

A vibrant sunset or sunrise over a mountain range. The sun is a bright, glowing orb in the upper center, surrounded by soft, wispy clouds in shades of orange and yellow. Below the sun, a range of mountains is silhouetted against the bright sky. In the foreground, a dark silhouette of a forest of evergreen trees is visible against the lower part of the sky.

# Reflections of Hope

An Advent Photo Challenge  
by Jean Andrianoff with Christine Sine



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## Photography as a Spiritual Practice - Christine Sine

Photography in our world today has become a global barrage of uploaded images. Millions of pictures are published every minute onto Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Flickr Youtube, and other sites. We take photos but we don't really look at them. We look but we don't really see. Our hurrying eyes rush across the landscape looking for the next good shot that might bring us a moment of internet fame. Photographs are yet another product to share and consume.

This booklet invites us into another experience of photography, a contemplative practice which beckons us to slow down, take notice, savour what we see and enter into a sacred encounter with our God.

In her inspiring book [Eyes of the Heart](#) Christine Valters Paintner explains:

*Photography as a spiritual practice combines the active art of image-receiving with the contemplative nature and open-heartedness of prayer. It cultivates what I call sacred seeing or seeing with the "eyes of the heart" (Ephesians 1:18). This kind of seeing is our ability to receive the world around us at a deeper level than surface realities... When we focus on the process of art-making, rather than the product, we can immerse ourselves in the creative journey and discover the ways God is moving through our lives and how we are being invited to respond. We release our own plans and expectations and pay attention to what is actually unfolding within us.<sup>1</sup>*

Christine goes on to say:

*"Taking" photos with the head is often an act of analysis or grasping, as when we try to either capture an image or make one that is aesthetically pleasing. "Receiving" photos with the heart is an experience of grace and revelation, an encounter with the sacred<sup>2</sup>.*

Join us as we walk through Advent at a contemplative pace immersing ourselves in the creative journey that our photography provides for us. Learn to see the world with the eyes of your heart. Discover the holy presence of God waiting for us in every moment and every image.

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<sup>1</sup> Christine Valters Paintner: *Eyes of the Heart: Photography as a Christian Contemplative Practice* (Sorin Books, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2013), 3

<sup>2</sup> *ibid* 19

## Introduction to Reflections of Hope - Jean Andrianoff

Some thirty years ago, my husband and I were seeking to develop meaningful traditions to help our girls focus on the true significance of Christmas. We liked the idea of an Advent calendar, but saw little value in opening cardboard windows in Santa's workshop for a daily piece of chocolate! So I created our own Advent calendar using symbols representing Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by the coming of Jesus. We found the focus on fulfilled promises helped us to be mindful that Advent is about *coming*—both Jesus' arrival as a human infant and His promised return in the future. So many promises fulfilled reinforce our hope in the faithfulness of God to keep those we have not yet realized.

When [Christine Sine](#) suggested we work together to develop a series of photo prompts for Advent, we decided to incorporate the symbols from our Advent calendar. We present a different symbol each day, along with the promise it represents, the way Jesus has fulfilled the promise, and a brief reflection on the meaning of the symbol.

Photos capture reflected light. As you meditate on these Advent photo prompts, look for images that reflect the light and hope of fulfilled promises. Perhaps your photograph will portray the literal word, or perhaps you will want to capture another image that represents your reflections on the symbol's meaning. And while we are presenting this as a photo prompt, you might prefer to draw or cut out a picture that reflects your meditation on each symbol. Consider sharing your images on a social media site like Facebook or Instagram or creating an art journal or collage. We would love to see your pictures and read your reflections as we enter this season of light and hope.

*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.  
Hebrews 10:23 (ESV)*

## How to Use the Photo Prompts - Christine Sine

As Jean mentioned above there are many ways to use the photo prompts. This is one suggested process that you might find helpful. It requires the discipline of time management however. Setting aside a few minutes in the morning to savour the scriptures and their invitation to contemplative seeing opens for us the possibility of sacred moments throughout the day. It is these moments that can be translated into photo opportunities, and in the process they often make sacred the moments in between as well.

Many of us are familiar with the practice of [Lectio Divina](#) where you read a passage of Scripture through once noting the things that stand out for you or that you are drawn to. You then read the same passage another time, imagine yourself in the scene. What sights, sounds, and smells do you experience? Where are you located in the scene? The third time you read it through, reflect on your response and what God is calling you to do. You may find it helpful to see this process as a combination of [Lectio Divina](#) and [Visio Divina](#), starting by reflecting on specific passages, and then asking God to speak to you through specific images.

- ☀ Find a quiet place that you can return to each day which invites you to reflect and meditate. It might be a favourite armchair, a local park, a quiet place in your church, a home altar or your office desk early in the morning before anyone else arrives.
- ☀ Read through the PROMISE scripture slowly several times. Close your eyes and sit in silence for a couple of minutes. Is there an image that comes to mind?
- ☀ Now read through the FULFILLMENT scripture and again close your eyes and sit in silence. Does this scripture stir an image in your mind?
- ☀ Finally read through the REFLECTION for the day. Close your eyes a third time and allow an image to form in your mind.
- ☀ Now look for a photo opportunity. This is not something to be hurried. It should further your sense of the presence of God already established as you immersed yourself in the short reflection. From the exercise above you may have one, two or three images to work with. Which of these most compellingly represents the symbol of the day for you? What comes to mind as a possible photo shot?
- ☀ Now its time to take the photo. Walk around your neighbourhood, looking for the image that best portrays what is in your mind. *Let yourself be willing to see the world differently, so that what others see as garbage becomes transfigured through your opens and intention<sup>3</sup>.*
- ☀ Bring your camera to your eye, or point your phone at the image you wish to photograph. Imagine that this is a portal to a new way of seeing. Notice the quality of the light, the vibrancy of the colours, the posture of the figures and the emotions they evoke.
- ☀ Once you have taken your photo upload it to a digital journal or [digital scrapbook](#). Return to it throughout the day and open yourself to the continued revelation of God.

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<sup>3</sup> ibid 15

## Share Your Photo With Us

We want to see your photos and your reflections so that others can benefit from your creativity and insights. Do not feel you need to send a photo every day. You may want to focus on one of the prompts for several days, savour it, allow God to speak to you through it and ongoing story that becomes part of your journey.

Here are some ways to share:

- ☀ Each afternoon on [Godspace](#) we will post the daily prompt with photos our team has taken in response to that prompt. Add links to your photos or blog posts in the comments below the post.
- ☀ Use the prompts to post daily on your own blog throughout Advent. If you plan to do this, email us at [mail@msaimagine.org](mailto:mail@msaimagine.org) and we will add your name to our list of regular bloggers for this series.
- ☀ Share your photos on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter with the hashtag **#MSAphotochallenge**. Using this hashtag makes it easy for others who are interested in what has been written or photographed in response to the prompt to find your response.
- ☀ Add your photo to our [MSA group](#) timeline on Facebook. Again use the hashtag **#MSAphotoschallenge**. This will make it easier for our MSA team to gather your responses too and for others to interact with what you have both photographed and written.
- ☀ Please send low resolution photos preferably under 200KB in size.
- ☀ Submit only your own original photos or photos that you have permission from the photographer to use. In this case make sure that the photo is appropriately credited. We are unable to accept photographs from other sources.
- ☀ Remember - this is not about sharing photos, it is about responding to the voice of God and sharing our insights so that others might learn from us. You might want to post each day or only once a week, or occasionally, as you feel God gives you a special revelation that others would benefit from.
- ☀ **NOTE: posting links to your photos grants MSA permission to use them for our Advent photo challenge and Advent reflection on Godspace only. The photographer retains copyright for the photo. For use in any other print format MSA will contact the photographer for permission.**

## Promises, Fulfillment, Reflections: The Daily Challenge - Jean Andrianoff

### November 29: SEED

☀ PROMISE – Genesis 3:15  
 And I will put enmity  
 Between you and the woman,  
 And between your seed and her Seed;  
 He shall bruise your head,  
 And you shall bruise His heel. (NKJV)

☀ FULFILLMENT – Hebrews 2:14  
 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.

☀ REFLECTION:  
 The job of a seed is to reproduce. Some seeds produce nourishing fruit; others, weeds. The offspring of the woman and of the serpent produced different kinds of seeds. Through His suffering, Jesus, the special Seed of the woman, destroyed the power of death introduced into the first garden by the serpent. How will you nurture the growth of that life-giving Seed in your life this Advent season?

### November 30: STARS/SAND

☀ PROMISE – Genesis 22:17,18  
 I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.

☀ FULFILLMENT – Galatians 3:16  
 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.

☀ REFLECTION:  
 Look up into the sky on a dark, clear night. Can you count the stars? Or walk along a sandy beach and begin counting grains of sand. God gave Abraham these images to illustrate the number of descendants he would have. However, the importance of this promise is not the multitudes that would descend from Abraham, but the *one* particular descendant through whom *all* the nations of the earth will be blessed. How can you share the blessing Jesus brings with someone of another race or culture?

### December 1: STAR OF JACOB

☀ PROMISE - Numbers 24:17  
 I see him, but not now;  
 I behold him, but not near:  
 a star shall come out of Jacob,

and a scepter shall rise out of Israel. . . .

☀ FULFILLMENT - Luke 1:31, 33

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus . . . and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

☀ REFLECTION:

The six-pointed star we call the Star of Jacob symbolizes the nation of Israel and the religion of Judaism. Jesus was born into a Jewish family, as an Israelite. God planned the right family for His Son from the time of Abraham and Jacob. Jesus became “the bright and morning star” of that family. Reflect on the family and citizenship God has chosen for you. What is your particular role in that family and country?

## December 2: SCEPTER

☀ PROMISE – Genesis 49:10

The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
until tribute comes to him;  
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

☀ FULFILLMENT - Hebrews 1:8

But of the Son he says,  
“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,  
the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.”

☀ REFLECTION:

A scepter symbolizes the authority of a king. In the nation of Israel, the authority to hold a scepter was granted only to the tribe of Judah. Jesus, born into the tribe of Judah, fulfilled the promise of a king who would hold authority over all peoples. Adoring a baby in a manger is pointless unless we give Him authority to be ruler and Lord over our lives. Who or what has the authority over your life?

## December 3: CROWN

☀ PROMISE – Isaiah 32:1

Behold, a king will reign in righteousness,  
and princes will rule in justice.

☀ FULFILLMENT – Matthew 2:2

“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

☀ REFLECTION:

God’s people expected their Messiah to be a king. Yet throughout Jesus’ life, few people recognized His kingship. The only crown He ever wore was a crown of thorns. And the sign on His cross, “King of the Jews,” was written in irony. As we reflect on Jesus’ kingdom, how can we follow the example of the wise men who recognized the King and bowed down to worship Him?

## December 4: TEMPLE AND THRONE (Priest and King)

### ☀ PROMISE – Zechariah 6:13

It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

### ☀ FULFILLMENT – Hebrews 7:14-16

For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.

### ☀ REFLECTION:

God asked the prophet Zechariah to set up an object lesson: crown the high priest. To the Jewish people, a person could not be a priest and a king at the same time: priests came only from the tribe of Levi; kings, from Judah. This prophecy showed that the Messiah would be both priest (intercessor) and king (ruler). How can Jesus your King intercede for you today?

## December 5: BRANCH

### ☀ PROMISE – Jeremiah 23:5

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

### ☀ FULFILLMENT – Matthew 1:1

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

### ☀ REFLECTION:

God often communicates with us through metaphors, many of them based in the natural world. Jesus was a branch growing out of David's family tree, as both Mary and Joseph came from the line of David. During His lifetime He was often referred to by the title "Son of David," showing that He was the rightful heir to David's throne. What blessings and challenges do you experience related to your family tree?

## December 6: ROOT

### ☀ PROMISE – Isaiah 11:1

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

### ☀ FULFILLMENT – Revelation 22:16

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

### ☀ REFLECTION:

The root metaphor is closely related to the metaphor of the branch. Both describe parts of a plant; both relate to Jesus' family line. At the time of Jesus' birth David's descendants no longer

ruled the Jewish people. The family line of Jesse and David resembled a lifeless stump, so no one expected the sprouting of a new shoot from Jesse's roots. How have you seen God work in unexpected ways in your life?

## **December 7: STONE**

### ☀ PROMISE – Isaiah 28:16

So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic." (NIV)

### ☀ FULFILLMENT – Acts 4:11

This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.

### ☀ REFLECTION:

We think of stones as solid, durable building materials. Isaiah promises that the stone God lays will create a reliable and sure foundation. Jesus referred to Himself as that cornerstone. In an unpredictable, changing world, we can count on the firm foundation of this stone. How does Isaiah's promise that "the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic" apply to your life today?

## **December 8: DOVE (SPIRIT)**

### ☀ PROMISE – Isaiah 11:2

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,  
 the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
 the Spirit of counsel and might,  
 the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

### ☀ FULFILLMENT – John 1:32

And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him."

### ☀ REFLECTION:

Jesus offers the Spirit that descended on Him as a gift to His followers, giving us access to that same "Helper (Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor-Counselor, Strengtheners, Standby)" (John 14:16 AMP). Ask your Father, who gives good gifts to His children, to supply your particular need for the Spirit's help today.

## **December 9: BALANCE SCALES (JUDGE)**

### ☀ PROMISE – Isaiah 11:3-4a

And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.  
 He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
 or decide disputes by what his ears hear,  
 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
 and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

☀ FULFILLMENT – John 5:30

“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.”

☀ REFLECTION:

No matter what your political views, you have no doubt found yourself frustrated with some recent court judgment. Our legal system does its best to make fair decisions, but human understanding is limited. Jesus, however, judges with complete righteousness, ultimately administering justice to the earth’s poor and oppressed. How can you help bring justice to the disadvantaged?

## December 10: VILLAGE (BETHLEHEM)

☀ PROMISE – Micah 5:2

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
 who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,  
 from you shall come forth for me  
 one who is to be ruler in Israel,  
 whose coming forth is from of old,  
 from ancient days.

☀ FULFILLMENT – Matthew 2:1

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem.

☀ REFLECTION:

Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem fulfilled prophecy. Only a chain of external circumstances beyond their control put Mary and Joseph in this otherwise insignificant town at the moment of Jesus’ birth. This created difficulties that must have led Mary and Joseph to question God’s provision. Have circumstances in your life caused you to question the place where God put you?

## December 11: MOTHER AND CHILD (VIRGIN)

☀ PROMISE – Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

☀ FULFILLMENT – Matthew 1:20-23

“Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
 and they shall call his name Immanuel”

☀ REFLECTION:

The virgin birth presents a stumbling block to many. It just seems too unbelievable! But God’s supernatural creation of a new life within Mary is central to the miracle of Jesus’ birth. Only in this way could Jesus be fully human—born as a helpless human baby—and fully divine—

Immanuel, God with us. Our Creator became one of His creations. No obstacle you face is too great for a God who can do that!

## December 12: DONKEY

☀ PROMISE – Zechariah 9:9  
 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
 Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
 Behold, your king is coming to you;  
 righteous and having salvation is he,  
 humble and mounted on a donkey,  
 on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

☀ FULFILLMENT - John 12:14-15  
 And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,  
 “Fear not, daughter of Zion;  
 behold, your king is coming,  
 sitting on a donkey's colt!”

☀ REFLECTION:  
 How do you recognize a king? The people of Jerusalem were told to look for someone riding on a donkey. In spite of this prediction they continued to expect a warring king to free them from Roman rule; not a humble king of peace. But for one brief moment, Jerusalem's people remembered Zechariah's words and recognized that their promised King had come. Are you prepared to recognize God in the unexpected?

## December 13: BLOSSOM

☀ PROMISE – Isaiah 35:1-2a  
 The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them,  
 And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;  
 It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice,  
 Even with joy and singing. (NKJV)

☀ FULFILLMENT – Luke 2:10  
 And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

☀ REFLECTION:  
 Angels proclaimed joy to the world when announcing Jesus' birth—an event that gives us reason to rejoice. God came to live among us, redeeming us from the consequences of sin, giving us hope of eternal life. So why don't we always feel joyful? Isaiah promised a day to be fulfilled at Jesus' return, one in which all creation will be redeemed. In the meantime, look for blossoms in the desert. What joy blossoms has God scattered through your life today?

## December 14: WREATH

☀ PROMISE -Isaiah 28:5  
 In that day the Lord Almighty  
     will be a glorious crown,  
 a beautiful wreath  
     for the remnant of his people. (NIV)

☀ FULFILLMENT – John 1:14  
 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

☀ REFLECTION:  
 The wreath (sometimes translated “diadem” or “crown of flowers”) is a metaphor for glory—a revelation of God’s character to the world. In most verses about a crown, Jesus is the one wearing the crown, but in this prophesy, Jesus *IS* the crown worn by His people. If you wear that crown, what does your life reveal to the world about God’s character?

## December 15: HORN

☀ PROMISE - Ezekiel 29:21  
 “On that day I will cause a horn to spring up for the house of Israel, and I will open your lips among them. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

☀ FULFILLMENT – Luke 1:68-70  
 “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
     for he has visited and redeemed his people  
 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
     in the house of his servant David,  
 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.”

☀ REFLECTION:  
 In the Old Testament the horn symbolized anointing and also strength. As you feel challenged to meet the tasks for which God has anointed you, remember that “we are weak, but He is strong”. Reflect on His strength for your needs today.

## December 16: OLIVE BRANCH (PEACE):

☀ PROMISE – Micah 5:5a  
 And he shall be their peace.

☀ FULFILLMENT - Luke 2:14  
 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

☀ REFLECTION:

We usually associate the word *peace* with the absence of conflict. But the Hebrew word *shalom* used by Micah means so much more: completeness, wholeness, well-being. Only Jesus can fulfill our longing for these attributes. As you search for peace in this often-frantic season, remember the angel's *shalom* to the shepherds, and ask God to pour His perfect peace into your life.

## December 17: LIGHT

☀ PROMISE – Isaiah 9:2

The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.

☀ FULFILLMENT – John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

☀ REFLECTION:

Light provides a strong metaphor at this dark time of year. We outline our houses and decorate trees with strings of lights. We fill our homes with candles and light fires on dark, cold evenings to push back the darkness. Without light, we lose our way. Jesus enters the darkness to light our paths. What opens your eyes to His light?

## December 18: SUN

☀ PROMISE – Malachi 4:2a

But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.

☀ FULFILLMENT – Luke 4:40

Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.

☀ REFLECTION:

The sun brings light and warmth, essential to healthy life on our planet. Our Sun of righteousness, the Son of God, has risen offering life and health. What physical or spiritual need in your life will you lay before His healing light today?

## December 19: MOON

☀ PROMISE – Psalm 89:37

Like the moon it shall be established forever,  
a faithful witness in the skies.

☀ FULFILLMENT – Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

☀ REFLECTION:

The moon symbolizes permanence. It has reflected the sun's glory through the ages. The same moon shining over my home tonight shone over Abraham's tent and David's palace and Jesus' stable. In a constantly changing world, Jesus, reflecting God's glory, came to establish an eternal kingdom. How do we reflect the glory of Christ's everlasting kingdom?

## December 20: CROSS (FORGIVENESS)

☀ PROMISE – Isaiah 43:25

I, *even I, am* He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake;  
And I will not remember your sins.

☀ FULFILLMENT - Colossians 2:13-14

And you, who were dead in your trespasses . . . God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

☀ REFLECTION:

We rarely reflect on the cross—a symbol of death—at Christmas time. We prefer to focus on the new life represented by Baby Jesus. But the whole point of Jesus being born with a human body was to die, paying the penalty for our sins. On the cross Jesus transformed an instrument of punishment into a symbol of forgiveness. The one who forgives our sins asks us to forgive as well. Who do you need to forgive today?

## December 21: FOUNTAIN

☀ PROMISE – Zechariah 13:1

On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

☀ FULFILLMENT – John 4:13-14

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

☀ REFLECTION:

Remember a time you longed for water—when you were desperately thirsty or couldn't wait to get sweat and dirt off your face and hands. Think how you would have welcomed a spring of pure water. Jesus offers life-giving water that sustains and cleanses. Do you have something in your life that needs refreshing from that fountain today?

## December 22: SNOW

☀ PROMISE – Isaiah 1:18

"Come now, let us settle the matter,"  
says the Lord.  
"Though your sins are like scarlet,  
they shall be as white as snow;

though they are red as crimson,  
they shall be like wool. (NIV)

☀ FULFILLMENT –1 John 1:7

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

☀ REFLECTION:

To the Hebrews, red—the color of blood and violence—was considered opposite to white because of its inability to be washed out easily. Blood does not cleanse; it stains. Yet the blood of Jesus cleans our sin-stained hearts, a cleansing so complete that it is compared to the bright purity of fresh snow. Are you trying to scrub away your own sense of guilt, or have you accepted Jesus' cleansing?

## December 23: SHEPHERD

☀ PROMISE – Isaiah 40:11

He will tend his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms;  
he will carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead those that are with young.

☀ FULFILLMENT – John 10:11

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

☀ REFLECTION:

A good shepherd protects and provides for his flock, even to the extent of giving his life for them. Following such a shepherd insures abundant pasture, soul restoration, comfort through the dark times, and an eternal home. What blessings has your Good Shepherd provided for you?

## December 24: LAMB

☀ PROMISE – Isaiah 53:7

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
yet he opened not his mouth;  
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
so he opened not his mouth.

☀ FULFILLMENT – John 1:29

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world

☀ REFLECTION:

A lamb symbolizes innocence and purity. In the Old Testament, lambs were offered in daily sacrifice. Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, lived a sinless life, dying without protest to take away the sins of others. We no longer offer daily sacrifices nor do we have to do anything else to earn

forgiveness. How do you express your gratitude to God for His forgiveness and for the Lamb sacrificed for you?

## **December 25 - CHRISTMAS DAY: NEW BABY**

☀ PROMISE – Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

☀ FULFILLMENT – Luke 2:11

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

☀ REFLECTION:

Each new life holds promise, but no life has ever fulfilled as many wonderful promises as the One whose birth we celebrate today. Emanuel—God with us—rejoice! Glory to God in the highest!

## About the Authors

### Jean Andrianoff



Jean Andrianoff might easily have been chosen “Person Most Likely to Spend Her Life Living Behind a White Picket Fence in Mid-America” by fellow students at Geneva College. Instead, God took her and her husband David to Thailand, Laos, Mongolia, and Malaysia over a twenty-five year period of ministry under the Christian and Missionary Alliance and World Concern. They now live on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State, where Jean finds inspiration for writing from God’s creation, family, life experiences and her faith in Jesus.

Jean blogs with a group of like-minded friends at [www.wordways.org](http://www.wordways.org) and is the author of [Chosen for a Special Joy](#), the story of David’s parents and a people movement to Christ among the Hmong of Laos. The Sunday School curriculum she developed for the Lao church is widely used in Cambodia as well. David and Jean have two daughters and two grandchildren.

### Christine Sine



Christine Sine, Executive Director of Mustard Seed Associates, calls herself a contemplative activist, believing that every activity entered into and every experience of life is an opportunity to represent or learn about God. She is passionate about helping individuals and faith communities connect their everyday life and their faith practices, encouraging them to establish a rhythm of life in which spirituality weaves through all of life. She speaks around the world on how to reimagine all of life as acts of prayer. Christine blogs regularly on faith and sustainability at [Godspace](#), loves writing prayers, and liturgies and has authored several books including [Return to Our Senses](#).

In a former life Christine was a physician, born and trained in Australia and practiced in New Zealand. She joined Mercy Ships in 1980 and as their Medical Director, was responsible for developing the medical ministry. She also worked in the refugee camps on the Thai Cambodian border for a short time in the mid 1980s.

Christine, her husband Tom and their golden retriever Bonnie are part of a small intentional community in Seattle called the Mustard Seed House. They grow about 40% of their own food on an urban lot and feed a steady stream of local and international visitors from the produce. If you are coming through Seattle we would love to meet you.

## Resources by Mustard Seed Associates

MSA produces resources that equip followers of Jesus to develop a rhythm of life that revolves around their faith, encouraging them to establish firm spiritual foundations that enable them to engage faithfully in God's hurting world

### Advent Resources:



#### **A Journey Toward Home**

For most of us, the birth of Christ conjures up images of a dirty stable where Jesus and his family are alone and abandoned. As Christmas approaches we imagine the Holy Family, together with a few other outsiders - shepherds, foreigners and animals. Maybe a glowing angel and star overhead, but who else might have been present? *A Journey Toward Home* challenges readers to pose these questions to themselves through daily reflections as well as in weekly gatherings with family, friends, or church communities where all are invited to "Gather, Feast, and Create" during these months surround the birth of Christ, when we welcome God among us.

[A Journey Toward Home](#), draws together fifty-five contributors from eight countries providing daily reflections from many theological and cultural perspectives, shared family activities and recipes that will enrich the season for all of us.



#### **Waiting for the Light**

Christians of all traditions are discovering the value of taking time in the days that lead up to Christmas to break away from the consumer frenzy of our culture and prepare their hearts and minds for the coming of Christ. [Waiting for the Light](#) responds to this desire. It is more than a devotional, it is a complete guide to the Advent and Christmas season, providing liturgies, weekly activities and daily reflections to equip and nourish us all through the season.



#### **Advent Videos**

Over the last several years the MSA team has produced a series of Advent reflections with words by Christine Sine and music by Jeff Johnson - check out the series [here](#).



#### **Prayer Cards**

The MSA team has produced several sets of prayer cards to help you focus your daily rhythm of prayer - check them out [here](#).

For other MSA resources including free downloads on Creating a Faith Based Community Garden, Celtic Spirituality and other topics visit our [resource page](#) at [msaimagine.org](http://msaimagine.org)