“Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill His promises to her!” Luke 1:45
On Eagle’s Wings

“Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill His promises to her!” Luke 1:45, NIV

We can only be overjoyed at the brightness of God’s light radiating through and around Mary and Elizabeth on our cover. We thank Mike Lee for portraying the intimacy of this exchange between Elizabeth and Mary. This very human, tender, yet joyful moment is at the centre of God’s eternal plan of salvation for all. May you too be overcome by the light of God's presence and grace Advent and Christmas season.

Mahsi Cho.

Copy Editor
Fiona Brownlee

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Elizabeth Rushton

Volunteering to teach Bible Camp in the North with On Eagle’s Wings provides a unique opportunity to share God’s love and build relationships with our northern brothers and sisters.

Thank you for coming back. You make a difference in our kids’ lives.
(Community leader, northern Saskatchewan)

The sum of it all is that I spent my time on the flight home asking God why I’d been singled out for this blessing. It was a great experience. (Doug, 2016 Bible Camp volunteer)

It felt good to be back in Behchoko – a place that has become our northern home – and I am overwhelmed with happiness to see the people I have grown to love so much over the years. (Susan, Bible Camp volunteer for 9 years.)

Contact us. We are excited about the possibility of engaging more volunteers to walk with the people of the North.

1-866-441-6594 or 780-440-6594
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**On Eagle’s Wings**

Dear Friends,

We listened to you! Thank you for letting us know that some of you were finding it difficult to read small print. In response, this is our first ‘larger print’ edition of our Advent Reflections booklet. We appreciate your support of *On Eagle’s Wings* ministry among northern people; trying our best to meet your needs is part of our saying ‘thank you’ to you.

In this edition, you will hear some new voices as well as some familiar ones. I hope you will welcome our new writers. The stories and experiences we share are personal; they allow you into the lives and thoughts of friends in ministry all across the North. In many ways, they are as intimate as the exchange between Elizabeth and Mary depicted on our cover.

Just as Elizabeth and Mary see the presence of God in each other’s lives and glorify Him, our stories and reflections reveal the presence of God in life’s circumstances that range from horrific to peaceful, to exhilarating and joyful. And like Mary, through all of this, we know we have hope because we are coming to know that, *Blessed are we who have believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to us!*

I hope that, by allowing us to walk with you as you prepare for the coming of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, these stories will draw you closer into the life of God that we share.

Thank you for your continued support, and for being part of this *On Eagle’s Wings* family. May you be steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and untiring in love all the days of your life.*

(*From the Book of Alternative Services, Anglican Church of Canada)*

Rev. Lesley Hand, Executive Director
He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom. Isaiah 40:11, NRSV

This summer at Bible Camp, one of our activities was having the kids write an invitation for Jesus to come to their home in whatever way they wanted him to be present (some kids invited Jesus to dinner, to a slumber party, to go berry-picking, etc). In Cambridge Bay, one teenager named Becky wrote such an invitation to Jesus, and then she turned over the paper and wrote this prayer:

Dear God, I'm praying for you to come to my house tonight with food and goodies on the table. Also I am praying for positive people to come into my life. I hope that's not too much to ask for.

Becky wanted an escape from the negative influences around her so she could enjoy life responsibly, working to apply for a special university program for Inuit to attend in Ottawa. So she asked God for help.

I believe that God will answer Becky's prayer, and I hope that our Bible Camp was part of "positive people coming into her life." For we trust that God cares about us deeply enough to feed us when we need to be nurtured and hold us in his arms. God even loved us so much that he sent his own Son to live among us in our troubles and trials. I will be remembering that this Advent season as I keep looking at Becky's note, pinned on my wall, and continue to pray that she feels God's embrace through the people around her.

Loving God, we trust that you are answering our prayers and are at work in the world around us through your love. We ask that you gather us in your arms, carry us along the journey, and continue to provide all that we need through the new life and salvation that you offer through your Son Jesus Christ. Amen

Melissa May (Lutheran)
On Eagle’s Wings Diaconal Minister
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
STOP, SHUT OFF the ENGINE, LOOK, LISTEN and WAIT

*Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!*

Psalm 27:14, NRSV

While harvesting with my father and twin I noticed the safety instructions written on the combine in case of an emergency – STOP, SHUT OFF the ENGINE, LOOK, LISTEN and WAIT.

I chuckled to myself for I had been thinking about the upcoming Advent season and the sign was clear, direct, exact – the kind of words we might hear in the season of Advent.

Advent words prophetically call us to a different way of living in the season dawning upon us. Advent words like REPENT – WAIT – HOPE – PRAY – PREPARE. But these aren’t the only words we hear, for at the same time we are bombarded by other clear, direct, exact words like BUY – ONLY ?? SHOPPING DAYS LEFT – KEEP UP – CONSUME – GO, GO, GO.

What would it be like for us to hear – and to live – in a different way this Advent season?

STOP – the clutter of our lives – seek to free up time for…;
SHUT OFF – the distractions – seek the gift of silence, worship, service and…;
LOOK – for ways that God is breaking into our world – seek to be a part of the in-breaking reign of Christ by…;
LISTEN – for ways to serve that are life-giving – seek other means of gift-giving through…;
WAIT – with expectation, in hope, for the One who is called Emmanuel – God with us.

Advent words for us to live by.

**Gracious God, in this Advent season teach me to wait. Amen.**

Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer – Bishop (Lutheran)
Synod of Alberta and the Territories
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
Edmonton, Alberta
Gifts to Share

_Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay. God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another._

1 Peter 4:9-10, NLT

Recently we returned from a one month mission as hosts for _On Eagles Wings_ Bible Camps in the Northwest Territories. We would meet incoming Bible Camp teachers at the airport and transport them to cabins, where they could gather supplies for a few days prior to us bringing them back to the airport so that they could fly to remote northern regions of the NWT to conduct Bible Camps.

We were blessed to meet very dedicated teachers, some of whom had served as missionary evangelists through _On Eagle’s Wings_ Bible Camps for 4-9 years. We were very moved by their excitement to share God’s word with their classes.

We were very grateful to meet many amazing individuals during our stay including teachers sharing God’s word, athletes of the NWT about to attend the 2016 Canada 55+ Games, and generous contributors at the Coop Store for the St. Vincent de Paul Society. All of whom inspired us greatly.

Awaiting and preparing for Jesus’ coming during Advent is much like the preparations that we experienced and recognized this summer. We learned from the teachers, athletes and our hosting role that planning and preparation are key to successful readiness. Planning and preparing to have our heart ready to receive Jesus means acting through forgiveness, mercy, service, caring and giving. The gift of our experience has exposed us to these truths and has allowed us to realize that we have ‘won the Gold Medal’ by being God’s Children.

_Lord God, you shared your Son with us and gave us many gifts that we might share with others. May we use these gifts in praise of your holy name. Amen_

Larry and Patti Ofner (Roman Catholic)
_On Eagle’s Wings_ hospitality and office volunteers,
Edmonton, Alberta
Christmas the Whole Year.

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*

Hebrews 13:8, NIV

When we lived in Salluit, Nunavik in the 60's, Christmas was not just a day but a whole season of celebration. It would begin with the school concert and Nativity play through to when the whole community would be fed at the mission, a feast of beans, bannock, fish and tea. Each family would receive Christmas gifts from the bales which had arrived the previous summer, sent by kind ladies' groups in the south. In the week that followed, leading up to the New Year, there would be a hectic round of activities.

During the short daylight hours there would be races, on foot, by dog team and skidoo. There would be shooting contests, candy scrambles, harpoon tosses and fish net crawling. Each evening began with a church service and then a dance in the school with more indoor games. It seemed as if we were all basking in the celebrations.

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas this Advent wouldn't it be wonderful if we could celebrate Christmas for the *whole year!* If we could keep that feeling of closeness to God, that assurance of His love in Jesus, that sense of generosity, that reconciling of differences in family and community, that care and concern for the less fortunate; keeping them not just for a day or even a week but for the whole year. What a difference it would make to our homes, our communities, our work places, our schools and most of all to *ourselves*. How can we do it?

**Lord Jesus, as we prepare to celebrate the miracle of your birth in love amongst us, help us to live in such a way that we share the spirit of Christmas every day of our lives. Amen.**

Bishop Chris Williams (Anglican)
Fourth Anglican Bishop of the Arctic
*On Eagle’s Wings* hospitality volunteer
Former *On Eagle’s Wings* Governing Board member
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
Thursday, December 1

Come

*But as for me, I will look to the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.*

Micah 7:7, NRSV

The years pass and I am inextricably connected to the people of the North. During the Advent season we wait together for the Christ Child, the Saviour, the One to whom our hearts are open and our created souls yearn. Come quickly, Lord of lords.

Bible School had ended for the day 30 minutes earlier. Children were still meandering home, carrying crafts that they had made, meeting friends on the road, deciding whether or not to go swimming, getting a snack at the store, voices gradually fading into the sounds of a small village. Julie and I were sweeping and cleaning, getting the church ready for our evening Bible School time. Three 5-year-old friends had stayed, wanting to finish their coloring pages ‘just so’ as 5-year-olds like to do. Their little girl talk stilled as they worked diligently. Quietly the first voice began … “Kum ba yah, my Lord …” Gradually, all three were singing as they coloured. We listened as the girls sang sweetly, their voices calm and assured, confident in their relationship with our loving God. Ten years later and I can still hear the voices of those children praying for the Christ Child.

As we wait for our Lord’s coming, we are drawn into relationships with others who share our hope and others whose hope has dimmed or never flickered. The Saviour of the world is coming! In hope and faith, welcoming others to join, we say the Advent prayer “Come by here, my Lord. Come by here.”

**Lord Jesus, give us watchful eyes and hearts to see and feel your presence every hour of every day. Reveal yourself to the nations that all peoples may await your coming. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen**

Lois Graff (Lutheran)
*On Eagle’s Wings* Bible Camp volunteer
Former *On Eagle’s Wings* Governing Board member
Huntsville, Alabama
Believe … Faith … Trust

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

Jeremiah 29:11, NRSV

Believe…Faith…Trust…aren’t those words synonymous? In our theme passage for this Advent season, Mary believed. She believed that God’s promises would come to pass. What incredible faith she had! Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we all had that unwavering faith in what God is doing in our lives? During this Advent season, perhaps we could assess ourselves and determine in what areas of our lives we need to have more faith.

I think about the people of the North when I think of examples of faith. The frigid winters that Northerners endure seem so brutal to a girl from North Carolina, but these amazing people never lose faith that they will have their needs met, even in this harsh climate. They know that God will provide and that their community will support and care for each other. They have faith in God and each other, as Mary did.

Through this Advent season, let’s reflect on this unfailing faith that Mary had and how we can be more like her. God keeps his promises. He tells us in Jeremiah 29:11, He has “…plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” What wonderful news that we can believe!

Precious Lord, Help us to release doubt, worry and fear that hinders us from having faith in you and your plans for us. Help us to remember the faith of Mary and help us to be more like her. In Your Holy Name, we pray. Amen.

Jen Canipe (Lutheran)
On Eagle’s Wings Bible Camp volunteer
On Eagle’s Wings Governing Board member
Harrisburg, North Carolina
Saturday, December 3

Watching, Waiting and Preparing

Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my door"  Proverbs 8:34, NRSV
Prepare the way of the Lord...  Matthew 3:3, NRSV

Much of my life is spent 'watching', 'waiting' and 'preparing'. I live in Fort Simpson NWT, the centre or hub of the Deh Cho region. Several years ago our church was torn down because it was unsafe. Now, after years of 'waiting', a new church is under construction. The contractor expects that we will be in our new church for Christmas....so Advent 'preparation' has special meaning this year.

I serve as pastor of five other communities in the Deh Cho region. To get to Wrigley (215 km north), there is a ferry across the Mackenzie River. The ferry operates 8hrs a day, so I must 'prepare' my schedule.

To get to Jean Marie River (125 km east) and Fort Liard (285 km southwest), I take a ferry across the Liard River which operates longer hours....so less 'preparation' is required. However to get to Nahanni Butte (200 km southwest) I take the same ferry, but I must cross the Liard River again...people are helpful in coming by boat to pick me up.

But rivers freeze over and break up every year. So there are weeks of 'waiting and watching' every Fall and Spring. "When will the ice crossing open?" "When will the ferry begin to operate?" I almost forgot to mention Sambaa K'e/Trout Lake (270 km south) which is accessible only by winter road for a few months of the year. The rest of the time people travel on charter flights - pricey!

What about 'watching', 'waiting', and 'preparing' in your life?

Gracious and loving God, creator of the changing seasons, open our hearts to the surprising and unexpected ways you reveal yourself to us day by day. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen

Fr. Joseph Daley (Roman Catholic)
Regional Pastor
Fort Simpson, Northwest Territories
An ancient icon of the Christian East equates the Virgin Mary with the burning bush that Moses happened upon at the foot of Mount Horeb, the mountain of God (Exodus 3). The bush was completely engulfed in flames yet it was not consumed by the flames, since it contained God’s Divine Presence; and Moses was instructed by God to remove his sandals “for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Ex. 3.5).

In a similar way, the early church accorded a special place of honour to Mary. In her “yes” to God’s call, she was seen as the meeting place between the earthly and the divine, the flesh from which the Word became flesh, the creature not consumed by her encounter with the Creator, the holy ground of Christ’s incarnation. For this reason they gave her special titles to reflect their reverence for her: New Eve, Mother of God, and Theotokos meaning “God-bearer.”

Mary’s calling was certainly unique as it related to bearing the Christ-child into the world; but the vocation of being a “God-bearer” is really what is asked of each one of us in our daily walk. Think of an expectant mother who carries within her one who will bear God’s image and likeness in the world. Think of a Bible School teacher who opens up the gospel for the first time with young children. Think of someone who in humility says “yes” to serving the needs of others ahead of themselves.

We thank you, Lord Jesus, for calling us to the vocation of bearing your image to the world. Help us to follow in the footsteps of Mary, and to answer faithfully this call today and always. Amen

Julien Hammond (Roman Catholic)
Ecumenical Officer – Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton
Edmonton, Alberta
Monday, December 5

Start Each Day with God

Only fear the Lord and serve him in Truth with all your heart: For consider what great things he has done for you.
1 Samuel 12:24, NRSV

When I get up in the morning, I often tend to get busy right away without starting off my day with a prayer. In this busy world it is too easy to forget all of the things that God has done for us. In fact, a great way to start each day is by reading the Bible and to take two minutes to count all of your blessings and then try to have loving thoughts all day long. For when we do that, our hearts become merry and then we are walking in God’s light. That will make us feel even more blessed than before! It is written, “The Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which he swore to your fathers. And He will love you and bless you.” Deuteronomy 7: 12-13

Therefore, let us never forget to thank God for His great Love, and all of the blessings that He has given to you and me. Also remember when you are counting all of your blessings to count the biggest blessing of them all: having such a loving, caring Heavenly Father who sent us Jesus Christ our Lord, born to live with us and who died for us.

God of blessings, we thank you for all that you have given us: our lives, our relationships, your creation, and your love. Help us to remember these gifts every day as we come to you in prayer and as we lead our lives each day in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Geela Qaapik, (Anglican)
Income Assistant Worker and Justice Outreach Worker
Grise Fiord, Nunavut

“Thank you for not forgetting about them.”
Bishop Darren McCartney, Anglican Suffragan Bishop of the Arctic, speaking of On Eagle’s Wings Bible Camps in Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord, Nunavut.
Saying Yes

*I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.”*  Luke 1:38, NIV

Before there were shepherds abiding in the fields. Before there were angel choirs. Before there were murmurs around Bethlehem, there was a simple “yes” to the great I AM. The same I AM who led the people of Israel from bondage of Egypt to the freedom in the Promised Land. He is the same I AM who Mary was saying “yes” to birthing.

You are reading this, mostly likely, because you have said “Yes” too. None of us can say yes in the same way Mary did, but that doesn’t take away from our response. She said yes to the angel Gabriel and then many small ones after that. “Yes” to trusting her cousins. “Yes” to trusting Joseph. “Yes” to a crazy long journey to Bethlehem. “Yes” to an innkeeper who offered her a barn to birth the Messiah in.

As we say “Yes” to God, let us take a moment to offer our thanks for Mary’s witness and willingness to say “Yes” too! Let us pray for those who struggle to say “Yes” and join us as we too journey to Bethlehem. Let us offer our thanks for opportunities – great and small – to say “Yes”!

Lord Jesus, the great I AM come among us. Bless us in this holy season as we prepare for your birth in time as the timeless Son of God. Aid us to say “Yes” to you in all things, like your mother Mary did. We pray this in your precious name. Amen.

Rev. David Lehmann (Anglican)
Founding Member, On Eagle’s Wings Governing Board
*On Eagle’s Wings* Bible Camp volunteer
Fort Smith, Northwest Territories
Wednesday, December 7

Shepherds, Just Like Us

*But the angel said to them (the shepherds), Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.*

Luke 2: 10-11, NRSV

My friend Alma lives on the shores of the Mackenzie River. It is the longest river in Canada, originating in Great Slave Lake of the Northwest Territories, flowing north into the Arctic Ocean. The river is navigable for approximately five months of the year by ferry, canoe and boat. During the winter months, sections of the river are used as an ice road.

Along with challenges of the harsh climate – this woman struggles. As a young girl, she was abused at a residential school. The legacy of abuse remains. She tries to forget with the consumption of alcohol. It does not work.

On a winter’s day, we read the scriptural account of the shepherds. In an area where fishing and hunting are necessary activities, a shepherd is a new term. So we talk. …

… “What is a shepherd anyway?” “The working poor…caregivers of sheep…close protectors.” “You mean to tell me that God’s message went to shepherds? The first were sheep smelly folk? They weren’t special.” “That’s what the story says.” “Everyone is invited?”

Jesus is coming for sheep like us, the hurting, Alma, the excluded, those who feel excluded and the poor. He is coming to the targets of bullying and abuse, to those who bully and abuse, and even to those who stand by quietly.

Jesus is the Messiah born in a barn and calling disciples that the world would never choose.

*Dear Creator, help us to be ready. Help us see that Jesus comes for all – shepherds, just like us – with great transformation in mind. Be with Alma and be with us. May we once again be reminded that the good news is for all people. In the Saviour we long for.  Amen.*

AnnE Zimmerman (Lutheran)
Interim Pastor, Lakeland Lutheran Church
Former *On Eagle’s Wings* Co-Director
Cold Lake, Alberta
A Child is Born

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6, NKJV

As a child growing up in Edmonton I remember the excitement of the Christmas season. As children, we engaged in family and church traditions that centred upon the baby Jesus. Fast forward several years and many miles. When we were expecting our first child as a couple, we had a unique Christmas season. The idea of waiting on our own child was a totally new perspective. The excitement and anticipation of what was to come, was very real and new. During our time of living and serving in the north, we got to experience many Christmases and to make lasting friendships. The relationships that we built during those early years have stood the test of time.

As a pilot with On Eagles Wings I have the privilege of serving the children of the north. Together with volunteers from the USA and Canada, we partner to provide Bible schools in remote communities. We are able to spend a few moments with these amazing kids, and spread the news about the baby in a manger. Just like the kids we serve, He was also born in a remote community. As we enjoy and celebrate this Christmas season, let us all reflect on the amazing gift of our Lord and Saviour.

Heavenly Father, We thank you for Jesus the Prince of Peace. We thank you for the beauty of the north. We thank you for our families. We pray for peace and love this Christmas season. We pray that your spirit will fill our hearts with your love. We pray this in Jesus precious name, Amen

Will Brander (Alliance)
On Eagle’s Wings volunteer pilot
Leduc, Alberta
My spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant." Luke 1:47-48, NRSV

Twelve-year-old Rachel from Cambridge Bay hadn't read the Bible before. The week we visited for Bible Camp, we shared five Bible stories and donated a children's Bible to the Youth Centre. Rachel's eyes lit up and she immediately sat down with the book: she was going to read all the Bible stories, from the beginning.

In a hymn called *Canticle of the Turning*, Mary sings: "Though I am small, my God, my all, you work great things in me."

It's amazing to me how God keeps working great things through "small" or unexpected people to make the message of Jesus' saving love known. Young Rachel helped me to experience again the joy of reading the Word of God. A boy named David from Tuktoyaktuk patiently guided our team on a tour of the local beach with grown-up precision and youthful eagerness to talk about God. Everywhere we go, people who are sometimes forgotten by our culture emerge shining with God's love: children, teens, elders, people who are experiencing Northern Canada for the first time, people who've never left the North, people who've experienced few to no church events.

I count myself among these: how does God work with a young woman from rural Virginia to form meaningful Christian experiences and relationships in Northern Canada? It's still a mystery to me. But I hope and pray that God will keep working through "small" me to work great things.

O God our Creator, work among us as your small and lowly servants to make great things happen. As we prepare for the birth of your son Jesus, remind us of your inspiring presence which enters the world and fills us with your love to share with all. We pray this in your name. Amen

Melissa May (Lutheran)
*On Eagle's Wings* Diaconal Minister
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
A Week of Joy

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.
Matthew 2:10, NRSV

This was my ninth visit to my beloved Bechoko, NWT. I was overwhelmed with anxiety. I missed my new granddaughter and didn’t feel as organized and prepared as I wished. As we landed in Yellowknife I was exhausted. As I stepped off the plane and saw the late night sunset over the horizon I was filled with an overwhelming joy. I had made the right choice.

Our team was welcomed back at the Sunday morning service. The elders thanked us for coming and what time tomorrow? And my favorite question of all…what ages? We embraced everyone in the community from the toddler who came in with siblings to the teens and adults that wanted to help. More joy!

Next morning, I was still feeling anxious because we hadn’t put up signs for Bible Camp. Imagine my joy when I saw our friends had posted our On Eagles Wings camp for us and there was a stream of kids lined up to come in as we opened the doors. Doubled joy….

The week went fast and we were never at a loss for materials and activities. Our friends Patti and Larry came for a visit and brought bags of goldfish. Fun! Let’s read the Feeding of the Multitude. The kids loved it. Two adults showed up to help. The mom had tears in her eyes as she watched all the children laughing and “Jumping the Jordan” with Dave. Shared joy.

We felt welcomed again and the many kid’s hugs told it all. Best yet, on the last night we heard many “See you next year!”.

Dear Lord, thank you for the many opportunities and joys that you throw in our path. Thank you for letting us get to know this beautiful community of the North. You give us strength to do your will, faith in knowing what should be done and joy in feeling you have our backs. Amen.

Chris Heimer (Lutheran)
On Eagle’s Wings Bible Camp volunteer
Souderton, Pennsylvania
- Northwest Territories
- Nunavut / Nunavik
- Northern Alberta / Saskatchewan
- Northern Ontario / Quebec
Whenever two or three of you come together in my name, I am there with you.
Matthew 18:20 CEV

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Sunday, December 11; Third Sunday of Advent

O God, We Behold Your Coming?

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.
John 1:5, NRSV

In my first years here in NWT, I was struck by the long, dark days and nights of the northern winter. Also striking was the brilliance of the light from the stars, the moon, and the northern lights. The darkness brought about a greater intensity, shape, and colour to the light.

I soon needed to call forth persons from other parts of North America to consider serving as ‘northern missionaries.’ However, this was no easy discernment for people, because they would be serving in some of the most uniquely beautiful yet challenging conditions. The wisdom of a previous ‘recruiting statement’ spoke to me: “God is calling many men, women, and young people to serve here in the North, and we very much need your help. But discern carefully. Be careful to not over-romanticize the North. One’s devils speak loudly in the cold, dark, and isolated places where one would live and serve. However, in such quiet austerity one can observe with a greater clarity and intensity the grace and blessings of God.”

In Advent, we wait in the darkness to behold a wonderful light. Every Advent season is a new opportunity to see, hear, and behold God’s blessing and action in a new way. We need not fear the darkness; but with expectation and real hope, the light will always illuminate all darkness.

Christmas is the celebration of Emmanuel: God comes among us; God is with us!! Our very busy and full lives may often miss the deep blessings – of creation, and human fellowship, and treasured virtues such as compassion and mercy - that are fully manifest in the coming of the Saviour of our world.

O God, thank you for being the Light that comes to us in the darkness, and brings illumination so that we may truly see and live. Our hearts hunger and thirst for Our Saviour: the Light in the darkness that truly shows us what it means to be fully human and alive. May all our lives of searching, trials and hardships be the occasion of seeking and receiving Your Light and Love that illumines all things. O Come, O Come, Emmanuel! Amen.

Bishop Mark Hagemoen (Roman Catholic)
Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith,
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
God’s Blessings

The LORD bless you and keep you. Numbers 6:22, NIV

When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, she gave her blessing to Mary. She ended with “Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” Then Mary sang her song of praise – The Magnificat. She sings “For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.” This does not take away from her humility. She is boasting in the Lord (2 Corinthians 10:17) because God is working through her.

How do we count our blessings? How are we really blessed? Are the material items we have our blessings? What if “our blessings come through raindrops?”

If we pay attention, we know God is always blessing - the first rays of the sun in a dark January…the first hunt of the season…a good catch of fish…gathering eggs from the geese…a good cup of hot tea on a cold day…the plane coming in…a great ball tournament on July 1st…cook out with the whole village…going out on the land…the shout of a name upon recognition.

God is always blessing. The New Testament has over 100 references with the word bless, blessing, or blessed. So, what is blessing? Anything that draws us closer to Jesus. It is approval that helps us to do something…help and approval from God. It is a thing that is conducive to happiness. We need to look for the blessings, because they are there for our claiming.

Dear God, thank you that your greatest blessings always rest in who you are. Draw us close to you, that we may know your love and approval. For in you, we are truly blessed. Amen.

Vicki McCombs (Lutheran)
On Eagle’s Wings Governing Board Member (US President)
On Eagle’s Wings Bible Camp volunteer
Kannapolis, North Carolina
Tuesday, December 13

Emerging Identity

Tell the elders to be temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance. Titus 2:2, NRSV

The relationship landscape of the North is changing – something to ponder as we celebrate the humanity and divinity of the Creator at Christmas. The language, customs, spirituality and identity of northern communities are slowly recovering from colonial practices that still occur. Deline, a community in the Sahtu, now has its own self-government. It is like a province or state and other communities are moving in this direction.

As Canadians, we need to accept the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, recognizing this new governance model, respecting and supporting this new direction and continuing to walk with the people on this heroic journey.

This year I met a young woman who reflects this change. After her initial year in university, she came back to the community of Fort Good Hope with energy, wisdom and a goal to help the community’s young people reclaim their identity and purpose with the help of the elders. She is a good example of this change that is happening in the North. Her attitude and story are contagious is such a positive way. At one time she was immersed in alcohol and all the negativity associated with such a lifestyle. She turned herself around with the help of others. She is now planting the seed of hope within the community that is slowly growing. She is an example to show that much will be accomplished in the promise of the Creator.

Creator, as we approach Christmas, open our hearts and minds to allow northerners and southerners to continue to walk together, supporting the re-emergence of aboriginal identities, dignity and faith. Allow us to be open to new relationships as we continue to pray together. We ask this through you, the Creator – Father, Son and Spirit. Amen.

Roger Plouffe (Roman Catholic)
Lay Ecclesial Minister
Fort Good Hope, Northwest Territories
The Church Gathered

*This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”* Matthew 3:3, NRSV

I was intrigued by the advertisement posted by a little Lutheran church in Yellowknife who was looking for a pastor. It read: “We have the wilderness, come be the voice crying out in it”. There was a playfulness there that interested me and soon we arrived from the prairies to spend the next five years serving an incredibly diverse congregation and community. The north attracts all sorts of people for all sorts of reasons.

Often I wonder what the people were like that were led out into the wilderness to be baptized by John. What led them out there? Was it out of curiosity that they just had to see this weird figure dressed in camel’s hair and munching on grasshoppers and wild honey? Was it the truth about their lives that he spoke of – the brokenness and the need for a complete turn around - that drew them to the waters of repentance? Whatever it was, as they gathered, their lives were transformed not by John, but by the One he pointed to.

Isn’t this what the church is – an eclectic group of misfits gathered together to receive this Jesus? We are people from all walks of life, united in our need for wholeness, love and the grace of God, which we discover more fully as we live and serve together.

**Gracious God, as we await the coming of your Son, draw us together as your church that we might live and serve you with our whole hearts. Amen.**

Rev. Kirk Tastad (Lutheran)
Former *On Eagle’s Wings* Governing Board member
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
Thursday, December 15

God’s Biggest Plan

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. 

Hebrews 11:1, NIV

Long lists of arrivals and departures fill the notes of the pilots, directors, hosts, village contacts and day camp volunteers as they prepare to share God’s love and community with hundreds of children in the North. There are many tasks and plans that are made in good faith that it’s all a part of God’s bigger plan.

Living on this side of Jesus’ birth, we get a breath-taking play-by-play of God’s biggest plan! What would God’s amazing blueprint of enter and exit “on cues” have been like without the faith and willing hearts of ordinary people responding to God’s invitation to be a part of it? Just take a moment to think about each one of them… A young teenage girl, a young man with a pretty good reputation up-to-this-point, a benevolent inn keeper, some rag-tag shepherds, some die-hard wise men up for a star-led spiritual journey, not to mention the multitude of angels on specific “assignments.”

Thank God for people - today and yesterday - who exemplify faith! People of all ages and walks of life who embrace invitations to do their part with only an inkling of God’s good intent. Extraordinary things like … airport runs for day camps in the North, … and gatherings around mangers – today and yesterday and …

Amazing, life-changing things can happen on seemingly ordinary days when people are open to being God’s hands and feet and voice to speak.

God of life and breath, refresh our hearts with past and present invitations to be a part of Your marvelous plans. May these - though seemingly ordinary - Advent days inspire us to see your presence and activity in the wonder of it all! Amen!

Miriam ‘Mim’ Campbell (Lutheran)
On Eagle’s Wings Bible Camp volunteer
On Eagle’s Wings curriculum support
Lakeville, Minnesota
Longing for Light

*Because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.*

Luke 1: 78-79, NIV

As the season of Advent moves forward, for many in the Arctic the days grow shorter, darker. For some, there is no sunlight at all; for others there is precious little daylight. We long for the year to end, for the new year to bring us back the light, the sun.

As the season of Advent moves forward, for many in the Arctic, and in other places, life grows darker. Worries pile up, fear crowds in, hope ebbs away. We long for the fear to end, for anything, for Anyone to bring us back to the Light.

The message of Advent, the announcement of hope, the Good News, breaks into our darkness, physically, emotionally, spiritually. “Don’t be afraid! For unto you this day, in the city of David, is born the Saviour”. Jesus was born to be the physical message that God knows you, sees you in all your glory and in all your gory detail, and God loves you!

“Who, me?” you ask, looking over your shoulder. Yes, definitely you. You are not alone, you are not forgotten, you are precious to God. Indeed, you are so precious to God that the ultimate sacrifice, God’s own Son, was offered on the Cross so that you could be freed from the sin that mires all of us. Through Jesus’ birth and death, you have been freed and can return to the path of peace, peace of heart, peace of mind, peace with God. Advent - God Loves You!

**Dear Father, we give you thanks for all your mercies, and most especially for the great Gift of Your Son. May this holy season of Advent bring us the blessing of the sure knowledge of your love, and with that knowledge, may our hope be rekindled, the embers fanned into flame so that we might be warmed deep in our spirits and that the path forward might be lit for us all. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.**

Rev. Canon Paul Williams (Anglican)
Regional Dean, Diocese of the Arctic
Kugluktuk, Nunavut
Saturday, December 17

Going Home?

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, ... Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Joel 2:12-13, NRSV

He had not been home for years. He wasn’t from the North, or Canada. His life story is detailed, complicated—an interesting home life growing up, a faith life, service in the armed forces, a marriage that ended in divorce and then having real financial needs.

So he lived simply, delighting in often overlooked things—the view from his windows, a few plants, time for drawing and writing, and shopping in thrift stores. He had a story to tell to those who would make time to listen.

For his material and health needs he accessed resources in his community. But there was one need, one desire that could not be met by any community program or resource. He wanted to go home. The North had become his home and he thought he would likely come back after having seen family one more, one last, time. However, no social program, no charity existed that could pay for that airline ticket. Yet the deep desire remained—he wanted to go home.

In each of us there is a longing to be close to the heart of God, to know deep in our hearts where and to whom we belong. Christmas music and traditions often highlight that expectation of going home. This Advent, let the openness of each nativity scene be your invitation to renewed closeness with our God, to whom you can always go home. No plane ticket required.

God who makes a home with us, with Mary I ponder the wonder and mystery of your promise to be with us. Open my heart to the truth of your promise to graciously, mercifully, and lovingly welcoming me home. And then lead me home to you. Amen

Rev. Steve Meysing (Lutheran)
Assistant to the Bishop, Nebraska Synod ELCA
Former On Eagle’s Wings board member
North Platte, Nebraska
Fourth Sunday of Advent; Sunday, December 18

Treasures of the Heart

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.  

Luke 2:11, NIV

Many times when I go to places where people gather or to visit homes, there are children from babies to rambunctious toddlers to laid back teenagers. As the visitor, I can only form my own thoughts of the situation(s), but one thing that is common is in the way the parents express their care, patience and love for them. Moms try hard to see, hear and anticipate all things that could happen. However the ever evolving different scenarios of life take over, along with the child’s journey to self-reliance, which can be both beautiful and difficult to witness.

Through it all, they are the treasure, a treasure that cannot be described or touched but only felt with the heart. Like any mom, Mary must have felt the same way right from the beginning knowing in her heart that this was “different”. This difference is unveiled in a mystery. As we journey towards Advent, I can’t help but think how can we share and participate in doing our part in this reflective waiting season?

Heavenly Father, the treasure we anticipate has always been present through you. As we unwrap the mysteries, help us to be still and recognize what you have in store for us as we prayerfully await your coming. Amen.

Martina Norwegian (Roman Catholic)
On Eagle’s Wings Governing Board member (Canadian President)
Fort Simpson, Northwest Territories
Who Am I?

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.
Matthew 13:44, NIV

Advent is about a message of hope, that a Saviour will come. What does Saviour mean to us today? One who saves, one who sees us and will come to our aid. In this world, we can feel very alone. Overwhelmed is a word we hear used many times by people in our society. In our high-pressure world, where we think we should know so much, prove our accomplishments, stand on our own two feet…. how inadequate and scared we often feel.

In the north, I live with people who feel the pressure of society’s expectations, but also have a strong connection to their family and the elders, even those who have passed on. It is moving to hear an elder speaking about being a child, and what his father or mother said, words that still hold true and shape their identity.

The words God has spoken to us in the Advent promise, through Jesus, is that we are enough, as we are. When we receive faith to believe that promise and when we dare to hope that we can live in the freedom of being who God created us to be, the kingdom of God is near, and we are truly “blessed”.

Richard Rohr speaks about this. Growth in the spiritual life is discovered by the release of our defense postures, by letting go of fear and our attachment to self-image. Then the inner gift lies present, as “a treasure hidden in a field”.

Dear Lord, Who am I? The trees ask me, and the sky asks me. The grass asks me, and the sand, and the rocks ask me. Who am I? The wind tells me at nightfall, And the rain tells me. Someone small. Someone small, but a piece of it all.
Poem by Felice Holman

Kathryn Scott (Lutheran)
On Eagle’s Wings Bible Camp volunteer
Wrigley, Northwest Territories
Feeling the Excitement

She went into Zechariah’s home, where she greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, her baby moved within her. 
Luke 1: 40-41

My friends and I were walking around the community hanging up signs for the Bible camp. A man stopped and asked when the Bible Camp would begin. He said he would tell his children.

We passed a house and a young girl came out and asked if we were the Bible Camp teachers. We told her we were and the time and place it would begin. She said she would be there.

The word spread. Children ran and jumped and skipped to camp on Monday afternoon. Something inside them moved and told them that something special was coming. That something special was Jesus in the stories, crafts, games and music. We prayed they would also see Jesus in us.

When Mary visited Elizabeth, Elizabeth knew someone special was coming. She felt her baby jump and skip. Even he knew that Jesus was on the way.

In Advent, we know someone special is coming. Our hearts might skip a beat as we hear the story of Jesus’ coming as a baby. We ask “when will Jesus get here?” The good news of Christmas is that he is already with us.

Dear God, thank you for all ministries, including On Eagle’s Wings, that bring Jesus to children and communities all over the world. Help us all to show Jesus to others. Amen.

Jan Davis, AiM (Lutheran)
On Eagle’s Wings Bible Camp volunteer
On Eagle’s Wings Sunday School curriculum writer
Hanover, Pennsylvania
At that time I will gather you; at that time, I will bring you home.
Zephaniah 3:20, NIV

Home is a word that has meant many things throughout my lifetime. As a child, home was my parents’ house. When I went away to university, home became a dorm room or an apartment as I grew more independent. Still, though, the town I grew up in was the place I would return for Thanksgiving, Christmas, or other gatherings of family; it was home. About 13 years ago, my husband and I moved our family north to Fort McMurray, Alberta, which is the place I’ve called home ever since.

On May 3rd of this year, we fled our home along with tens of thousands of friends, neighbours and strangers as wildfire invaded and destroyed neighbourhoods. It was a completely unfamiliar feeling to be forced out of the comfort of our home and not know when we could return. By now, many of us have returned to rebuild. Many others are not ready or able to do so. Although my family’s house is still standing, our home, Fort McMurray, is very different. The restoration of our city will take time, and we don’t know what it will look like in the end.

Zephaniah declares to the Israelites in exile that the Lord will rescue them, gather them, and bring them home. During Advent, the church remembers God’s promises of restoration to His people, and both heralds the coming of the Messiah while still aching for the fulfilment of the promises in His return. We have been rescued from sin and returned to home in Christ, but we wait for eternal restoration.

Heavenly Father, thank you that in sending your son Jesus Christ you have rescued us from the exile of sin and death and restored us to you forever. We pray you would hasten the day you come again to take us home with you forever. Amen.

Tara Munn (Anglican)
On Eagle’s Wings hospitality volunteer
Fort McMurray, Alberta
Listen and Believe!

Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her! Luke 1:45, NIV

The first time I traveled North to teach Bible Camp I was so very anxious about the planning, the process, anxious about everything! Anxious that it be perfect, that we correctly share the message and anxious that the children have a wonderful experience. Our planning was by no means perfect, far from it! But, we were guided by God's hand and the week became everything it was supposed to be and so much more because it became God's plan.

The Bible verse seems to have two major parts - listening and believing. Listening to what God is saying to us and believing that it will be accomplished. In subsequent trips to the North I'd like to think I got a bit better at doing both - listening and believing. Listening to God's guidance through the process of preparation, planning and, most importantly, listening to Him during our time in the communities and with the children. Believing that God's hand was at work in all that we did and His mission would be accomplished.

Advent is all about listening and believing! Listening to God should be part of our daily devotions, but it becomes especially important to listen to God through all the “noise” that becomes part of the holiday season. Believing in the birth of a baby in a stable who saved us all and believing in the unconditional love of God for all His children. Believing that what God said will be accomplished when our Saviour returns.

Heavenly Father, open our ears to all that You have to say to us and our hearts to know that all things can be accomplished through You. Amen

Marcia Baker (Lutheran)
On Eagle’s Wings Bible Camp volunteer
Former On Eagle’s Wings Governing Board member
Blue Ridge Summit, Pennsylvania
Friday, December 23

The Lord is With Us

*The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”*  
Luke 1:28, NIV

Our parish has been actively supporting refugees. They have come to us from various countries in the Middle East and from two countries in Africa. They are both Christian and Muslim and come from a variety of backgrounds and with a number of complex needs.

One of the young men that we have sponsored is an artist. I commissioned him to design the Christmas card for the university where I minister. After much back and forth, we decided that he would paint “The Annunciation,” specifically, the Angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she would give birth to The Messiah. He was given full liberty in how the narrative was to be depicted.

I received the image and was struck by how he rendered Mary. Her hands are not clasped in prayer. Her body is not stooped over in some serene embrace of humility. Rather, she is upright and on her face is the look of sheer and utter terror. There is a certain dissonance in the image. There is simultaneously strength and fear.

So often, we find ourselves in the same position. If we are authentic in living out the gospel, we will be faced by countless challenges. Some of these challenges, be they at home or at work or in church will be great. Our faith will be known when despite our fear and anxiety, we live the gospel, echoing the words of Mary: “Let it be done to me according to your word.” … Truly, the Lord is with us.

**From one generation to the next, you God, you are our refugee and our strength. All of our hope is in you. In our moments of doubt and fear, enliven us with the strength which comes from your Holy Spirit. May our words and deeds, be a constant reflection of your love. All of these things, we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Fr. Michael Bechard (Roman Catholic)  
Priest/Chaplain, King’s University College at Western University  
London, Ontario
Christmas Eve; Saturday, December 24

Super Spy Glasses

_Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!_  
Luke 1:45, NIV

“Let’s put on our super spy glasses; they’ll help us see the way Jesus sees them.” Our Bible Camp story, Rahab and the Spies, had been about how Jesus protects us. The spies were on a dangerous mission but, through them, Rahab saw the promise of God that His presence would be a blessing to those who love and trust Him. How she wanted that for her own family! What did the spies see in Rahab? Not a woman with a bad reputation, but a woman of courage and faith.

“What do you see now when you look at people with your super spy glasses?” What we saw in each other was the presence of God.

We saw in each other exactly what Elizabeth saw in Mary. We saw God’s presence in our courage, kindness, peace, creativity, and love. For Elizabeth, no sooner has Mary crossed the threshold of her house than she cannot hold back from proclaiming her blessedness. Even the unborn John recognizes Jesus’ presence by kicking and turning. For Mary is carrying Emmanuel, God with us … God in a real person … God who keeps His promises … God who will give us strength to go on seeing and being seen as through super spy glasses.

Today, let’s pause from the busyness of our Christmas preparations. Let’s pause to put on our own super spy glasses, to recognize the presence of God in each other. And, like Elizabeth, let’s tell each other what we see. Let’s pause to welcome the newborn Christ a little more fully and know His promises to be true.

Thank you God for sending your Son to be born among us, so that we might see and know your presence in this world. On this holy night, may we begin to see Christ in each other and to reflect your love to those around us. Bless us that we might be a blessing. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Rev. Lesley Hand (Anglican)  
_On Eagle’s Wings_ Executive Director  
Spruce Grove, Alberta
You Can Help!

When we work together, we make a difference in the lives of many (including each other!). Please join together with us. Be part of our family.

**PRAY**

…always with a thank you for the continued presence of God in the *On Eagle’s Wings* ministry.
…for volunteers and staff who serve faithfully.
…for our pilots and safe travel.
…for continued financial support to meet the ongoing needs of northern ministry.

**SHARE**

…a special Advent offering to sustain ministry.
…a gift to honour and/or remember a family member or friend with a offering in the individual’s name.
…in faithful support to *On Eagle’s Wings* by signing up for automatic withdrawals from a bank account or charges to your credit card.
…airline miles/points for staff and volunteer travel.
…an estate gift by including *On Eagle’s Wings* in your will or making us one of the beneficiaries in a life insurance policy or retirement account.

**BE INVOLVED**

…“face to face” as a volunteer. Call *On Eagle’s Wings* to offer your gifts.
…by reaching out beyond your comfort zone – volunteer for a northern Bible Camp.
…by being a friend on the *On Eagle’s Wings* Facebook and Twitter.

**INCLUDE OTHERS**

...by advising your church leaders that *On Eagle’s Wings* has great curriculum for VBS, Sunday School, and after-school programs.
...by receiving *On Eagle’s Wings* information and mailings.
...by inviting us to visit your church or group.
...by sharing the *2016 Advent Reflections* with friends, family and church groups.
A Symbol of Ministry

The inspiring logo was designed and painted as a gift to *On Eagle’s Wings* from First Nations artist, Archie Beaulieu. It is Archie’s response to the powerful words of Isaiah, “Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles.” It also reflects the land, animals and people of the North.

The eagle is highly respected by all cultures and by people everywhere as a symbol of strength and vision. For many aboriginal people the eagle is a messenger of the Creator. Within the eagle Archie has included other animals of his land and culture. A northern family stands at the foot of the cross, the symbol of new life for all God’s people.

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35
Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles.
Isaiah 40:31

MISSION STATEMENT

On Eagle’s Wings is an ecumenical Christian ministry that proclaims Jesus Christ and serves the Church and individuals in remote and isolated areas of northern Canada.

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Printed in USA