

# CREATING SANCTUARY

ST. LUKE'S ATLANTA  
ADVENT DEVOTIONALS  
2024





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## INTRODUCTION

### *Vision Statement of St. Luke's Atlanta:*

*We dream of being a courageous, diverse, healing, and justice-creating sanctuary for the heart of Atlanta.*

Our church and its members yearn to create a sanctuary for the heart of Atlanta that fosters courage, diversity, healing and justice. But how do we do this? What changes do we need to make within ourselves to create sanctuary for each other and the community? And what does that sort of sanctuary look like?

Some of us may not know where to begin to answer these questions. Those who do may answer them differently than others. Yet each of us can strive to discern how best to become a parishioner who helps make our church that place of sanctuary. By undertaking that vision together, we can connect more deeply with God and each other.

This is the 25th year that members and friends of St. Luke's have contributed to a booklet of reflections. We hope you find ideas and experiences in these contributions that add meaning to your Advent season as we aspire to create a sanctuary for others and ourselves.

Bill McCarty, Managing Editor  
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Catherine McCarty, Editor  
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## LITURGY FOR DAILY DEVOTIONALS

### *Becoming Still*

Breathe in slowly and exhale slowly four times, calming your mind. Be ready to listen and observe.

#### **Invocation**

God, open my heart and mind so that I may hear you.

#### **Reflection for the Day**

Read or view the reflection for today found in this booklet or email.

#### **Contemplation**

Consider this reflection. Does it relate to you?  
Your response?

#### **Closing Prayers**

Petitions and prayers. What do you wish to say to God today? For what are you most thankful?

#### **Stillness**

Be still and listen for God.

## ***Bless Their Hearts; They Have a Dream***

St. Luke's vision statement, with its aspirational "dream of being," prompted this devotional. But our newest associate rector's recent "confession" was another source of inspiration. Joe began his inaugural St. Luke's sermon by revealing his newness to the South. What immediately came to my mind? "Bless his heart!"

After the firefighter-when-I-grow-up stage, many children start dreaming big in alignment with their developing talents and ceaseless devotion to some activity. If all such dreams ushering us into adulthood were to come true, our congregation would comprise talented professional athletes, wealthy surgeons, Broadway stars, top-billing attorneys, acclaimed artists, Grammy-winning performers, business executives, social influencers, and at least one very accomplished organist living out his dream of playing at a prominent, Southern church. (Okay, maybe a few of these dreams actually do come true.)

My point? St. Luke's vision statement—the creative prompt for these Advent devotionals—might sound like an adolescent's dream of becoming something amazing. It's nice to reach for the stars, but won't we ultimately have to be realistic; make some adjustments; trim a little off at the margins; settle for less?

The world incessantly tells us we need to tamp down our dreams, and any therapist worth their salt counsels that perfection is not an option. But isn't "sanctuary" a place set apart from the world? When it comes to loving our neighbor, aren't we called to be perfect? (See Matt. 5:43-48.) Paul admonishes the Romans not to conform to the world but rather to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, to discern what is God's will. (See Romans 12:2.) Does St. Luke's have what it takes to uncompromisingly nurture and sustain our vision?

As you enter this Advent season, the Devotional Committee invites you to read, contemplate upon, and inwardly digest each of these devotionals. They constitute our community's thoughtful, creative, and vivid reflections upon our bold vision statement.

Bless our hearts! We're dreaming big!

*Bill is a cradle Episcopalian and lifelong Southerner from Nashville. He attended St. Luke's as a young attorney in the mid-80s and returned to Atlanta in 2023 to retire.*

## *Standing Together in Love*

During this Advent marked by uncertainty, fear, and division, having the courage to stand together in love can be our witness to faith and resilience.

At St. Luke's we have said we aspire to be a courageous, diverse, and healing sanctuary for the heart of Atlanta. The question I wrestle with daily is whether I can muster enough faith, enough resilience?

Advent beckons us to remember the birth of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who came into the world as a beacon of hope and unity. In the manger, the shepherds and wise men gathered, despite their differences to welcome the Prince of Peace. Can I emulate their spirit of unity by embracing our diverse community and celebrating our unique gifts and talents?

The city of Atlanta, with its bustling streets and vibrant energy, is a melting pot of cultures, backgrounds, and experiences. As St. Luke's we have decided to be a sanctuary, offering refuge and solace to all who seek it. Can I bring healing and understanding to bridge the gaps that divide us and forge lasting connections?

In this season of expectant waiting, we dream of becoming agents of justice, spreading the light of Christ to the darkest corners of our world. Can I extend my hand in friendship to the marginalized and voiceless and embody the love that Jesus preached and lived?

The Advent wreath's flickering candles are a reminder of the ever-present light within each of us, guiding our path as we strive for justice and compassion. Can I open my heart and mind to be transformed by the power of love and unity and create a sanctuary that reflects the values of the One who was born in Bethlehem?

In this journey through Advent, I pray we can turn our dreams of courage, diversity, healing, and justice into action so the heart of our city will be warmed by the collective glow of our shared faith and resilience.

*Don and his wife Sally became "St. Lukers" in 2019 and immediately fell in love with our parish. Don credits writing news for The Diocese of Atlanta "catching people doing good" for opening his heart to God after the corrosive effects of decades as a journalist "catching people doing wrong."*

Writing reminds me how difficult I have always found “still and present”; uncluttering, disconnecting, and turning off to listen, observe and experience.

No naps. That was for others. I was all about multi-tasking and then some. Bring it on.

However, I am entering a season of study and learning (or unlearning habits and traits that until now were, I thought, expected, rewarded, even honored). As a young woman of the early '70s I was assured I had the right stuff to take it all on: Walter Cronkite as he ushered in Vietnam, a recipient of Affirmative Action, a participant of bused integration, and learning that the words to my newfound freedoms echoed in every socially conscious protest song.

I had the world by its tail, navigating arenas I had always thought of as obtainable. It was a magical time, for some more than others, catapulting me into my career—Psychology and Prisons.

I took it on with the spirit that there was nothing I couldn't do. But what was I doing? The noise became too loud and the big spaces so filled with “stuff” that I now realize I had dragged some souls with me, while others fell along the way. It seemed at the time we were all in sync and yet now I wonder. While I was the head-turner and the voice, it was the stakeholders who had struggled from the frontlines, with courage and conviction. My work was only small gestures reflecting the wrongful prison sentences they were living ... again. The atrocities of disdainful acts inflicted on these wounded souls never stopped. They just changed names.

As I move into my next season with Creation Care, I am committed to forgiving myself (that's a tough one) and then being patient, present and mindful with me, as a foundation for helping others. After all, when God gives us grace, with the opportunity to forgive ourselves, who are we not to take it? This time, I don't have to save the world, but perhaps I can do more if only for one. Will you leap with me?

*Michele, a 40-year member of St. Luke's, is enrolled in Compassion Consortium's Ordained Animal Chaplaincy program, recognizing humans, non-human species and eco systems as our responsibility to Creation Care. She shares her home with her cat, Figaro.*



## *Follow the Star*

Follow the star to Bethlehem to see the Baby Jesus.

He is our gift, God's precious Son.

Jesus came to teach us.

Beautiful star shining so bright,

Filling the sky with heavenly light.

Follow the star to Bethlehem to see the Baby Jesus.

Follow the song the shepherds heard to learn of Baby Jesus.

He is our gift, God's precious Son.

Jesus came to teach us.

Peace upon earth the angels did sing,

Glory to the newborn King.

Follow the song the shepherds heard to learn of Baby Jesus.

Follow the path as wise men did to worship Baby Jesus.

He is our gift, God's precious Son.

Jesus came to teach us.

Over the hills they traveled so bold,

Bringing their gifts of incense and gold.

Follow the path as wise men did to worship Baby Jesus.

Follow the star!

Follow the song!

Follow the path your whole life long!

Follow the star to Bethlehem to see the Baby Jesus.

He is our gift, God's precious Son.

Jesus came to teach us.

*Lynda lives in Rome, GA with her husband, Ed, and her cat, Bob Marley. This piece was written as a song for children.*

A student of mine wrote this several years ago.

The assignment was to write about how society sees him and how he sees himself.

*Just because I am black  
I am not an animal from a cage  
I am not a menace to society  
I am black and proud*

*Just because I am who I am  
I am not a follower  
I am not a bad influence  
I am not a hater  
I am a leader*

*Just because I am tall and skinny  
I am not weak and sensitive and fragile  
I am not slow and steady and stiff  
I am not ignorant and self-important  
I am a human, just like you*

The young man who wrote the “Just Because” poem wanted to be heard and seen for who he is, not as others might see him.

When people understand they have a voice that is valued and heard, integrity is added to the mix, and we, as a community, have a better chance of working with those around us in the healing process. That might be the first step toward realizing justice in our community.

This might sound simplistic, but it is a place to begin.

*Karen is a lifelong Episcopalian. She and her husband, James, chose St. Luke's because it is a vibrant, inclusive, and diverse community of people and talents working together to help God's people.*

## *Bricks: A Metaphorical Meditation on the Nature of Sanctuary*

One brick, one individual unit  
Each brick unique yet blending, becoming indivisible to create something new  
Solid, linked surface with the capacity to breathe  
Interdependent forces at work to support the whole  
Purpose drawn from its part of the whole  
Mutually bears the weight of external forces  
Collective energy carries the load  
Balanced internal forces supply integrity  
and  
Play an essential role  
Stronger together



*Barbara joined St. Luke's in 1993 and, despite knowing no one there, was drawn to purchase a commemorative brick offered as part of the 1996 parking lot and memorial garden redesign. That purchase marked the beginning of her lifelong dedication to this faith community and a commitment to building a spirit of sanctuary at St. Luke's.*

We have a beautiful sanctuary right here in the heart of Atlanta. Within the walls of this magnificent holy place, we do incredible work that points to all that we strive to be. Yet, what if the holiest moments happen outside the walls of the safe and awe-inspiring place that we call our own?

In Exodus, God tells the people to build a holy place so God can live among them. In the earliest days, Moses and the Israelites built a portable sanctuary—a tabernacle. They carried God with them through the wilderness. God led them as a pillar of clouds by day and a pillar of fire by night as they sojourned in the unknown land. When the first permanent Temple was constructed, we began to understand God as within the walls, but why should we limit the movement of God? Would God really need to hide within the protected walls of a building?

God came to earth as a helpless infant. God lived among us, fully enfleshed in the pain and suffering and joy and celebration of the human experience. Jesus' ministry did not play out in the Temple, but in the streets and the desert and the wilderness.

In my childhood church, we called the exit hymn and leaving the “Recessional.” In that moment, we honored what we had done within the walls of the sanctuary. In our liturgy, the exit hymn and leaving are called a “ProceSSIONal” as we are called to see our liturgy as beginning—as a sending forth to be God's hands and feet in the world.

In our post-communion prayer, we ask God to “send us forth as a people, forgiven, healed, renewed; that we may proclaim [God's] love to the world and continue in the risen life of Christ our Savior.”

We come to our protected sanctuary here on Peachtree Street to pray, learn, discern, and connect, but God longs for us to go forth and illuminate the holy presence in the larger sanctuary—in that holiest of places that we call the world.

“Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.”

“Thanks be to God.”

*Kate is the Minister of Community Discernment at St. Luke's. She and her family have been at St. Luke's for almost 20 years. She is grateful for the community that has supported her work and her dreams.*

We come together to pick up the pieces of broken hearts, stand in solidarity with diverse peoples, and address the pressing issues of the unhoused and marginalized communities. In a world where many feel unsafe because of gun violence, and others struggle with their gender identity, it is our shared responsibility to create a more compassionate and inclusive society for all.



*Billy and his loving husband, David, are grateful for their spiritual home at St. Luke's.*

## *All Are Welcome Here*

Hospitality has been on my mind a lot lately. After all, 'tis the season. There will be any number of hospitable events around town this month, all offering an abundance of food, drink, and merriment. Entertaining and being entertained are activities that make the holiday season so enjoyable, at least for me.

But there is another form of hospitality that's also on my mind these days, and it's more spiritual in nature. It's the kind of hospitality that turns a church into a real sanctuary.

In his book *Reaching Out*, the Dutch theologian Henri Nouwen wrote:

Hospitality ... means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring people over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines, to offer a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. .... Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the lifestyle of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own.

Nouwen, Henri J. M., *Reaching Out* (New York: Image Books, 2024 ed), p 56.

I have re-read this thought-provoking passage, as well as our St. Luke's vision statement, so many times. Nouwen's hospitality, I believe, is the kind we should employ in offering sanctuary to all people. To succeed at this, we must certainly love all others as Jesus loved us. I personally have a lot of work to do in this area, but I'm committed. Filled with the joyful anticipation that accompanies Advent, I'm rethinking my hospitality skills and hoping to help bring our St. Luke's vision to fruition. We are already well on the way.

*Brenda, a former children's librarian and professional freelance harpist, has been a St. Luke's parishioner since 2004. She and Mike Egan were married at St. Luke's in 2019.*

As a cradle Episcopalian from St. John's Episcopal Church in College Park, Georgia, I learned as a child and young adult that Advent is a season dedicated to reflective preparation for the arrival, or "advent" of Jesus Christ's Nativity at Christmas time as well as his expected return in the Second Coming. During this important event on the church calendar, each of the four weeks of Advent focuses on a different theme—hope, peace, joy, and love.

Earlier in the year, many of us became students of Dr. Gabrielle "Gabby" Thomas who led us on one of the most incredible journeys I have been on the five-week journey through the Gospel of Mark. Her teaching was outstanding. Learning with so many St. Luke's people in a standing room only class was fascinating. One of the most profound passages in Mark—and there are many—is:

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all of the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (NIV, Mark 12:28-31)

This passage about love offers a profound blueprint for achieving St. Luke's vision—creating a sanctuary in the heart of Atlanta that fosters courage, diversity, healing, and justice. By embracing these commandments, we can cultivate an environment where individuals are inspired to act courageously in the face of adversity, celebrate the rich tapestry of diversity, and work collectively towards healing and justice. These verses remind us that true sanctuary is built on the foundation of love for one another.

*Philip is a native of Atlanta and an Episcopalian of 54 years. He is Vice President and Risk Manager for a large Regional Bank. Hobbies are golf, reading, and traveling. He loves St. Luke's and finds it the most grounding part of his life.*



“Safe haven, refuge, sacred space, place of peace, shelter, oasis, place of belonging, harbor of hope—all these define *sanctuary*.” -Edwin Dill

As a professional gay man in my 60s, I’ve had the privilege of being a member of St. Luke’s for the past seven years. In that time, St. Luke’s has become more than just a church for me—it has been a sanctuary. It is a place where diversity is embraced, and healing can happen. For someone like me, who has navigated both personal and professional journeys rooted in identity and justice, the vision of St. Luke’s resonates deeply. Sanctuary, I’ve learned, isn’t just a physical space but a community bound by love, acceptance, and the pursuit of justice.

Creating sanctuary begins with empathy, the courage to listen, and an openness to others. My work in advocacy has shown me that true sanctuary comes from understanding the needs of those around us—whether in the LGBTQ community, the homeless population, or those who feel unheard. At St. Luke’s, we create sanctuary when everyone, regardless of their background or circumstance, feels seen and valued. It requires commitment to love our neighbors fully, and to actively break down barriers of exclusion.

To truly live out St. Luke’s vision, we must first look inward. Creating sanctuary for others takes courage and vulnerability, and a willingness to grow. I’ve learned that we must dismantle our unconscious biases and embrace discomfort as part of that growth. Only by doing this internal work can we create a space of healing—not just for ourselves but for others.

Sanctuary looks like a church that doesn’t just talk about justice but lives it. It is a place where diversity is celebrated, and everyone can bring their full selves. St. Luke’s already embodies much of this vision through our outreach and presence in inner city Atlanta, but sanctuary is ever evolving as we grow in love and understanding.

Each of us plays a part in this vision, and by striving to embody it, we build a sanctuary that extends beyond the church gates, connecting us more deeply to God and one another.

*Edwin, a member of St. Luke’s for 7 years, serves our neighbors as a non-profit professional. A native Southerner, with 25 years of living in New York City and Miami while working in the financial industry, he now calls Midtown home with his Beagle, Andy.*





Photo taken by Rebecca Mick at Foyers de Charité Notre Dame d'Orléans, a Roman Catholic spiritual retreat (or, sanctuary home) on the Island of Orleans near Quebec City.

Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

A prayer for St. Lukes:

In the midst of the chaotic and hurting world, we seek the inner sanctuary of God to hear the call to provide space to heal and action to be the breathing embodiment of Christ's heart for justice and grace in Atlanta.

*Becky is currently a nursery lady, cook with the Courtland Street Ministries, and part of the healing prayer team. Gifted with a wonderful family and group of friends, she continues her personal journey, loudly stumbling towards finding the divine spark in all of us.*

As far as music goes, I consider myself an old soul. Even though I listen to music from this century, my favorite songs are still those from the '70s, '80s, and '90s. One song I particularly like is by Nicolette Larson. I suppose the song is about romantic love, but when I sing along, I imagine the words referring to divisions in our communities, our country, and around the world. So, I offer the words to one of my favorite songs, with a few of my own editorial additions.

### *Lotta Love*

It's gonna take a lotta love  
To change the way things are  
[around the world]

It's gonna take a lotta love  
Or we won't get too far  
So if you look in my direction  
And we don't see eye to eye  
My heart needs protection  
And so do I  
It's gonna take a lotta love  
To get us through the night  
[of divisions]

It's gonna take a lotta love  
To make this [world] work out  
right

So if you are out there waiting  
[to communicate with others who  
may not agree with your ideas]  
I hope you show up soon  
You know I need relating not  
solitude [we're all social creatures  
who need each other]

We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. What would happen if we really started to live that belief? Could we continually forgive and pray for each other, especially people whose beliefs may be radically different from our own and who may not even believe in God? And I don't mean some superficial prayer. I mean the kind of prayer one would pray for a loved one: that they be blessed with love in their lives, that God strengthen them through all their trials, that they're blessed with health and prosperity.

Difficult? Maybe. But I think it's what our Lord taught us to do, and if we call ourselves "Christians" ... it's gonna take a lotta love.

*Toni is immensely thankful to be retired from the medical field for more than four years, enjoying several hobbies and traveling the world with her beloved husband, Phillip. She also feels blessed to be a part of the diverse St. Luke's community.*

I doubt that the framers of St. Luke's vision statement intended for the "healing and justice-creating sanctuary" to apply specifically to the descendants of slaves, but that is precisely what those words mean to me.

In many ways, that sanctuary already exists.

Thanks to Lorena Walsh's 1995 book *From Calabar to Carter's Grove*, a detailed study of the enslaved on five Burwell plantations in Williamsburg, Virginia and environs, I learned that some of my ancestors had been baptized at Bruton Parish Church in 1743. I had already traced us by group from Williamsburg in 1775 to Mecklenburg County when the Burwells from Kingsmill Plantation moved west in search of fresh tobacco land. However, I can only trace by name to Dolly, my great-great-great grandmother listed on Colonel Lewis Burwell's inventory in 1801 along with her four children. Someone on that 1743 list is most likely related to Dolly, but I do not know who. If I can ever find Mama Dolly's mother, this will take me to the 1743 list, and I can go back one more generation.

Why is all this important to me now? It is historically important for three major reasons. First, the Kingsmill enslaved could not be baptized during a regular service; instead, a special service after church would be organized on a designated Sunday. Secondly, Mama Dolly is listed on the same page as "5 work steers" and "56 head of hogs." These Burwells were staunch supporters and members of St. John's Episcopal in Mecklenburg County, but their slaves were viewed as property, not fellow Christians. And thirdly, I grew up in a segregated Episcopal church in the country where the only time we saw a white person was once a year when the bishop came to perform confirmations.

How does it feel to love a church with such a painful historical past for me personally? For me, the church is the comfort of ritual, which I find immensely soothing; it is hugs from friends who've become family; and most assuredly it is the enduring Christian message of love, which has withstood any variation of church name and institutional practice. St. Luke's is, for me, the culmination of a long journey to wholeness, inclusion, and love.

*Loretta, a Virginia transplant, has been a member of St. Luke's for many years.*

When we walked into the hospice room, I thought we were in the wrong place. The figure lying in the bed, laboring to breathe, could not possibly be the same woman we had visited barely three and a half weeks before.

Jan had had cancer surgery but was healing well, and she was more or less “herself” during our five-day visit in August. But . . . she wasn’t eating and there was that increasingly severe back pain, which the medical team didn’t seem to be worried about: “Just give her Ibuprofen.”

The back pain was the first warning shot. In the ensuing weeks, Jan’s kidneys came within a hair’s breadth of failing completely. The tumor that was to be targeted by months of chemo was growing fast—first blocking her kidneys from draining, then encroaching on her stomach and bowel. By mid-September, there was nothing more to be done and Jan was moved to a hospice facility. Family rushed to be by her side, and she died three days later, just 64 years old. She looked like she was 85.

I don’t particularly want to contemplate being in hospice care—for myself or my loved ones. Hospice is a one-way ticket to something we just don’t understand, something we fear, despite our Christian beliefs. But Room 9 at Kobacker House in Columbus, Ohio, became quite the sanctuary for Jan and for us during our three-day sojourn there.

The staff are not in the business of healing—patients in hospice are beyond that. The doctors, nurses, and aides are in the business of caring for, and easing into, and relieving. They didn’t just care for Jan; they also cared for us, her family. They never treated us as obstacles to work around, but as essential elements of Jan’s dying process.

Welcome, acceptance, nourishment, compassion, understanding. These are essential elements of sanctuary. We can apply these elements to other settings—welcoming those who are lost and helping them find their way again. These are the elements that I believe are important in a church, as well. It is my hope that St. Luke’s will always welcome the stranger who comes through our doors, offering hope through Jesus Christ.

*Elaine has been a member of St. Luke’s for more than 40 years. She is married to Jeff Hopper, Jan’s big brother.*

As I prepared for my dreaded St. Luke's photography appointment, I sat in the empty sanctuary filled with sunshine and the beautiful stained-glass windows. I reflected on St. Luke's Gospel which includes many of Jesus' courageous acts that incorporate matters of diversity, healing, and justice. Luke's Gospel speaks of cleansing the leper; healing the paralyzed man; healing on the Sabbath; raising a widow's son from the dead; feeding the five thousand; rejoicing in finding the lost sheep; rebirth of the prodigal son; condemning the rich man and comforting Lazarus, the beggar; healing ten lepers; valuing the poor widow's gift; and healing the centurion's servant. How fitting that these acts are so representative of the ministries that have been implemented or are in discernment at St. Luke's.

I also thought about our St. Luke's predecessors who paved the way for us with their rich history of daring to do the impossible to help others. Imagine being a member of St. Luke's 50 years ago when a few of the women decided to start serving food to the hungry in the parish hall. Think about other courageous ministries that started at St. Luke's and the opinions members might have had about these ventures.

I was one of the sponsors for the "I Have a Dream" project connecting St. Luke's and Ebenezer Baptist Church to mentor and support the education of 60 low-income students from second grade through high school. In addition to helping the students, this major undertaking started a collaboration and beneficial friendship for members in both churches. These two ministries were among the many at St. Luke's that required creative and courageous thinking.

As for what I can contribute to St. Luke's vision, my focus has always been on "feeding the lambs and sheep" that Jesus instructed Simon Peter to do in John 21. This call also has been given to me as my charge when I ask Jesus what He wants me to do. I am involved in several ministries at St. Luke's and am open to any call I receive that speaks to God's vision for my life.

*Jeronia has been a member of St. Luke's for more than 30 years and is the lay leader for Courtland Street Mission. She is a new member of the Order of the Daughters of The King, an Intercessor, and a Prayers of the People reader. She loves St. Luke's and enjoys the many friendships she has formed.*

When I think of a church, I think of what Heaven most likely looks like. I don't think that Heaven is all the black people in one corner, whites in another, brown people or any other races in still other corners.

See, I was raised in Los Angeles in the late 70s. And forgive me if I state the following incorrectly, but I was blessed to be raised in a multicultural, multiethnic, multiracial environment. That is exactly what I feel Heaven is like and what our beloved St. Luke's breathes and lives, thus bringing its vision statement to life.

Both Heaven and St. Luke's are places without boundaries based upon color, gender, or thought. St. Luke's is a home for all who seek one and who love as our Savior Jesus has shown and taught. We are kin in love, grace, and His glorious mercy forever.

*Karen moved to Atlanta after the pandemic and joined St. Luke's, where she is happy to belong.*



## *Anticipation*

**A**rrival

**N**ears

**T**o

**I**nward

**C**almness

**I**nnner

**P**eace;

**A**dvent

**T**ime

**I**s

**O**bserving

**N**ativity

I've always wanted to find a way to verbalize the sights and sounds and scents of pine, beeswax candles and spruce all in the Advent season.

*Marjorie is an artist, actor, and voiceover talent who also loves to lead spirited travelers through forest meditative walks, especially at Kanuga! When not involved in culture, she serves the Atlanta community as a 911 dispatcher on the overnight shift.*

Cookies, brownies, cakes—so many varieties of each, so many possibilities. I enjoy baking. Okay, I'll admit it: I'm a math and science nerd, and let's face it, baking is math and science. Sometimes baking, for me, is also a stress relief. If I'm stressed or upset about something, I'll bake a batch of brownies or a pound cake, and by the time I've cleaned up the kitchen, things are usually better. Then there are those times where I must bake multiple times before the hurt goes away. For example, the day after we arrived home from my father's funeral, I baked a batch of chocolate chip cookies (because the ones at the hotel were awful!). The following week I baked brownies, and the week after that was pound cake.

Most times I bake for love, and thankfully those occasions outnumber the stressed bake-offs. Our family Christmas gatherings always have a cake for dessert, plus fudge and some cookies. Before my mother passed, I would join her at Christmas to help bake goodies for her friends, as well as our family gatherings. A dinner to celebrate a friend's birthday would not be complete without a scrumptious dessert. Aunt Dean always enjoyed the German chocolate cake I would bring to our potluck family gatherings, and I had the joy to bake one for her to enjoy the week before she died in August.

As you read this, with that cookie or slice of cake at the forefront of your mind, you are probably wondering, how does baking fit into our devotional theme this year of St. Luke's vision statement?

Well, baking can be healing, diverse, and create a sanctuary. It brings joy to people. It heals us when we hurt. It connects us to others. It shows we care.

If you happen not to be a baker, that's okay. Find something that you love to do and think about that activity in light of the St. Luke's vision statement. You may be surprised at how well the thing that brings you pleasure and meaning fits the words in the statement. So be courageous. Use your talent to bring healing to someone or create a sanctuary for yourself or someone in need.

*Kenneth receives plenty of baking support at home from taste tester/husband Warren Williams and kitchen assistant furkid Emma.*





It's raining down on a Friday morning. I'm reflecting on the past years of being in a wonderful church family. That church would be the Church of the Common Ground.

We always say, "we are a church with no walls, so this is the church." It is like your church, but we cater to the ones who are living on the street. You can come as you are. We welcome all kinds of people.

Kim Jackson is our pastor and Shereetha Jackson is our community director. Moses and Taylor are our assistant helpers. Matthew Johnson is the administrative receptionist. Matthew Reed, our coordinator with Intown Cares, helps our unhoused parishioners transition into their own home.

Since I've been at this church for 13 years it has never been the same. You can say I experience God's love daily.

*Jennifer is a long-time member of the Church of the Common Ground where she volunteers with the Common Soles Foot Clinic and is a graduate of Project Upstream.*

My son recently asked me “Are we Indian or Christian?”

“We’re both,” I said, but he seemed unconvinced. I was raised Knanaya Catholic, an endogamous (marrying within the group per custom or law) early Christian community that emigrated to Kerala, India in the 3rd century from the Persian Empire. Religion weaved into daily life, from nightly rosary recitations to novenas and liturgies in song.

My son’s question was not uncommon. When my family moved to America, we attended churches where we were met with attempts to convert us, and confusion as we explained our family had been Christian for millennia, well before colonialism. Nevertheless, certain brown faces don’t register as Christian in America. Naturally, immigrant churches with liturgies in native languages and ethnic practices sprouted across the diaspora to maintain a sense of community. Just Google “Indian church,” “Korean church,” “Nigerian church,” etc. near you. You may be surprised.

It is not only factually incorrect but dangerous to apply a “gold standard” to Christianity exported from Europe. The early church spread globally to Africa, the Middle East, India and beyond. Currently, 70% of practicing Christians live in the Global South. This diversity is not well known or acknowledged. Christianity has become what Malcolm X calls “the white man’s religion,” a reference to its exploitation to uphold institutions like white supremacy, colonialism, racism, misogyny, and homophobia.

Although very few churches outwardly espouse these “ideals,” nearly every church I’ve been to—even in India and our own St. Luke’s—represents Jesus as white man. He was probably closer to my son’s skin tone than my son’s blonde-hair, blue-eyed friends, but the world shows Jesus as white.

After being ousted from my immigrant church for marrying outside my community, I sought to find a new spiritual home. St. Luke’s is a welcoming community with a familiar liturgy and progressive values. Our diverse clergy is inspiring, but the work is not done yet. For a church in downtown Atlanta, our demographics are more Buckhead than Bankhead. I don’t know what the recipe for a multi-ethnic church entails, but perhaps it begins with curiosity—listening to other people’s stories, their histories. We can hold space for our diverse backgrounds and still find unity without uniformity.

*Freny and family have been at St. Luke’s since 2021. She felt the presence of God at the birth of her son Vishwas (or Vishu), whose name means faith and trust in Sanskrit.*

## *Lauds at Montrose Point*

On this Sabbath sort of day I walk and wander  
Miles through city streets and find this sanctuary  
Nurtured, planted on the edge of the city, like a coral reef rising this refuge.  
Asters purple, goldenrod, pods, coneflowers  
Crimson maples and pine trees wave me toward  
A path to wander and now

This magnolia warbler.  
She is urgent about her daily seed.  
Last month's flower is feast for the soul of this mighty songbird.  
I've come north and you've come south. We have landed here  
In this wild cathedral and we are being restored.

"Do it now" my mother said to me in the days before she died.  
Do it now. What shall I leave behind?  
A home, a cathedral, a sanctuary, a bloom?  
Like this aging field of beauty that takes me to this warbler.  
Both of us blessed by those who came before.

We sing of wisdom, she and I.  
Perhaps the generations will follow.



*Lisa is a long-time member of St. Luke's. Montrose Point is a stunningly beautiful bird sanctuary in Chicago.*

Sanctuary, a sacred place. Over the last few years, we have seen the growth of home sanctuaries. *Architectural Digest* recommends that you prioritize comfort, invite natural light, minimize clutter, personalize, and add greenery. We create our design vision and work towards it. Maybe the magazine is on to something for St. Luke's.

**Comfort:** We continue to work within our building in addition to our outreach programs to provide comfort in the city and beyond. Accommodations for people with disabilities, improved audio, and larger bulletins are all signs about how we make people feel seen and valued. I hope we continue to actively ask people who don't look like us or have the same physical needs, what it would take to make them comfortable, and work towards it. *Design wish:* introduce images of Jesus and the disciples that accurately depict them as Middle Eastern and the diversity of Christian people.

**Light:** How do we illuminate issues and opportunities in our immediate backyard, prioritize, educate ourselves and each other, and move to collective action? *Design wish:* Play a leadership reconciliation and repair role through The Stitch reconnection effort.

**Decluttering and Personalization:** What are we holding on to that physically and spiritually keeps us from transition to our new journey and time of discernment? *Design wish:* Be transparent in our need to provide space for new people, thinking and voice of the spirit.

**Adding Greenery:** Can we see this in the fullness of our role and intentions as creation stewards and as fundamental elements of justice and love? *Design wish:* Ask how our endowments and church resources are invested to support creation and justice?

Design aesthetics are subjective. However, co-creating God's Kingdom in Atlanta in the physical and metaphysical senses inherently should not be solely individual choices. As we renovate and update our vision of St. Luke's, let us go bold with color; choose wild and untamed. This will be our curb appeal. As we design for our future generations to inherit sanctuaries at St. Luke's, let us build on a solid foundation, by wildly reimagining to carry out God's call to action to be a justice seeking and loving parish in the heart of Atlanta.

*Suganthi and her family have attended St. Luke's since 2005. She enjoys the outdoors with her family, personal fitness, and running very slowly.*



At another parish I and others came together to offer a live Nativity as a gift to our community. Over the years hundreds of families stood behind the floodlights to hear the story of the Nativity of Christ acted out, then took us up on the offer of a warm fire and hot chocolate. Many left messages thanking our little church for creating a new tradition for their families. I don't know if any of them "joined" our parish, but I do know that many felt a connection to the little church on the corner with the barn.

*Don and his wife Sally became "St. Lukers" in 2019 and immediately fell in love with our parish. Don credits writing news for The Diocese of Atlanta "catching people doing good" for opening his heart to God after the corrosive effects of decades as a journalist "catching people doing wrong."*

The Merriam-Webster dictionary provides two definitions for sanctuary. The first and perhaps more significant is that sanctuary is a consecrated place. The second definition is that sanctuary is a place of refuge and protection. These two definitions, though listed first and second, are not mutually exclusive. They go hand in hand. St. Luke's has been, is, and always shall be an important sanctuary for me and for many in our parish. Each time I enter this magnificent space, I am never underwhelmed by its sheer beauty and the serenity I feel. Thirty-two years ago, I was warmly welcomed my first Sunday here, and that feeling continues to this day.

The sense and meaning of sanctuary is palpable during the Advent season, not only for us now but also, I believe, for those in Jesus's time and most notably on the eve of his birth. We know the story. Descendants of the House of David had been summoned to Bethlehem in Judea to be counted in the census as decreed by Caesar Augustus. The city was crowded—probably overcrowded. All comfortable lodgings and accommodations were full; there was no room anywhere. Mary and Joseph, weary from travel with nowhere to stay, were offered the meager, spartan, and humble space of a barn. That was their sanctuary; their sacred space where the Redeemer of this world was born in the presence of livestock. Later, local shepherds and great kings came to adore the Holy Infant. All who were present that night witnessed this miracle of heaven on earth.

Christmas Eve at St. Luke's is a special and joyous time for me. I love the music, the carols and anthems, and the message. It is one of many occasions where I find sanctuary within the sanctuary. I leave the services a wee bit tired, but with a full and very happy heart. During Advent we are following and moving toward the light from a blazing star in the pitch dark of night to the place where we find The Light of Life. There we find a sanctuary that has not and will never fail or abandon us. Thanks be to God.

*Chris loves Advent and the Christmas season. He is grateful for the clergy and his friends at St. Luke's and to be a part of the sanctuary.*

## *Scripture Readings for Advent 2024*

Daily Office (BCP)

### **WEEK OF 1 ADVENT**

#### **Sunday, Dec. 1**

Isa. 1:1-9

2 Pet. 3:1-10

Matt. 25:1-13

#### **Monday**

Isa. 1:10-20

1 Thess. 1:1-10

Luke 20:1-8

#### **Tuesday**

Isa. 1:21-31

1 Thess. 2:1-12

Luke 20:9-18

#### **Wednesday**

Isa. 2:1-11

1 Thess. 2:13-20

Luke 20:19-26

#### **Thursday**

Isa. 2:12-22

1 Thess. 3:1-13

Luke 20:27-40

#### **Friday**

Isa. 3:8-15

1 Thess. 4:1-12

Luke 20:31-21:4

#### **Saturday**

Isa. 4:2-6

1 Thess. 4:13-18

Luke 21:5-19

### **WEEK OF 2 ADVENT**

#### **Sunday, Dec. 8**

Isa. 5:1-7

2 Pet. 3:11-18

Luke 7:28-35

#### **Monday**

Isa. 5:8-12, 18-23

1 Thess. 5:1-11

Luke 21:20-28

#### **Tuesday**

Isa. 5:13-17, 24-25

1 Thess. 5:12-28

Luke 21:29-38

#### **Wednesday**

Isa. 6:1-13

2 Thess. 1:1-12

John 7:53-8:11

#### **Thursday**

Isa. 7:1-9

2 Thess. 2:1-12

Luke 22:1-13

#### **Friday**

Isa. 7:10-25

2 Thess. 2:13-3:5

Luke 22:14-30

#### **Saturday**

Isa. 8:1-15

2 Thess. 3:6-18

Luke 22:31-38

### **WEEK OF 3 ADVENT**

#### **Sunday, Dec. 15**

Isa. 13:6-13  
Heb. 12:18-29  
John 3:22-30

#### **Monday**

Isa. 8:16-9:1  
2 Pet. 1:1-11  
Luke 22:39-53

#### **Tuesday**

Isa. 9:1-7  
2 Pet. 1:12-21  
Luke 22:54-69

#### **Wednesday**

Isa. 9:8-17  
2 Pet. 2:1-10a  
Mark 1:1-8

#### **Thursday**

Isa. 9:18-10:4  
2 Pet. 2:10b-16  
Matt. 3:1-12

#### **Friday**

Isa. 10:5-19  
2 Pet. 2:17-22  
Matt. 11:2-15

#### **Saturday**

Isa. 10:20-27  
Jude 17-25  
Luke 3:1-9

### **WEEK OF 4 ADVENT**

#### **Sunday, Dec. 22**

Isa. 42:1-12  
Eph. 6:10-20  
John 3:16-21

#### **Monday**

Isa. 11:1-9  
Rev. 20:1-10  
John 5:30-47

#### **Tuesday, Dec. 24**

Isa. 35:1-10  
Rev. 22:12-17, 21  
Luke 1:67-80

#### **Christmas Eve**

Isa. 59:15b-21  
Phil. 2:5-11



## *Christmas Eve at St. Luke's*

### **TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24**

4 pm | Christmas Pageant and Holy Eucharist, Rite II

\*8 pm | Holy Eucharist, Rite II

\*11 pm | Holy Eucharist, Rite II

\*The Feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ our Savior, St. Luke's Choir with Brass. A prelude of carols and seasonal anthems begins 30 minutes prior to the service.

## *Christmas Day at St. Luke's*

### **WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25**

10 am | Holy Eucharist, Rite II

## *Christmas Lessons & Carols*

### **SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29**

10 am | Holy Eucharist, Rite II

YOU  
BELONG







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