INNERGLOW

First Reformed Church
Boyden, IA

LaVonne Sietstra & Teresa Harms, Editors



December 2026



Greetings from your favorite church secretary! My article for December is called "The Christmas I Didn't See Coming." It was written by Aura Guerra-Artola. Aura works with the CRC, Thrive and Faith Alive. I hope you enjoy it! I pray you have a very merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!!

The Christmas I Didn't See Coming

"I'm the kind of person who listens to Christmas music all month long, so much so that by the end of December, I'm usually ready to give it a rest until next year. I return to the same familiar playlist, the one that brings comfort and invites me to sing along without thinking too much. Yet it's interesting how these heartfelt songs can take on new weight and reveal fresh meaning as life unfolds. This year, as the music shuffled in the background, one song landed differently: 'Mary, Did You Know?' We all know the question, *'Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water?'*

As I listened, I found myself picturing the manger scene and imagining that young girl who had been given a promise: 'For no word from God will ever fail' (Luke 1:37). She held that precious baby in her arms without knowing what the future would demand of her when she responded, 'May Your word to me be fulfilled.' She was holding the promise itself, the Word made flesh, yet unaware that she would shortly flee to Egypt to save her son's life.

How many times must Mary have not known what to expect? How often did she discover that a promise does not guarantee an easy or sheltered life, but instead calls for deep trust? I imagine her years later, standing at the foot of the cross, as Simeon's words became painfully clear: 'And a sword will pierce your own soul too' (Luke 2:35). Perhaps only then did she grasp how deeply those words would cut. As the song suggests, she may not have known that the baby in the manger would walk upon the waters, give sight to the blind, and that the very death that pierced her heart would become the source of her own salvation.

I am not that far from that reality myself. As Christmas approaches, I face uncertainties that feel small but familiar. I wonder whether I should make beef roast or pork, whether I should invite others for a Christmas Coffee Break study and face the fear of rejection, or simply gather with my family. And yet, as the song continues to ask, 'Mary, did you know?' I find myself reflecting more deeply on what this year has left behind.

This is the Christmas I didn't see coming. Aura, did you know this would be the year you faced some of your deepest fears? Did you know that last Christmas would be your last with your mother, and that her place would be empty this year? Did you know that amid loss and uncertainty, God would reveal himself to you not only as Savior, but as Father? Did you know that He had a path for every redirection and a door for what once seemed impossible?

I did not know. Like Mary, in every circumstance I found myself asking, 'How can this be?' Yet the promise of Emmanuel, God with us, remains. He was always present, and He is still present. Christmas reminds me of that young woman holding her baby, surrounded by questions, suddenly quieted by a child's first cry, as if to say, 'I am here.' A loud promise of salvation wrapped in innocence. And somehow, that is enough.

As so I ask you now, reader, did you know?"

Mary Did You Know

Praise & Thanks for…

***those who planned and participated in the Thanksgiving Eve meal and service**

***those celebrating milestone birthdays & anniversaries – Steve & Ranae K's 50th wedding anniversary! – May each of you enjoy God's richest blessings in the year ahead!**

***all those who helped decorate church festively for the holidays**

***God's Word that is filled with promises and expressions of love**

***prayers both answered and not yet answered**

***the love and beauty of Christmas**

***the church custodians & church secretary as they do their work each week**

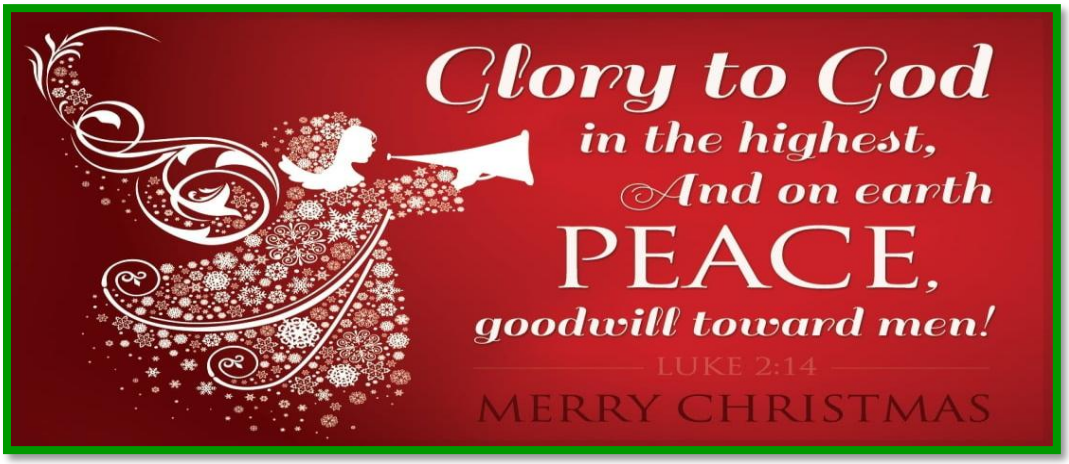
***ushers, nursery workers, video & audio operators, kitchen helpers and everyone who helps each Sunday**

***Kathy & Leila as they use their musical talents each week to bless our services**

***the out-going Elders & Deacons who have given their time & service to our church – Rod Bolkema, Roger Nelson & David Mouw**

***Jesus was God's gift to the world, but it wasn't just for Christmas! He is a gift that has been given every day of every year since that time and the gift is still freely given!**

***Kaitlyn Rosenboom and the volunteers for Boyden Awana & Youth Group!**



Pray for…

***those in our church family facing health issues and concerns: those who are battling cancer – Jerald Keizer, brother of Carla Starkenburg; Mary Schafer, mother of Adam Schafer; Don Ver Meer, brother of Kathy Ver Meer; Max Moret's grandson Tyler Schouten and his long battle with epilepsy.**

***military families separated during the holidays**

***safe travels for the holiday season**

***someone to turn to Jesus for the first time today!**

***our church to be a house of prayer, love & warmth to all**

***our focus to be on Christ during our holiday celebrations and parties**

***all of us to live more like Jesus everyday!**

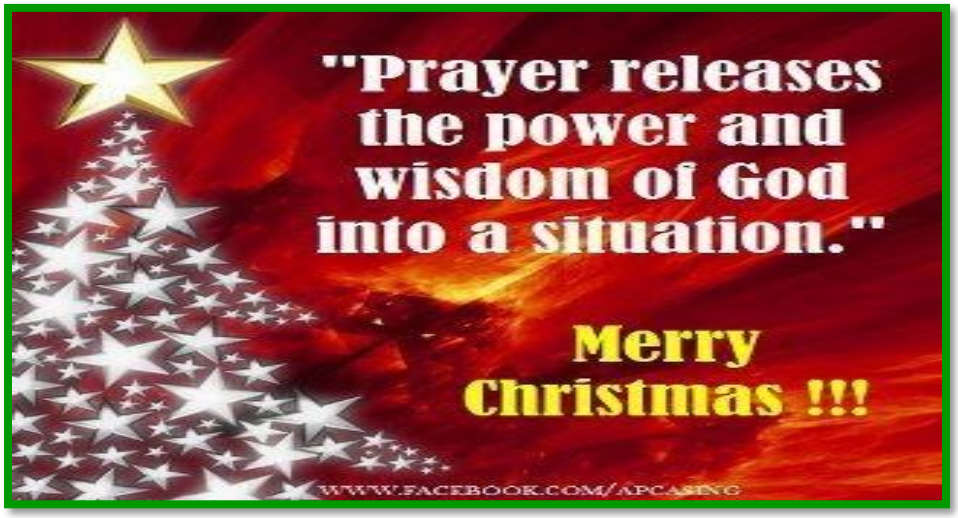
***us to remember others in our church & community that we may minister to through a gift, a prayer, a phone call or personal visit during the Holidays**

***the future & vision for Boyden First Reformed Church**

***people around the world who are living in fear, poverty, war, sickness or oppression – may God be with them and bless them!**

***Advent to be a time of preparing our hearts to receive Jesus**

***those individuals who will be joining the Consistory this coming year**



SUNSHINE FOR THE MONTH:



WHO GETS WHAT?

The gift tags have fallen off all the Christmas presents. Help us sort them by matching each gift to its proper recipient:

___ 1. the Grinch
___ 2. Bing Crosby
___ 3. Della
___ 4. George Bailey
___ 5. the World
___ 6. Kevin McCallister
___ 7. baby Jesus
___ 8. Bob Cratchit
___ 9. Rudolph
___ 10. Buddy the Elf
___ 11. Gladys Herdman
___ 12. Susan Walker
___ 13. Ebenezer Scrooge
___ 14. Charlie Brown
___ 15. Ralphie Parker
___ 16. Jeanette Isabella
___ 17. Alvin & the Chipmunks
___ 18. George Washington
___ 19. Mr. James Dillingham Young
___ 20. Frosty the Snowman

A. a dream house
B. a family reunion
C. gold, frankinscense & myrrh
D. a magician's top hat
E. a torch and a cradle
F. the lead position on Santa's team
G. a non-commercialized celebration
H. a role as the Christmas angel
I. a watch chain
J. maple syrup & Christmas cheer
K. four life-changing spectral visits
L. a successful river crossing
M. $8K cash & a new lease on life
N. a loopity-loop plane & a hula hoop
O. Red Rider air rifle
P. a day off from work
Q. a bigger heart
R. hair combs
S. snow
T. joy



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HYMN OF THE MONTH:

"O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL"

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel." Matthew 1:23 (NKJV)

The origins of this plaintive carol date to medieval times. In the 800s, a series of Latin hymns were sung each day during Christmas Vespers from December 17 to 23. Each of these hymns began with the word "O", and were called the "Great" or "O" Antiphons (the word *antiphon* meaning psalm or anthem). These hymns were apparently restructured into verse form in the 1100s, and finally published in Latin in 1710. In the mid-1800s, they were discovered by an English minister named John Mason Neale, who wove together segments of them to produce the first draft of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," which was published in 1851. Neale's original version said, "Draw nigh, draw nigh, Emmanuel."

Neale is a man worth knowing. He was born in London on January 24, 1818, the son of an evangelical Anglican clergyman. He attended Cambridge University and proved to be a brilliant student and prize-winning poet. While there, Neale was influenced by the Oxford Movement and became attracted to Roman Catholicism. In 1841, he was ordained into the Anglican ministry; but his poor health and Catholic leanings prevented him from gaining a parish ministry.

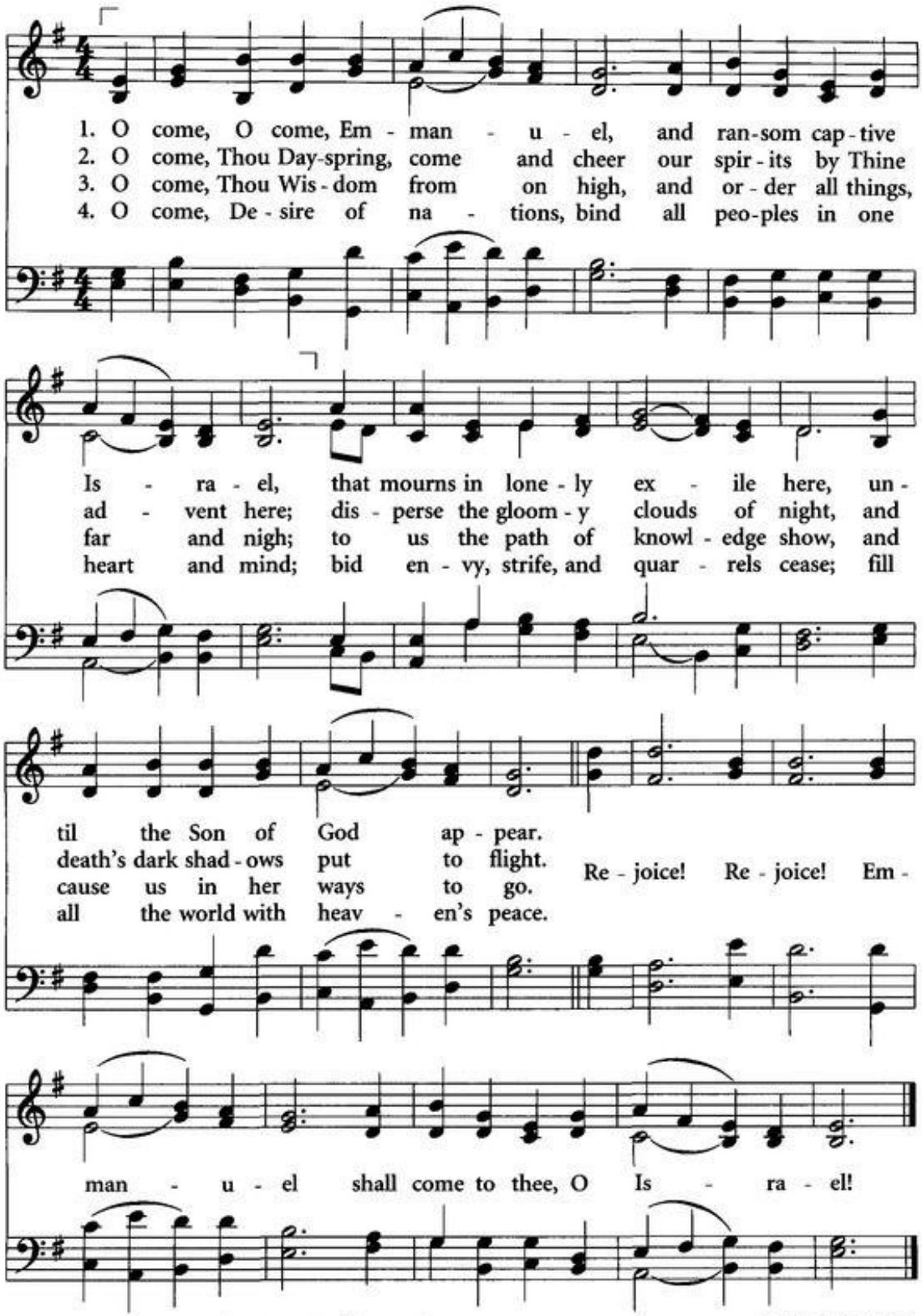
He was appointed instead as the director of Sackville College, a home for old men. (Sackville College, started by Robert Sackville, Earl of Dorset, in the early 1600s as a home for the elderly, is still going strong today in East Grinstead, Sussex.) This was the perfect job for Neale, for he was a compassionate man with a great heart for the needy, but he was also a scholar needing time for research and writing.

As a high church traditionalist, Neale disliked the hymns of Isaac Watts and longed to return Christianity to the liturgical dignity of church history. He was an outspoken advocate of returning church buildings to their former glory. He campaigned, for example, against certain types of stoves that spoiled the tastefulness and charm of English churches. He also worked hard to translate ancient Greek and Latin hymns into English.

In today's hymnals, we find Neale and Watts side-by-side, the old differences having been forgotten. We owe a debt of gratitude to John Mason Neale every time we sing one of his Christmas carols: "Good King Wenceslas," "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," "Good Christian Men, Rejoice," and his Palm Sunday hymn, "All Glory, Laud, and Honor."



O Come, O Come, Emmanuel 79



WORDS: Latin hymn; tr. John Mason Neale (sts. 1, 2), 1851;
Henry Sloane Coffin (sts. 3, 4), 1916
MUSIC: Plainsong; adapt. Thomas Helmore, 1854

VENI EMMANUEL
LM with refrain

In Years Gone By …

50 YEARS AGO – December 1976

The Junior Choir and the Freshman class both had skating parties.

A 90th birthday open house was held for Gerrit Uittenbogaard.

Sympathy wishes were extended to the family and friends of Sam Heemskerk.

End of year Sunday School numbers – Highest attendance number was 177 – lowest attendance number was 132 – the top 3 highest perfect attendance achievers were Scott Sneller with 36 years, Wanda Slykhuis with 11 years and Sheryl Vander Schaaf with 10 years.

25 YEARS AGO – December 2001

Public professions of faith were made by Randy Brands, Jeremy Rensink and Dustin De Wild.

Shannon Rensink's membership was transferred to Boyden FRC and her and Jeremy's son Cole Allen was baptized.

Anna Gabrielle Godtland, infant daughter of Kim & Randy, was baptized.

10 YEARS AGO – December 2016

Sympathy wishes were extended to the family and friends of Rev. John Boender.

Congratulations were extended to Dustin De Wild and Amanda De Wild for the birth of their daughter Raylen Nicole.

5 YEARS AGO – December 2021

Sympathy wishes were extended to Jim & Elaine Ver Meer for the passing of Jim's brother Ken Ver Meer.

A "Sweatpants and Leggings" tree was put up for donations for Boyden-Hull Elementary.



Hopes *and* Fears

Sacred Christmas carols are a cherished tradition. But during sorrow and struggle, some lyrics may seem hard to swallow. "O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant"? Where is the joy when my loved one has just died? Where is the triumph if I've lost my job? "Silent night, holy night, all is calm ... "? Not in my house; I'm exhausted from the fighting.

Yet ... listen:

> *And you beneath life's crushing load,*
> *Whose forms are bending low ...*
> *Oh, rest beside the weary road*
> *And hear the angels sing.*
> --"It Came Upon the Midnight Clear"

Truly, God reaches out to the happy and hurting alike. "The hopes and fears of all the years are met" – and gathered up – in the Babe of Bethlehem, who shares our joys and troubles. There are Christmas carols for us all.



HAPPINESS IS …



Wasn't it Smart of God to ...

... put iron, copper, and other ores in the ground and give us the ingenuity to dig them up, process them, and make tools.
... give us a sense of taste so chocolate isn't a wasted resource.
... make a single strand of DNA into an information storage unit that is a thousand times thinner than a strand of hair yet capable of holding enough information to fill a stack of books that would stretch from the earth to the moon five hundred times.
... design us so that even if we are twins our fingerprints are different, assuring us that we are unique individuals.





Nativity Word Scramble

1. STBALE _____
2. HEEPS _____
3. NLGEA _____
4. TSAR _____
5. GAMREN _____
6. JHPOES _____
7. OENYDK _____
8. EUSSJ _____
9. SKNGI _____
10. YMAR _____

