, and for making a generous gift. Together, let's show the world why we believe in the true meaning of Christmas by putting healthy Christmas dinners on the tables of your hungry neighbors!

Blessings again for a holy Advent season and a joyous Christmas!

Chesley R. Vohden

Director of Church Relations
Church@endhunger.org

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Society of St. Andrew

GLEANING AMERICA'S FIELDS
FEEDING AMERICA'S HUNGRY

How Can I Help?

GIVE AND SHARE HEALTHY FOOD

EndHunger.org/donate

- When you give, you offer health—and hope for a better tomorrow.
- Every gift matters!



GET OUT AND VOLUNTEER

EndHunger.org/register

- Contact SoSA to find out more about gleaning opportunities.
- Glean a variety of crops throughout the year!
- Great for individuals, church groups, civic organizations, and school groups!



LEARN MORE AND TELL OTHERS

EndHunger.org/signup

- Join an email list.
- Get the quarterly newsletter.
- Request Bible study, devotional, or VBS materials.



Why Do I Believe?

DECEMBER 1

Scripture: John 1: 1-14

Even before we retired to the beach, I was long fascinated and inspired by nature. How can one explain the wonder of creation as happenstance? I believe in God because this world is far too incredible and amazing to be an accident or chance event.

When my wife and I sit in the evening at a sea turtle nest, we marvel at these ancient creatures who return to their birthplace, laying eggs under the canopy of a million stars and galaxies overhead. The Aquarium where we volunteer is filled with extraordinary creatures of various colors, sizes and shapes that live in the surrounding oceans. Our maritime forest home has stately oaks that spread their wind-swept branches, providing cover for many woodland animals living there.

Many scientists see nature and its interwoven web of life as the product of wondrous design and creativity. I see God's creative hand at work throughout nature. We humans are also "fearfully and wonderfully made." The complexities of our human brains are only beginning to be fully understood.

Yet, perhaps the most compelling reason I believe is the presence of love. God is love; Jesus came to earth bringing love and his willingness to die for all of us. This Advent, I invite you to again listen to the words of Christina Rossetti: "Love came down at Christmas, Love all lovely, love divine; Love was born at Christmas, Star and angels gave the sign." This is why I believe!

Prayer: Father God, thank you for the gift of life, your creation, and for your marvelous abiding love. Amen.

Bob Brooks - Pine Knoll Shores, NC

Being Still and Knowing

DECEMBER 2

Scripture: Psalm 46:10

I do not remember a time that I did not believe, but there are often times when I am overwhelmed by my humanness and have to be reminded that God is taking care of me. In each of these moments, God communicates with me in different ways to bring me back to my belief.

I am a teacher, and every spring when I am weary, without fail, God sends a former student to remind me that my work is truly a ministry. Early in our marriage, when my husband and I relocated for his degree program, I could feel God's presence throughout those years holding me steady as He provided a new church family and a special job.

Six years ago when I had to come to terms with some difficult issues, I told the Lord I was ready to fight, and He has clearly opened the passageways for communication to resolve and assuage these issues. I also know he is using me for His glory as well.

There have been many conversations with friends, family, and strangers, when the words that came out of my mouth were not my own, but God's. In stillness, I can clearly "know" the proof of my belief; I can hear, see, and feel God's presence continually.

Prayer: Dear Lord, in this busy Advent season, help us to be still and to rest in the blessed assurance of your love for us through the humble birth of your son. Amen.

Melissa Dameron-Vines - Hoover, AL

A Gift for the Baby

DECEMBER 3

Scripture: Romans 10:14-15

I was seven years old when my sister was born. Shortly after my mother and sister came home from the hospital, a woman knocked on the front door and told my mother she had a gift from the church for my sister. My sister had been added to the "Cradle Roll" of the church where Mother was a member. Yes, Mother was a member of that church, but our family did not attend except maybe on Easter Sunday.

I was in the room watching when the woman asked my mother if I went to Sunday school. When she found out I didn't, she asked my mother if she could come the following Sunday and take me to Sunday school. Mother agreed.

She came back and took me to Sunday school. I can't say I remember what the teacher said or what we



did, but I remember I liked it and asked my parents if I could go back. The next Sunday my father took me to the church and picked me up after Sunday school. That was the Sunday pattern for many years.

Romans 10:14-15 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

I came to believe the Good News of the Gospel because a woman, whose name I never knew, brought gifts to our home for my sister and for me - and returned to introduce me to God’s Kingdom.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for those bearing gifts to your children. May we all know how to bring the gift of the Gospel to those who are waiting to hear it. Amen.

Charles Gambrell - Saraland, AL

I Believe

DECEMBER 4

Scripture: Mark 9:17-23

My doctor called one morning and asked me to come in and talk to him right away. Oh no, another crisis! “You are one of the healthiest patients I have ever known but your health is deteriorating so rapidly I am frightened for you. You must make a decision about your marriage, and soon.” My doctor was well aware of my husband’s affair with a co-worker, and the verbal and emotional abuse the children and I lived with. This was a ‘wake up call’ for me.

Soon, my husband divorced us. Crisis of belief? No, just crisis and like the father in Mark 9, “I believe; help my unbelief.” I knew I was facing a very painful and challenging time ahead. But my belief in God allowed me to realize that this divorce was God’s way of saving my life. With God’s help and the support of my church family and friends, we made it through this most difficult time. Amazingly, God’s support and answered prayers were so overt, so obvious, that even friends who were witnesses to this, commented on God’s answers and my faith. “Everything IS possible to him who believes.”

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your care and help in our times of crisis. Help me to remember in those times to be still, and know that You are God, to take a deep breath, pray, and allow you to work in our lives. Amen.

Carolyn Lee Purdy- Harrisonburg, VA

Believing Is Seeing

DECEMBER 5

Scripture: John 9

They said it couldn't happen.

“Man will never fly. And if he does, he won't be someone from Dayton.” That's what the editorial in the Dayton (Ohio) newspaper said upon learning that two bicycle mechanics from Dayton were trying to make a flying machine. A few months later, when Wilbur and Orville Wright, bicycle mechanics from Dayton, did fly from the sand dunes in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, the editor still refused to acknowledge it. Wilbur and Orville telegraphed their father: “Success four flights Thursday morning....inform press...home Christmas.” The next day, an article was on the front of the paper. It said, “Wright brothers will be home for Christmas.”

They said it couldn't happen.

He was born blind. He had always been blind. He always would be blind. But a wandering Jewish rabbi had done something to him, and now he could see. The Pharisees didn't believe it, even when they saw the man. His parents didn't want to acknowledge that their son was healed. They had all the arguments. But the man just kept saying, “Yeah, I know....but once I was blind, now I see.”

A person with an experience is never at the mercy of someone with an argument.

Can you see?

Prayer: Lord, help us to believe, so that we may see. Amen.

Michael Henderson - Florence, SC

The Unbelieving Believer: Knowing Why, What, and in Whom I Believe

DECEMBER 6

Scripture: Philippians 4:5

Recently, my husband and I celebrated our 56th anniversary. We recalled the events of our many years together, including the ups and downs of our marriage.

**Show your love with
Society of St. Andrew**
Christmas Cards!

**Send them to everyone on your list:
Co-workers • Neighbors • Pastors
Friends • Teachers • Shut-ins • Relatives**



sample of 2024 card

Give a gift from the heart. Your gift of \$15.00 or more, in your friend or loved one's honor, will put 500 servings of nourishing, healthy food on the tables of hungry people!

Your honorees will receive a beautiful Alternative Christmas Card, designed exclusively for Society of St. Andrew for 2024 by Virginia artist, James Harris.

The full color 5" X 7" card will feature original art for this Christmas season and an inspiring verse that conveys God's love and reminds your honoree that they hold a special place in your life.

This unique card announces your generous gift to feed people in need in your friend or loved one's name. We'll also send a card to you, with our thanks & confirmation of your gift order.

**Finish your holiday gift shopping in only a few minutes today!
Order today (form on next page) or
800-333-4597 • card@endhunger.org • Endhunger.org/cards**

Society of St. Andrew

Christmas Cards!

Minimum gift donation for each card is \$15.00.

Do not send cash through the mail. Your donation is tax deductible.

Charge my: VISA • Master Card • American Express

Make checks payable to: Society of St. Andrew

Account # _____ Exp _____ CVV _____

Signature _____

Total enclosed or to be charged to card: _____

Orders must be received by December 6th to ensure delivery before the Christmas holiday. We will make every effort to expedite late orders. Please PRINT all information. Mail to: Society of St. Andrew
3383 Sweet Hollow Road • Big Island, VA 24526

Your name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Daytime phone _____

Email _____

Send _____ cards to me for personalizing and mailing.

Personalize and mail the following cards on my behalf:

In the blocks below, please indicate how you want each individual card signed. Attach additional sheets, if needed, to complete your list.

You may also order online at EndHunger.org/card

In honor of _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____
Sign this card with these words:

In honor of _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____
Sign this card with these words:

In honor of _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____
Sign this card with these words:

In honor of _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____
Sign this card with these words:

But these past two years have been the most challenging. We never imagined we'd both be in the health condition we are in. Our bodies are not only affected, but our spirits are also. I know my faith has been challenged. I'm too old to be tested by God. Besides, it's bad theology. However, what do I really believe?

Like the father of the boy tormented by seizures in the gospel of Mark, chapter 9, I too have cried to the Lord, "I believe; help my unbelief!" But to be convinced, like the apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians, that the Lord is near has boosted my weary spirit.

Advent is more than waiting for the babe in the manger and the second coming of Christ Jesus. It is also a time of comfort and renewal. As we Christ-followers reflect on the meaning of this holy season, may we each expand our awareness of God in Christ Jesus, who is with us always, even during the difficult times.

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, for whom nothing is impossible, help us remember that you, through the Lord Jesus Christ, are always near to comfort and renew our weary spirit. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Chris Suerdieck - Emmitsburg, MD

Because of Them

DECEMBER 7

Scripture: Proverbs 22:6

I didn't understand how important my parents' faith was when I was a child. I thought everyone read the Bible before breakfast and discussed life events from a theological perspective. It never bothered me that my parents were always first in and last out of church, and I didn't see that was one more foundation of service. I didn't think it was strange that our church life, our home life, and our whole life were all one and the same. It was just the way it was.

As a pastor and the father of two young men, I can now see the little decisions my parents made for me before I could make them for myself. I pray that my sons will continue to claim faith in Jesus Christ for themselves. I realize that Proverbs 22:6 leaves open the realistic possibility we will sometimes veer from the path, but when we are older and wiser, we will return to what was laid for us. I know I didn't always stay between the solid lines, but I never forgot the lessons imparted to me through action and word as a child. I didn't understand what my parents were doing then, but I get it now. And I am thankful.

Prayer: Holy God, help us to recognize the good foundations laid for us by others, and set us to the work of laying out solid foundations of faith for those who follow. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Jacob Sahms - Chesterfield, VA

This I Believe

DECEMBER 8

Scripture: John 1:1-14

The year 2025 will be the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed. Historically, this creed has been, along with the Apostles Creed, among the Church's major affirmations of faith.

What is an "affirmation of faith?" It's a credo, or statement of beliefs. When asked about my beliefs, I must reply in terms of my faith. What do I believe? That is, what do I have faith in?

When faced with tragedy, one may say their faith is shaken, meaning their beliefs failed when needed. By contrast, one may say they overcame difficulty only because of their faith. Their beliefs made the difference.

What do I have faith in? This list includes my wife, family, friends, and church. Theologically, I believe in Christ as the way by which I try to live. It is through him that I seek strength for daily life. His love is the standard for how I try to treat other people. This faith describes my core beliefs. Do I sometimes fall short in practicing what I believe? Sadly, yes. However, I also believe in God's forgiving grace. Therefore, I ask for forgiveness—often! "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound!"

As part of my personal beliefs, I experience another Advent season, confident in the faith that in Christ, God became flesh, "full of grace and truth."

Prayer: God, lead me to deepen my faith and strengthen my beliefs, that I may better serve you in all I do. Amen.

H. Hasbrouck Hughes - Williamsburg, VA

Prayer Acrostics

DECEMBER 9

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-8

I appreciate memory aids, devices that help me recall useful words or thoughts. I especially like acrostics that assist me to focus my thoughts during prayer. I attempt to use Advent as a time to renew focus on my prayer life, one of reflection and preparation for the celebration of Christ's coming.

There are several prayer acrostics that have been useful to me throughout my life. One such memory aid, of which you may be familiar is ACTS. ACTS represents Adoration (praise of God), Confession (acknowledge and repent of sins you have committed), Thanksgiving (thank God for how he has blessed you and others), and Supplication (pray for your needs and the needs of others). I do not know the origin of this helpful memory aide and do not know who deserves credit for its creation, but I have found it useful.

For many years now, I have been using PPIR (I pronounce as "purr."), my own acrostic creation, to assist in focusing my prayers. P represents praise and thanksgiving, the other P is for penance, I stands for intercession, and R is for requests. I see praise for God and thanksgiving being closely related, exulting the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and being thankful for all that has been bestowed on me. A contrite plea for forgiveness is important. Focus on intercession for others, then close the prayer in making requests for self. Praise God and be thankful, seek forgiveness for your indiscretions, offer requests for others, and lastly, think of self.

Prayer: Oh God, I praise your name, and I am thankful for your grace every day. Forgive me my transgressions. May you be revealed to nonbelievers and assist me daily to focus on faithful living. Amen.

Dwain Baldrige - Arnold, MO



Help Thou Mine Unbelief

DECEMBER 10

Scripture: Mark 9:23-24 (KJV)

I find in my life that issues and concerns often lead to worries that try to consume my thinking, both in the quiet times during the day and even more so during the quiet times at night.

Of course, I try to solve the issues myself until overwhelmed, and then in desperation, I ask God for help (often followed by trying to take the issues back again later).

Although I know God is more than ready, willing, and able to help me, I still hesitate at making the request. Sometimes I think, "...It's me again Lord..." and wonder whether he might just be tired of always having to bail me out.

While counting my many blessings, trust based on God's many past rescues still gets clouded by an inkling of doubt when help doesn't come as quickly as I'd like.

But in the end, like the words in today's scripture verses, I humbly plead "... Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief..."

Prayer: Dear Lord, in my time of need, please help me believe that you will always be there by my side through thick and thin. I pray this in your precious name. Amen.

Denny Engle - Gautier, MS

The Greatest Gift

DECEMBER 11

Scripture: John 10:7-10

For the past several years a major department store has boasted the slogan: "The Magic of Believing." I always wonder what it is they want me to believe. What is the magic? Is this about believing in Santa Claus? Perhaps it's about concentrating on desired material possessions and the power of positive thinking to attain them? Is it about believing in the power of money to fulfill us? Whatever it's supposed to mean, it's missed the mark with me. I'm so tired of how the world now views Christmas. I don't even like to go into department stores at this time of year.

As a Christian, I know Christmas is not about Santa Claus, getting and giving gifts, or the power of things to make us happy. Christmas is about the birth of Christ. It's about believing Christ was born to show the world a better way to live and to save us from ourselves. "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly," Jesus tells us in John 10:10. Because we believe in him, we are forgiven, guided, comforted, and loved.

So this Christmas, let's show the world that Christmas is not about magic and material goods. Let's spend less time in stores and more time with Christ by reading our Bibles, attending church services, praying, and sharing His love with one another.

Prayer: Thank you, Father God, for the greatest gift, your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Regina K. Carson - Chesterfield, VA

Believe—More than a Word

DECEMBER 12

Scripture: Luke 1:38-55

I am an optimist—hoping that “BELIEVE” does not become yet another good word that gets decoratively hung on our walls and imprinted on knick-knacks, with little depth of meaning, because, of course, “Doesn't everybody believe something?”

For me, believing is a life-changing, important choice. I know that in creating me, God intends that I believe. But it is up to me to choose to believe in God, in Jesus, in the Holy Spirit, and in God's Kingdom that continues to emerge in our midst. The active component of my belief makes it more than a thought or an idea.

My choice to believe in Jesus compels me to live out a spiritual journey, immersed in the Word, following the Way, Truth, and Life that he taught.

My choice to believe in Jesus opens a continuing dialogical relationship with him about other choices I make, values I embrace, directions I choose, and relationships I pursue.

My choice to believe in Jesus confirms my hope that my prayers of confession and praise are heard by the Son of God.

The Society of St. Andrew is the Ultimate Green Ministry



Good Stewards of God's Creation

Society of St. Andrew (SoSA) was founded in Virginia in 1979 on Christian principles of caring for the environment; living a simple, sustainable lifestyle; and caring for the "least of these" by modeling a commonsense solution to the problems of food waste and hunger. SoSA uses the excess of God's abundance to feed those who don't get enough to eat, for less than 5¢ a serving.



Keeps Good Food from Going to Waste

SoSA saves tens of millions of pounds of perfectly good, fresh produce each year, food that would otherwise go to waste, and donates it to feed hungry people throughout the nation.

Using the proven biblical practice of gleaning farm fields and orchards after the harvest, each year SoSA engages tens of thousands of volunteers who pick, bag, and deliver leftover crops that, for a variety of reasons, would not be sold.



Benefits the Environment

SoSA keeps thousands of tons of food waste out of landfills, not only saving good food, but also reducing the production of methane gas, which damages the atmosphere.



Improves Health Outcomes

SoSA supplies fresh fruits and vegetables rather than high-caloric "filler food," improving the health and well-being of our society's most vulnerable.



Offers to Act on Faith

Harvest of Hope, SoSA's mission retreat program, teaches youth and adults how to live responsibly in a hungry world and care about those who are hurting.

SoSA's Gleaning Network and Potato & Produce Project put faith into action by following Jesus' commands to care for our neighbors and "let nothing be wasted."

Go Green with the Society of St. Andrew
EndHunger.org

My choice to believe in Jesus changes me, all of me, all for the good of others.

My choice to believe in Jesus challenges me to join my voice to the voices in Luke's first chapter: Gabriel, Mary, Elizabeth, and Zachariah.

Prayer: Merciful God, move my belief to an active following of Jesus, all to your glory. Amen.

Jay M. Hanke - Arnold, MD

Do You Hear What I Hear?

DECEMBER 13

Scripture: Luke 2:8-20

The first Christmas decoration I get out of the attic is a crèche. Growing up in church, playing the part of a shepherd boy or a magi, my eyes were always fixed on the manger where Jesus was born. It is where I first believed. Later, when I visited the place of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, the scene wasn't as I pictured it in a cow barn and a feeding trough. Yet, still it was awe-inspiring. Luke tells us that after the shepherds had visited the place of Jesus' birth, they "returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them." Like them, this is the story I like to tell. The Christian faith is always just one generation away from extinction unless we tell our stories. No one is "born" a Christian. Christians can only be "born anew" after they hear God's story and make it their story. Each new generation of Christians must pass on the story to the next, or Christianity will become something learned from history books but no longer lived out in a life of faith. It was at the manger that I first believed, and still today joyfully share this world-transforming event of our Savior's birth with everyone I meet. Do you hear what I hear?



Prayer: Loving God, we offer our thanks for the gift of love born to us at Christmas. Like the shepherds, let us approach the manger with wonder and awe. Amen.

Bill Jones - Waynesboro, VA

Don't Speak Your Belief; Show It

DECEMBER 14

Scripture: James 2:26

The gift of faith is an incredible thing, and having the ability and willingness to talk about it is equally powerful. But there's something even greater than that: *showing your faith in action*. In my life it's not been enough for me to talk about my belief that the hungry should be fed. I've gone a step further and volunteered at food pantries. Saying that I believe the homeless should be provided shelter isn't sufficient. I've taken time to work with others volunteering in a warehouse that provides furniture for those moving off the streets and into stable housing.

The writer of the Epistle of James isn't discounting the importance of faith. Faith—*belief*—is vital. What is being shown is that faith is only one side of the coin; flip it to the other side and you find *works*. I try to live my life demonstrating that it's not enough simply to *share* the good news. You must *show* the good news. Your words have an impact on those looking to you as an example, but your actions will speak with far more power.

Prayer: Gracious God, grant me the words to express my belief and opportunities to live it. Grant me the wisdom and courage to go beyond simply professing faith, empowering me to put what I carry in my mind and heart to work through my hands and feet. Let what I demonstrate through my actions be proof to others of my belief in you. Amen.

Matt Rhodes - Lynchburg, VA



The Courage to Believe

DECEMBER 15

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 16:13

We all have beliefs. I believe the beach is the most relaxing place, goats are the best pets, and a warm bubble bath can be the best form of relaxation. I also believe in the healing power of love and forgiveness, and that everyone matters. While we all believe in something, believing in more controversial things can take courage. Things like eternal salvation, the divinity of Christ, and the Virgin birth have been controversial for over 2,000 years. What do you do when society laughs at those things? When it laughs at believers? When it laughs at you? Will you remain steadfast in your beliefs, or start to doubt them? Standing strong in the face of peer pressure or ridicule requires courage. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 16:13, "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong." The next time you hear someone trivializing or poking fun at something you believe in, gather your courage and remind yourself that your beliefs are not based on whether or not they are popular. They are based on whether or not they are true. The truth is that heaven is real, Jesus was born of a virgin, died on the cross, and rose again for the salvation of all who believe. Be a courageous believer!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, be my strength. Give me the courage to believe in spite of peer pressure, ridicule, or persecution. Thank you for your unfailing love, especially during times of trial. Amen.

Laura Worosher - Richmond, VA

Daily Lenten Devotions A New Day Dawns

All New Lenten Devotions for 2025
PRE-ORDER online: EndHunger.org/lent



No Matter What, I Believe

DECEMBER 16

Scripture: John 14:1

When my son was a child, he wanted to be a policeman. One day, he came to me very upset. He said, “Mommy, I am scared because if I am a policeman when I grow up, I may get shot and die.” Wow, what do you say to that?

I told my son that Jesus was always with him and watching over him. I ended our talk by saying, “Honey, God is with you everywhere you go, and you will not go to heaven until God is ready for you. So you don’t have to worry about dying.” He thought for a moment, looked at me and said, “Okay,” and ran off to play.

**John 14:1 “Let not your hearts be troubled.
Believe in God; believe also in me.”**

I think of that conversation often. He didn’t choose to become a police officer. Instead, he joined the military. Had I not believed in the promise of God, I would not have made it through the dark thoughts and fears for my son during his deployments.

Romans 8:38-39 ESV, “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Prayer: Father, give us the faith to believe in the promise of your love and protection in this word. No matter what, I believe in You.

Barbara Lipford - Goode, VA

Advent Trust

DECEMBER 17

Scripture: Mark 9:23

Growing in Christ-like trust is the Advent journey. I am continually nudged by the Spirit to widen my understanding of the coming-again of Christ in my days.

In Mark 9, through the Transfiguration and a village-square healing story, God confirms Jesus is a healing Messiah. Peter, James, and John have witnessed



Society of St. Andrew
GLEANNING AMERICA'S FIELDS
FEEDING AMERICA'S HUNGRY



Preventing Waste, Feeding Hungry People

With your help, The Society of St. Andrew (SoSA) addresses this crucial issue in two ways. In each, SoSA gathers up food that would otherwise be wasted. This fresh and nutritious food is then provided, at no cost, to food banks, pantries, and programs to feed or provide food to those most in need.

SoSA distributes food donated from a variety of sources including farms, fields, orchards, packing houses, and grocers. This is accomplished through the coordination of thousands of volunteers and events, each year.

Volunteers serve in a variety of roles. This includes gleaning fields and orchards, delivering packaged produce to hunger relief agencies, and unloading and distributing truckloads of food directly into the local community. In 2021 alone, SoSA distributed more than 46 million pounds of good food to families who might otherwise have gone without.

Often the food is surplus, inconveniently-sized, or cosmetically imperfect. Sometimes, it's marketable but the farmer or grower wants to share it with the local community to address urgent needs.



Share nourishing food with people in the greatest need year-round by joining the 12 Baskets Monthly Giving Program. Your gifts will make a tremendous impact by faithfully sharing healthy food with our hungry neighbors throughout the year.

Yes! Please sign me up for 12 Baskets

- \$12 per month will share 4,800 servings of healthy food each year, touching the lives of 680 hungry children, women, and men.
- \$24 per month will share 9,600 servings of healthy food each year, touching the lives of 1,360 hungry children, women, and men.
- _____ Other monthly donation amount

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Sign up online at: www.EndHunger.org/12 or through your authorization (below).

I'd like to donate through an automatic withdrawal from my checking account. Please contact me to set this up.

Charge my credit card monthly VISA MC AmEx Discover
Account # _____ Exp. Date _____ CVV _____

Signature _____

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(but do not understand) the mountain-top Transfiguration. Joining the other disciples, a tense encounter ensues between Jesus, the Torah teachers, the crowd, and the other disciples:

Jesus: “What are you arguing about?”

Immediately, a man emerges from the crowd, “Master, I have brought my son for healing, but your disciples could not dispel the demon!” I can relate to the angst and frustration of the parent and neighbors because the child had not been relieved of his affliction after months of care and prayer. Even the hoped-for powers of the Galilean’s disciples had failed. Yet, the youngster is revived and healed by Christ—who reminds his disciples and us:

“...Everything is possible for one who believes.”

Advent days and ordinary days hold opportunities that, even in life’s stress and challenges, I become renewed and flourish. I only need to be attentive to the grace of God through prayer and service. This is every Christian’s Advent journey.

Prayer: Spirit of Christ, support me in these days of Advent and beyond. Guide me, through prayer and reflection, to see and to share your restorative grace and mercy. Amen.

Roger Dowdy - Richmond, VA

Why Do I Believe?

DECEMBER 18

Scripture: John 4:41

I have no stories of “ah ha moments” or huge, miraculous events in my life to share why I’m a believer. Personally, my belief began as a child when first hearing the stories of Jesus. I merely felt a quiet acceptance of Scriptures learned and an assurance that God is our Heavenly Father who sent his Son to be our Savior. That belief was strengthened as a teenager at the renewal of my baptism and confirmation into the church. I’ve continued to see that belief in action daily.

Though the world does its best to weigh me down with struggles and concerns, I still see the love of God in so many ways. I feel his presence in morning sunrises, evening sunsets, when gazing at beautiful flowers, majestic mountains, cascading waterfalls, or stars in the night sky. I see his love when holding a newborn baby, in the voices of children, or listening to wise elders share

their own life-long stories of God's love. In times of illness, grief, and crises, God has blessed me with comfort and mercy.

When I think back throughout my life, there's no doubt that the only way I made it through difficult situations I've faced was because God was with me, guiding me, teaching me, calming me, reassuring me, which still continues to deepen my subtle childhood acceptance of why I believe.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for words of Scripture that teach us of your miraculous love, mercy and grace, leading to our belief. Amen.

Julie Erickson - Olathe, KS

Every Church Needs a Roof...Right?

DECEMBER 19

Scripture: Mark 9:23

A small United Methodist church in rural Zimbabwe went seventeen years with no roof, worshipping in the open air all that time. Sure, there were four walls standing, and the hands of every family in the congregation had pledged (and made) every block used to get where they were now. But in the community, even the church didn't come first...the primary school came first, fully functional, fully operational, fully staffed and fully relevant to the needs of the community's children (how Wesleyan to meet the needs of the people first!).

A roof requires cash for the lumber for the roof trusses and a carpenter to guide the construction, but there were no funds available for such things. A United Methodist Volunteer in Mission team came, bought the necessary lumber, hired a carpenter, and together with the team, the congregation finally had a roof over their heads.

The church leaders explained they never gave up hope. They always believed that God's blessings were for them as much as they were for everyone. Their prayers, faith, and belief...all made an impossible thing possible.

Prayer: Papa God, help our unbelief. Turn our eyes to joyous recognition of your Spirit to enable us to see and do those things in faith and believe all things are possible. Amen.

Kip Robinson-Glen Allen, VA

“I believe in Opie”

DECEMBER 20

Scripture: James 1:6

In the 1960s, the Andy Griffith Show was a popular television series. Set in the fictional town of Mayberry, North Carolina, writers created scripts that made viewers laugh while offering wisdom too.

One episode, finds Sheriff Andy Taylor struggling to believe his son, Opie. Andy assumes Opie is using his imagination to create an imaginary friend, Mr. McVeebee. When Andy confronts him, Opie is adamant—Mr. McVeebee is real.



Entertainment Tonight, Public domain, via Wikimedia

After hearing Opie out, Sheriff Taylor, despite his doubts, tells his Aunt Bee and Deputy Barney Fife that he “believes in Opie.”

Unlike Sheriff Taylor who believes in his son, when it comes to the Christmas story, I’m like James 1:6: “you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.”

Clearly, there have been many times in my life when our complicated world has ‘blown and tossed’ me further away from this Christmas story of love.

And yet when I drift away, it is the loyalty of love found with Abraham and his son, Isaac, the Good Samaritan saving the beaten, robbed stranger, and Mary’s unshakeable love of God, Joseph, and Jesus that draws me back to believing.

Even Sheriff Taylor wasn’t tossed by the sea. His power of believing was affirmed when he really encountered Mr. McVeebee.

This Christmas, it is time to toss my doubts and believe.

Prayer: God, this Christmas anchor my heart to believe in your loyal love. Amen.

Bill Pike-Richmond, VA

Scripture: Luke 1: 18-22; 26-38

Believe! Don't doubt. Doubt assumes you doubt one statement because you believe another. To doubt is to believe in what you choose not to doubt. When God speaks and acts, will you believe? John the Baptist's father, Zacharias, doubts. Jesus' mother, Mary, believes.

Placing incense on the altar in the Jerusalem Holy Place, Zacharias performs his once-in-a-lifetime act. From out of nowhere, his eyes catch the supernatural angel Gabriel standing by the altar. He knows the heavenly visitor is from another world and is terrified! The angel calms him, saying, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son." Zacharias counters, "According to what will I know I this?" Translated, 'How can I believe this?' He doubts. He doubts God because he believes older women cannot have babies, rather than believing God. Being struck speechless, he learns what God can do!



Image Credit: The National Gallery, London
The Annunciation: The Angel Gabriel

The angel Gabriel visits Mary and says, "Do not be afraid, Mary...you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus." She is only perplexed because she is not married yet. When she understands it will be by the Holy Spirit, she believes, "May it be done to me according to your word."

Jesus says to you, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life." Do not doubt by choosing to believe otherwise. Believe!

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, I believe! Help my unbelief! Amen.

Tom Thomas - Forest, VA

A Swing in the Backyard

DECEMBER 22

Scripture: John 20:29

One might wonder why I chose an Eastertide scripture for Advent, but believing doesn't have just one season. This passage when Jesus shows himself to Thomas after the Resurrection, is a powerful illustration of overcoming doubt. Some think that the opposite of doubt is belief, but I declare that doubt is actually a part of faith.

The dictionary defines doubt as “to be uncertain about something,” and it defines faith as “belief that is not based on proof.” How is doubt PART of faith? Regardless of how unreal the idea of Jesus being raised from the dead was, Thomas showed back up. There was a lot more belief there than at first glance.

The dictionary defines doubt as “to be uncertain about something,” and it defines faith as “belief that is not based on proof.”

In the classic Christmas movie, *Miracle on 34th Street*, young Susan Walker is coping with believing the unbelievable, just like “doubting” Thomas. One scene has her muttering to herself, “I believe... I believe... It's silly, but I believe.” Regardless of how fantastical the idea that this nice old man with a beard could be Santa Claus and capable of giving a gift like a house, she's decided to believe.

We have that opportunity to believe—even when we struggle like Thomas—to keep showing up for Jesus. And the gift we will receive is even better than a house with a swing in the back yard.

Prayer: Lord, I believe...help my unbelief. Amen.

Chris Howell - Madison Heights, VA

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FEEDING AMERICA'S HUNGRY

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Society of St. Andrew began in 1979 in the hills of Virginia and has grown into the largest field gleaning organization in the country. Each year as thousands of farmers donate their crops, tens of thousands of volunteers are deployed to glean and distribute farm-fresh food to thousands of feeding programs in all 48 contiguous states, at no cost to the recipients.

You make it possible to bring this nutritious, but excess, bounty from the field to the people in greatest need. SoSA relies on farmers to share their abundance and volunteers to handle the hands-on aspects of picking and delivering food.

SoSA needs its donors to provide the funds to cover critical costs, like proper packaging, commercial transportation when needed, and behind-the-scene logistics.

2023 STATISTICS

Pounds Distributed:
24 Million
Events Held: 7,583
Volunteers: 23,190

**3.95 billion servings
shared historically**

Cost less than .05¢ a serving

Less than 3% overhead



Slot Machine God

DECEMBER 23

Matthew 21:22

The scripture from Matthew states that if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. Woohoo! Slot Machine Jesus. Great God Genie granting three wishes. All I have to do is believe, then life will be smooth sailing on a luxury yacht with all the chocolate and chicken nuggets I can eat. That can't be right... I know a lot of people with very strong faith who still struggle to make ends meet. Believers who deal with fractured relationships... what's up with that? What you talkin' 'bout Matthew?

As much as I love the idea of prayer being a magical incantation that solves all my problems and gives me whatever I ask for, I think that Jesus had something else in mind when he told that to the disciples.

If you are a believer and you find yourself in one of life's storms, going to God in prayer is a critical first response. Perhaps there will be divine intervention to the situation—like a miraculous healing or financial windfall. But much more likely, what you'll find is that prayer changes US. When we take our troubles to the Lord, he already knows the need. It is our turning toward him that makes the real difference. That humble act helps us remember and find perspective.

Prayer: Lord, in this Advent season, help me to seek you and your will. Let me look beyond the lights and wrappings to you. Amen.

Jack Kincaid - Alberta, Canada

Survivors Believe

DECEMBER 24

Scripture: Isaiah 43:1-3a, 10

Ever consider how complex humans are? One minute, we're susceptible to purchasing the latest weight loss trend. The next, we're doubting future predictions studied for decades. It is often said, "You can't believe anyone." I beg to differ. We all know at least a dozen people who have lived through a life-changing event. Trauma, medical treatments, or grief of a loved one. We refer to these people as "survivors." What makes a "survivor"? It is more than a belief things will improve. Accidents, abuse, and other trials leave emotional scars and physical wounds. To heal, action is a requirement. Taking risks, making changes, and growing patience. All the while, listening to God and believing he is listening to us.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus says, "Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (Mark 11:24-NRSV) Advent is a season of expectation, time to "believe in things unseen." Whether it be addiction, illness, or another life challenge, God will lead us through our period of unbelief. Traveling through this journey, our recovery is capable of inspiring others. We have to trust God and believe our story can impact the world.

Prayer: Dear Father, we thank you for making us survivors. Thank you for believing in us. We wouldn't be here without you. Guide us to share our experiences with others, so we may draw people closer to you. In name of your son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Kelly Desclos-Estes - Glen Allen, VA

Seeing is Believing?

DECEMBER 25

Scripture: John 6:36

What do I believe? I believe in God the Father—or Mother—just God—I do believe in God. I believe in Jesus Christ the son, and the Holy Spirit. I do so believe.

In wrestling with this question, I have done more soul-searching than usual, and have been asking myself, "What do I truly believe?" I had to actually think for an answer. Something so inherent in my mind and soul—I know what I deem to be true—but began to wonder why? I haven't seen God, no one has, but I know of the existence of God.

Not everyone is so convinced. These days, seeing and hearing is not necessarily believing. "Fake news", AI, and computer-generated imaging make it harder and harder to know what is real—even when we see and hear things ourselves.

Jesus, the son of God, was born and raised by Mary and Joseph, walked the earth as a boy, a teenager, then a man. There are numerous stories that further cement this in my heart, but even without examples, I would still know this is the truth. I just thank God for all blessings.

This is what I know—God is, and I am a believer.

Prayer: God in heaven, thank you for all you have given us; help us share the bounty of the world with others less fortunate than ourselves, and to show your love to others through what we do every day. Amen.

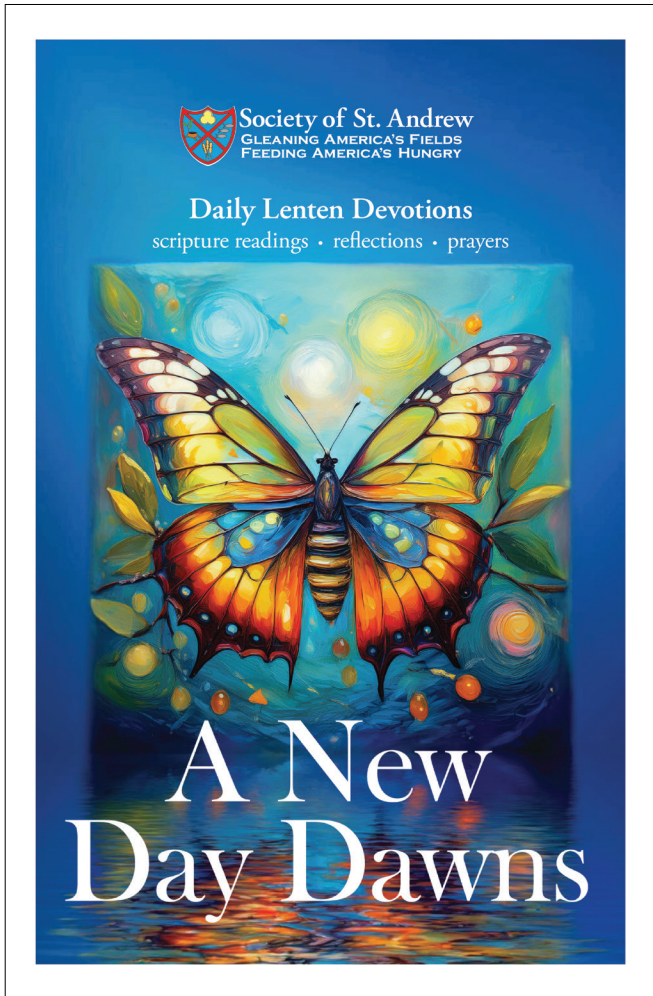
Kathi Wise - McLean, VA



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