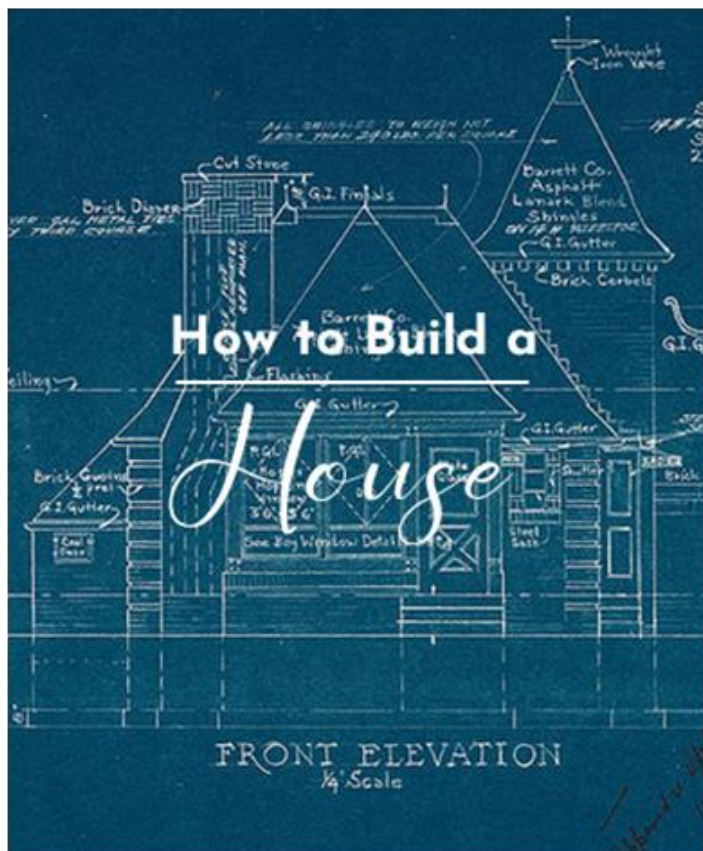


# ADVENT

2023



**Gretna United Methodist Church**  
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Rev. Jo Cooper, Pastor



# ADVENT 2023

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**Sunday, December 3**

10 am

Holy Communion

**Friday, December 8**

6 pm

Movie Night at the Church

**Sunday, December 10**

10 am

The Children's Pageant,  
"A Savior Is Born"

**Sunday, December 17**

The Chancel Choir Christmas Musical,  
"A Christmas Carol Gallery"

**Thursday, December 21**

6 pm

Blue Christmas Service

**Sunday, December 24**

**Christmas Eve**

10 am

Lessons and Carols

*Children are invited to wear pajamas!*

5 pm

Candlelight Communion Service

**December 25-26**

**CHRISTMAS**

*church office closed*



HOW TO BUILD A  
*House*

**I**

**December 3**

Holy Communion  
Isaiah 64:1-9  
“Designing the  
Floorplan”

**II**

**December 10**

Isaiah 40:1-11 with Mark 1:1-8  
“Setting the Foundation”  
The Children’s Pageant,  
“A Savior Is Born”

**III**

**December 17**

The Chancel Choir  
Christmas Musical,  
“A Christmas Carol Gallery”  
by Larry Shackley

**IV**

**December 24**

Luke 1:26-38  
“Let the Building Begin!”  
*Kids are invited  
to wear pajamas!*

**Thursday, December 21**

6 pm

Blue Christmas Service

**CHRISTMAS EVE**

5 pm

Luke 2:1-7

A Candlelight Communion Service

“Room to Grow”

**NEW YEAR’S EVE**

Luke 2:22-40

“Crossing the Threshold”

2023 Advent Study

# FAITHFUL

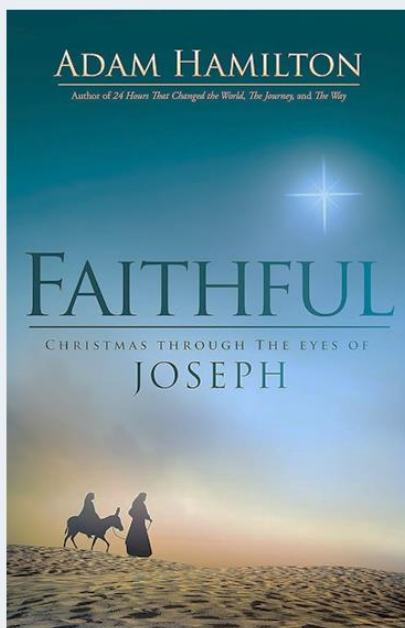
*Christmas Through the Eyes of Joseph*

*led by*

**Rev. Nancy Day**

**Tuesdays at 6 pm**

**November 28-December 19**



## HOW TO BUILD A HOUSE

This Advent Study has been designed specifically for Gretna United Methodist Church, using the Revised Common Lectionary as our Scriptural Guide. My reasoning for naming it “How to Build a House” is because I believe that God is guiding us in building a life of hope and fulfillment. In any building project it is easy to become discouraged when the work is difficult, or we do not see results. I hope that we will each allow God to help us dust off our dreams as we design and work to build a life that will follow Jesus into a deeper meaning and a clearer purpose.

Each week we will begin with a verse of the hymn “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less.” We will end each week with a prayer from the Iona Community in Scotland. Both remind us that Jesus’s earthly father was a carpenter and that Jesus was also a carpenter. Through faith we claim Jesus as God in the Flesh, the Messiah, the Savior of the World.

This faith is our greatest tool. As the season continues, we will also discover other tools to help us strengthen our faith and our courage to live out our faith—a faith that builds a space that invites everyone into a house not made with hands but with the love of Jesus.

Advent Blessings,  
Pastor Jo



1st Week of Advent

## DESIGNING THE FLOOR PLAN

Isaiah 64:1–9 NRSV

*My hope is built on nothing less  
than Jesus' blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.*

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These four lines make up the first verse of the well-loved hymn, “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less.” It certainly doesn’t fit the Christmas Season, but it does invite us to ponder this Advent Season in a new way. Advent is a season that reminds us to prepare for Christ’s return. It is also filled with the “spirit of Christmas” as we prepare to celebrate his birth. Both Christ’s birth and his return remind us that waiting and preparing are a part of our Christian journey. As we compare our preparation with the building of a house, we must decide on the floor plan. This invites us to consider what is truly important to us.

### **A Reading from Isaiah 64:1–9**

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down; the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our

iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

### **Time to Ponder:**

What seems to be important to this person?

How is this similar or different from what is important to you during this Advent Season?

### **Digging Deeper:**

In choosing a house plan, one source offers these questions to consider:

- What have you always wanted in a home?
- What do you want your home to look and feel like?
- What are your must-haves?
- What price are you willing to pay?
- How big does your home need to be?

As we consider what that might look like for our faith journey, we might ask ourselves:

1. What kind of faith have I always wanted?
2. How do I want to live out my faith?
3. What are the spiritual disciplines that are most important to me?
4. What am I willing to do so that I my relationship with Jesus Christ is authentic?
5. Does my daily schedule offer room for God to dwell?

### **Our Advent Prayer:**

Christ, the Master Carpenter,  
who at the last through wood and nails,  
purchased our salvation,





2nd Week of Advent

## SETTING THE FOUNDATION

Isaiah 40:1–11 with Mark 1:1–8 NRSV

When darkness veils his lovely face,  
I rest on his unchanging grace.  
In every high and stormy gale,  
my anchor holds within the veil.

---

Last week we compared preparing for Christ's return with building a house. We also found the invitation to be intentional about our hopes for our own faith journey by taking the time to consider what our souls long for. This week we will consider what we need to establish a strong foundation. The second verse of "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less" reminds us that we all have seasons of despair. It also reminds us that even during the storms of life God's love is always with us.

### **A Reading from Isaiah 40:1–11 NRSV**

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass; their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers,

the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

**Time to Ponder:**

Notice the visuals of preparing and leveling.

How might preparing "in the wilderness" connect with the second verse of our hymn?

What needs to be cleared from your life so that your spiritual foundation is strong and level?

**Digging Deeper:**

Read Mark 1:1–8.

As Mark references the Isaiah reading, what is similar? What is different?

Why do you think Mark has God's messenger preparing your way followed by the instruction to prepare the way of the Lord?

**Our Advent Prayer:**

Christ, the Master Carpenter,  
who at the last through wood and nails,  
purchased our salvation,  
wield well your tools in the workshop of the world,  
so that we, who come rough-hewn to your bench,  
may here be fashioned to a truer beauty by your hand.  
We ask this for your name and for your sake.  
Amen.



3rd Week of Advent  
**LET THE BUILDING BEGIN!**

Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11 NRSV

*His oath, his covenant, his blood,  
support me in the whelming flood.  
When all around my soul gives way,  
he then is all my hope and stay.*

---

As we continue our preparation for Christ's return, the third verse of our hymn reminds that Jesus is here to help us "steady" our hope and to ensure that he is with us every step of the way.

**A reading from Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11**

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed

me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

### **Time to Ponder:**

Underline or highlight the eight things the writer of Isaiah has been anointed to do.

Notice who will build up, raise up, and repair. The very people he has been called to help!

Review your notes from the previous weeks. How might God be preparing and anointing you to help others build a life of hope?

### **Digging Deeper:**

Read Luke 1:46b–55, also known as Mary’s Magnificat.

Notice that this song of praise is offered before Jesus is born, before the promises have been fulfilled.

How might the call of Isaiah and the praise of Mary be tools to help you build upon the promises of God?

### **Our Advent Prayer:**

Christ, the Master Carpenter,  
who at the last through wood and nails,  
purchased our salvation,  
wield well your tools in the workshop of the world,  
so that we, who come rough-hewn to your bench,  
may here be fashioned to a truer beauty by your hand.  
We ask this for your name and for your sake.  
Amen.



4th Week of Advent

## **ROOM TO GROW**

Luke 1:26–38 NRSV

When he shall come with trumpet sound,  
O may I then in him be found!  
Dressed in his righteousness alone,  
faultless to stand before the throne!

---

Just as the Advent Season helps usher in a new Christian year, we are reminded that until Christ’s return we are invited to help in the building of God’s Kingdom. The chorus to our hymn proclaims:

*On Christ the solid rock I stand;  
all other ground is sinking sand;  
all other ground is sinking sand.*

This chorus serves as a proclamation and a reminder that Christ will guide us in how we plan, how we clear, how we build—and how we live.

### **A Reading of Selected Verse from 2 Samuel 7**

Now when the king [David] was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you.” But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: “Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? . . . I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went. . . .

And I will appoint a place for my people. . . . Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. . . . Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.”

**Time to Ponder:**

What an amazing turn of events! Like King David, we may think that we are building for the Lord, only to realize that our works are a celebration of what God is building within us! God is truly our solid rock!

**Digging Deeper:**

Read Luke 1:26–35, 2:1–7

As Mary makes room in her life for God’s Promise, God’s Promise grows within her.

How would this story have been different if Mary had not asked questions, but instead, followed her doubts?

How might asking our questions and confessing our doubts help us make room for Jesus in our lives?

We also notice that the house where Mary and Joseph stayed did not have room for them. As you continue to prepare for Christ’s return, ask Jesus to help you always have room to receive love, mercy, and grace.

**Our Advent Prayer:**

Christ, the Master Carpenter,  
who at the last through wood and nails,  
purchased our salvation,  
wield well your tools in the workshop of the world,  
so that we, who come rough-hewn to your bench,  
may here be fashioned to a truer beauty by your hand.  
We ask this for your name and for your sake.  
Amen.





# Kids' Corner

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Prepare Him Room!



## Week One

Build the frame of a house or pyramid using toothpicks and marshmallows or gumdrops.

Email a picture of your creation to [umcgretna@gmail.com](mailto:umcgretna@gmail.com)

Name 3 things you like about the house you live in.

1. -----
2. -----
3. -----

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for your home.



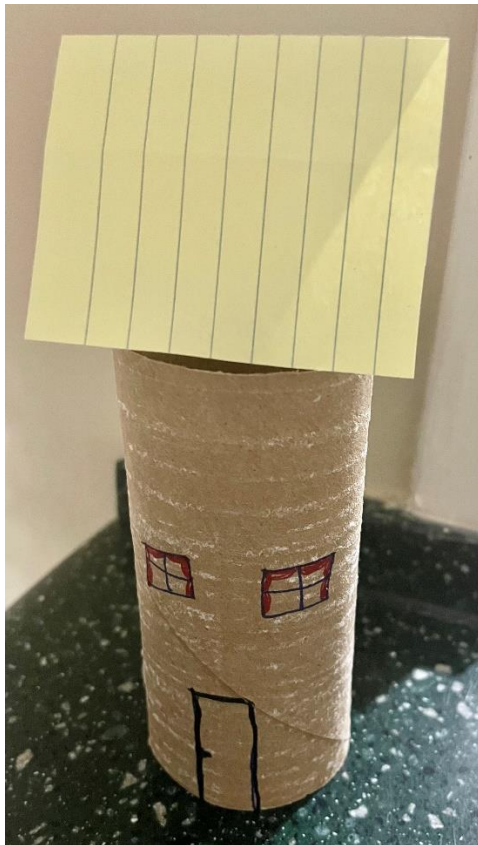
<https://www.simplydesigning.net>

## Week Two

Draw or paint windows and a door on an empty toilet paper roll, using a piece of paper for a roof (use a paper towel roll for a two-story house) You may want to color the roll or cover it with construction paper.

Email a picture of your house to [umcgretna@gmail.com](mailto:umcgretna@gmail.com)

Do you have toys or clothes on the floor of your room? As you are putting them away, offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the things that you have.



## Week Three

Using the house template enclosed in this booklet, color or paint the house, cut out the outline, fold along the dotted lines, and glue or tape it together.

Email a picture to [umcgretna@gmail.com](mailto:umcgretna@gmail.com). Give the finished project to a family member or friend as a gift.

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for your family and friends.

## Week Four

The Bible tells us that no one had room in their home for Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus. If you were able to build a house for baby Jesus, what color would you paint his room?

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Why did you choose that color?

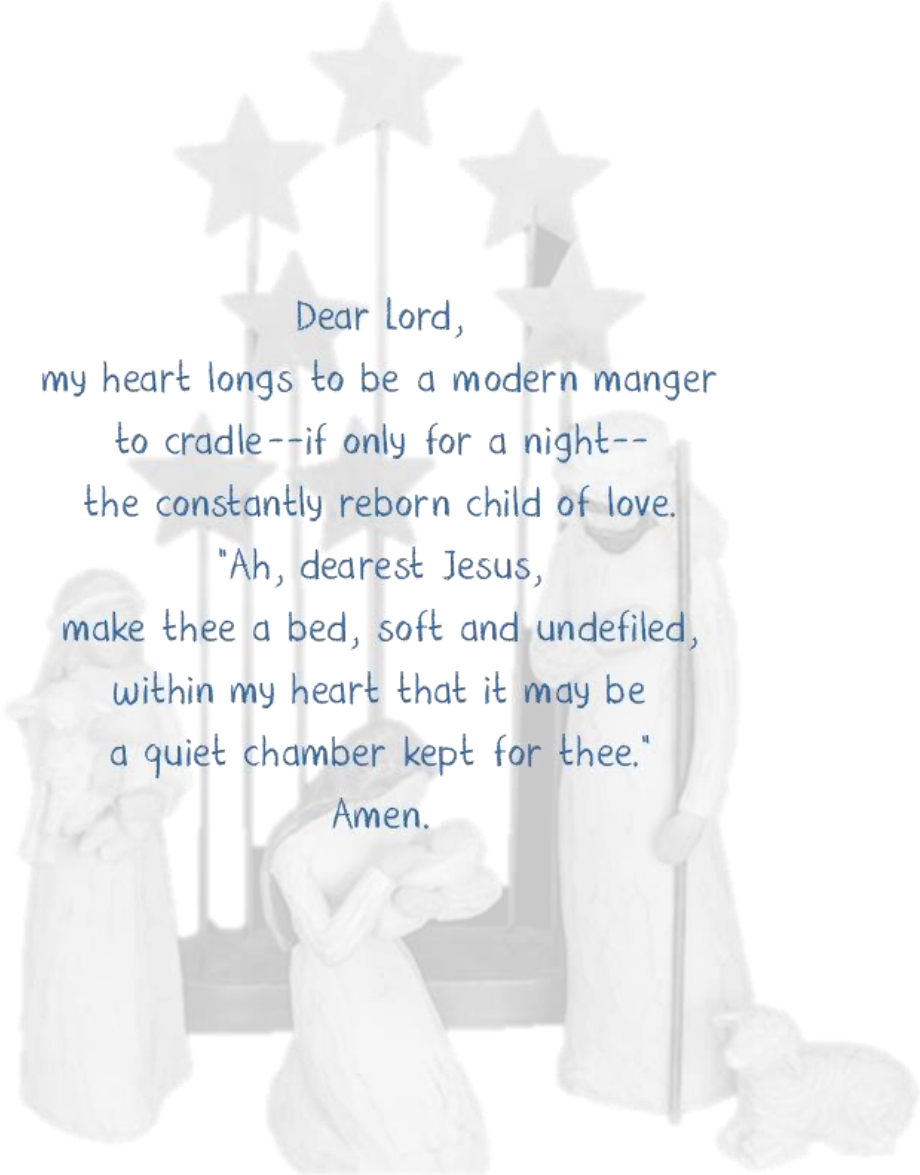
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Find 1 or 2 things in your house that are that color and play a quick game of "I Spy."

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Read Luke 2:1-7.

Offer a prayer giving thanks for Jesus!



Dear Lord,  
my heart longs to be a modern manger  
to cradle--if only for a night--  
the constantly reborn child of love.

"Ah, dearest Jesus,  
make thee a bed, soft and undefiled,  
within my heart that it may be  
a quiet chamber kept for thee."

Amen.