

# ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Volume 3 Issue 24

DECEMBER 24, 2023

## Miracles (One-to-One)



In this week's chapters from Letters to Santa, Lisa picks up the Christmas Globe at Kringle's Kitchen and shakes it as she says, "Please work." The snow globe was famous in Evergreen for people shaking it and making a wish as the snow settled on the couple in front of the tiny church inside the globe that looked a lot like the church in Evergreen. Lisa shares her wish with the others. "A new idea." Lisa hoped for a miracle that would result in finding a new owner for Daisy's Country Store.

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## Emerge (The beauty within)



This week's chapters from our companion book, *Letters to Santa*, ends with Polly's arrival on Christmas Eve. Polly loves the store, but she did not go to Evergreen to buy a store. Instead, she offers Lisa and Oliver jobs in Boston. Her offer further complicates the emerging relationship between Kevin and Lisa.

Will Kevin accept the job offer in Maine? Will Lisa return to Boston to work for Polly? Well, it is a Hallmark story!

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EVERYONE HAVE  
A WONDERFUL  
AND SAFE  
HOLIDAY!!



**DONATE**

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## Miracles (One-to-One)

*cont. from pg 1*

Time was running out and so were her hopes of saving the store. Meanwhile, Lisa's best friend and business partner, Oliver, is on his way to Evergreen, by train, to help. Is Oliver the miracle Lisa wished for?

Every year the town holds an annual Christmas event that featured the handiwork of residents. That's it! Lisa and Oliver stage the store using these items. One of their customers, Polly, agreed to visit Evergreen on Christmas Eve to determine if the store will fit her plans to expand.

The miracle Lisa wished for from the Christmas Globe was coming together.

Do you believe in miracles? A study conducted by Pew Research a decade ago found that over eighty percent of us believe in miracles. A more recent study, however, suggested that large numbers of former believers left church because they no longer believe in God. Does their unbelief disqualify them from experiencing miracles?

If you count yourself among those of us who believe miracles happen, what constitutes a miracle for you? The criteria that we use to determine whether something that happens is a miracle varies. But most of us agree real miracles involve God, whether whatever happened could have been a coincidence or would have happened, regardless.

I claim numerous one-to-one encounters with God. I wonder if these happened because I'm rather high-maintenance? As a child I imagined God near me most of the time. This feeling went away as I reach my teen years, although, looking back, it had more to do with me than God.

My most memorable encounter took place in the hospital. I suspect a lot of miracles happen in hospitals and even more requests for miracles happen. The image of an angel mediated my encounter sitting next to my bed in the middle of the night.

I believe all miracles involve God's spirit as a mediator and a medium for miracles. And I'm

guessing that our minds bend and shape our encounters into digestible pieces. Otherwise, encountering God would simply be too overwhelming for us to cope.

God has anointed me to bring good news to the suffering and afflicted... to tell those who mourn that the time of God's favor to them has come ...

Isaiah 61: 1-4

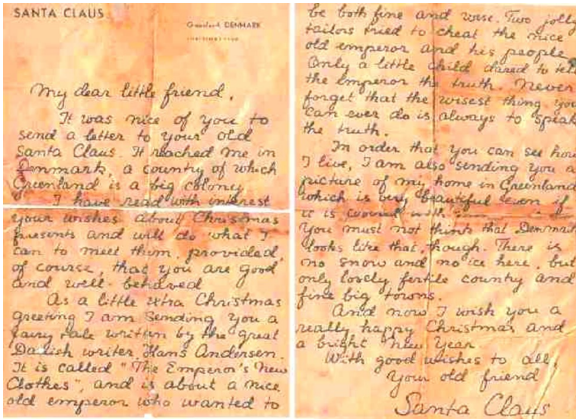
The Prophet Isaiah believed he encountered God one-to-one. Afterwards, Isaiah exclaims, "God anointed me to bring good news to the suffering and afflicted, and sent me to comfort the brokenhearted, to announce liberty to captives, and to open the eyes of the blind."

There is nothing particularly miraculous about the commission God gives to Isaiah. Except that it is God and Isaiah. A one-to-one connection between humanity and our Creator. Is this miraculous or does it just feel that way when we realize that we have encountered God one-to-one?



## Upcoming Worship Series "Letters"

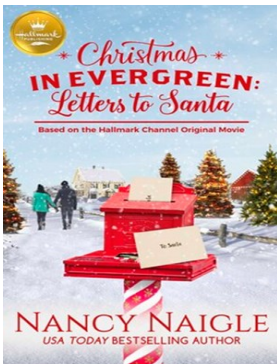
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One of my favorite activities to do the week of Thanksgiving is to watch movies with a Christmas theme. Hallmark produces most of the movies I choose. There are more choices than time to watch them all, but the commonality between them reminds me of the similarities of messages found among greeting cards. A man or woman is in a place where they would not ordinarily be. Some obstacle or challenge presents itself. They meet someone, and somehow pieces fall into place and they live happily ever after.

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## Book Club News



Our companion book for our new worship series is Nancy Naigle's book,

*Christmas in Evergreen: Letter to Santa*. Also a Hallmark movie, her book tells the story of how Lisa Palmer finally receives a gift asked for at age seven in a letter to Santa.

The author's website describes her book this way:

When Lisa takes a last-minute Christmas trip to her hometown of Evergreen, she finds that the historic general store has been closed. Using her skills as a professional retail designer, Lisa decides to keep local tradition alive and help the good people of Evergreen bring the store back to life.

Lisa charms a local contractor named Kevin into working with her, and the pair find themselves facing one surprise after another as they restore the store to its former glory. When the staff at the Kringle Kitchen temporarily accept the store's beloved 'Mailbox to Santa' for safekeeping, the townspeople find and rally around a mysterious 25-year-old letter that never made it to the North Pole.

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South Flint Soup Kitchen

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Tony & Mirium	Welcome Team
Cyndi	Worship Leader
Anthony & Jim	Ushers
Jonathon & Terrance	Production Team
Yasheah & Mirium	Nursery
Christine & Norma	Cafe

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## Upcoming Worship Series — “Letters” ..cont from pg 4

I have often thought of creating a worship series based on one or more Hallmark movies. After all, many of their themes remind me of the ups and downs of many stories found in scripture.

Christmas is a time of anticipation. Most of us have preferences for how the season should play out based on imperfect memories of past holidays. And although we can picture the expected outcome, life happens in ways we had not anticipated.

Welcome to our series *Letters*. If you prefer books to movies, I encourage you to read along with me as our imagination wanders from the pages of Nancy Naigle’s book to ancient times, when persons and communities also faced life-altering decisions.

Weeping we sat beside  
the rivers of Babylon  
thinking of Jerusalem.

Psalm 137:1

Of course, the movie, *Christmas in Evergreen: Letters to Santa*, is available from the Hallmark Channel if this is your media of choice.

As I searched through Hallmark’s library, reading dozens of summaries, Babylon kept popping up in my subconscious. In scripture, Babylon is a city, a region, and an empire. Most of all, Babylon is a place of exile.

Abram and Sarai, better known as Abraham and Sarah, were originally from Babylonia. It was in Babylon that the community attempted to build a tower tall enough to reach heaven. The people of Judea were exiled in Babylon.

As with most movies, biblical stories are about specific people. While, at the same time, the stories reveal things about ourselves. We’re not only invited to take on roles as we experience the story, we are the story.

As the daughter of military parents, Lisa Palmer lived an unsettled life. And as an adult, she wanted to return to Evergreen, the town where she was born, to spend Christmas. Lisa’s family left Evergreen when she was seven. Before her family left, Lisa put a letter to Santa in the box at Daisy’s General Store asking that she could spend every Christmas in Evergreen. Daisy, the store owner, suggests she make a slight, but subtle change to her letter that every year be “like” Christmas in Evergreen.



“Feed Flint”



## “Feed Flint”

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A meal goes a long way for a senior living alone, a family struggling to make ends meet, or a child fearful of empty shelves at home. But for the residents of Flint who carry the effects of lead-tainted water, nutrition is critical. Feed Flint provides locally grown, chemical-free, fresh produce to residents living in and around Flint. And we're hoping that you can help us provide 10,000 meals this summer.

Feed Flint includes takeout meals, produce boxes with recipes, and home deliveries as part of our work to guide and support families in moving to sustainable abundance. The reality is that Michigan's food insecurity levels got worse during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this summer's recovery is leaving behind those at the most risk of having to miss meals.

### **Flint families continue to struggle with the ongoing effects of the water crisis.**

We're bringing together the resources of the Asbury Community Development Corporation. This includes Asbury Farms, the South Flint Soup Kitchen, the Asbury Community Help Center, multiple food pantries, and our Sizzling Culture Mobile Food Trailer. Our plan is to care for our neighbors when they need it most. We accept all people as they are, and our doors are always open to anyone.

Asbury Farms provides locally grown produce used to create fabulous and nutritious meals. Our seed-to-table approach is community-based. This not only helps families make it through emergencies and crises. We help move families towards sustainable abundance.

Our Sizzling Culture program provides jobs and new skills to our city's youth. This includes year-round employment. Our staff and most of our volunteers come from the neighborhoods we support. We call this sustainable abundance because families move from need-based on scarcity to enough based on community-generated abundance.

Our work is also about food and justice. Our vision is a revitalized community where every resident can use their talents and passions for the common good, where children grow into active citizens. And all residents can enjoy safety, good health, and a culture that fosters life-long learning and satisfying lives. This summer, help us address food insecurity and strengthen Flint's budding local food system by supporting the Feed Flint campaign. Thank you for taking the time to see what we're doing and considering how you can help.

Donate to our Feed Flint Campaign by visiting:  
[flintasbury.org/feed-flint-donate](https://flintasbury.org/feed-flint-donate)



LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS & MORE:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Isaiah 9:2-7

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

Four horizontal lines for taking notes.



QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS:

- 1. Read Isaiah 9:2-7. What images come to mind as you read this text? Do you sometimes feel like you're walking in darkness? Describe your feelings. What brings light for you? In what ways does this prophecy remind you of the Christmas Holidays?
2. Read this week's articles titled 'Emerge'? In what ways are you emerging? What are the signs that cause you feel as though you're emerging? Describe how it feels to emerge. If you're not emerging what obstacles are holding you back? Where do you see opportunities for you to emerge? What is stopping you from taking the next step?
3. How can the members of your group help you this week and on-going to help you to be more receptive to hearing and understanding the Word of God? Pray for each other to have the Holy Spirit bless you with more courage.







South Flint Soup Kitchen ...

BOTTLED WATER DRIVE

All Year Long!

Our clients need bottled water for cooking,  
going with sack lunches, to bathe and brush  
their teeth with, and MORE!

Donations are accepted Monday-Friday

11:00am-12 Noon at South Flint Soup Kitchen,

3410 Fenton Rd (3 blocks north of Atherton Rd)

Flint MI 48507

Any questions, please call 239-3427 or 235-0016 or

Email us at [southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com](mailto:southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com)

To donate: [www.mightycause.com/feedflint](http://www.mightycause.com/feedflint)



# Show Your Support For Your Local Farm

We need your help to purchase fencing to keep our furry friends from eating up all our crops and not sharing with us.

## How You Can Donate

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- Text "FARMCDC"
- to 53-555
- Scan QR Code

**Donate Now**



More Information :



(810) 235-0016



funding@flintasbury.org

As old traditions are made new again, Lisa finds herself falling for Kevin, the traditions, and the town of Evergreen.

We have a limited number of copies of Nancy Naigle's book. It is no longer in print but there are used copies available along with the local library. The movie is available via the Hallmark Channel, Amazon, and other media outlets. The scenes from the movie parallel the chapters in the book.

Here is the schedule of chapters for our Advent Series:

Dec 3	Chapters 1 - 5
Dec 10	Chapters 6 - 10
Dec 17	Chapters 11 - 15
Dec 24	Chapters 16 - 19
Dec 31	Chapters 20 - 23 + Epilogue

Our Book Club does not meet as a group. However, our weekly messages reference that weeks chapters. You can anticipate spoiler alerts unless you keep up with the pace. I've purchased ten books but when they're gone you can still purchase your own copy or visit your local library.

You can contact our office with questions, by phone or simply type your question or enter a prayer request on our website's homepage — [FlintAsburyChurch.org](http://FlintAsburyChurch.org).

Pastor Tommy



Cash or checks can be sent to/dropped off at South Flint Soup Kitchen, 3410 Fenton Road, Flint, MI 48507. Please make checks out to South Flint Soup Kitchen!

Online at [www.mightycause.com/feedflint](http://www.mightycause.com/feedflint)

Donations can be dropped off Monday-Friday 11am-12Noon. Calling ahead is not necessary, but our needs change frequently, so calling ahead of time is a good idea!

Give time! We need volunteers!!! Volunteers arrive at 9:30am and are done by 12:30pm. Tasks include handing out lunches, assisting in the Angel Closet, light cleaning, putting together items to pass out to clients, and more.

Refer people!!

Questions??? Call 810-239-3427  
or email [southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com](mailto:southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com)

The people of Judah’s exile in Babylon came because of turning to other gods and losing their connection with the One True God. While in exile, they longed for holidays like they had when God was an everyday presence in their lives.

Christmas is particularly situated as a time of longing for God’s presence. Anticipating what might be possible when God lives among people, beginning as a helpless baby born in a place that new parents would not choose.

May your holiday be like Christmas in Evergreen. May your Christmas be filled with the peace and joy that Christ alone brings to all believers.

I pray that you will join us each Sunday morning at 10:30 am. We share our weekly episodes on our [YouTube channel](#). We go live at 10:30 am. You can find these links along with more information about us, or join our live broadcast on our [website](#) at [FlintAsbury.org](#).

Pastor Tommy



NEW  
CHRISTMAS TRADITION!!

Beginning December 1st, read one chapter  
Of the Book of Luke in the Bible each evening.

There are 24 chapters.

On Christmas Eve you will have read an entire account  
Of Jesus's Life and wake up  
Christmas morning knowing WHO  
And WHY we celebrate!

Michele Weston, President  
United Women in Faith





Sixty chapters earlier, we read the account of Isaiah's first encounter with God. Scholars question whether it is the same person, so I will use his name generically. Perhaps this is appropriate any way since each of us is invited to have an Isaiah experience. A miraculous encounter with our Creator.

Isaiah's recollection of his encounter is spectacular. His description is poetic. Isaiah presumed he was doomed. Instead, Isaiah was given the gifts of prophetic insight and speech. But his gifts came with a commission to share insights with others that God is never absent nor inactive.

Christmas is a special time for miracles. Perhaps the Christmas spirit itself is the most persuasive miracle of all. After all, for Christians, Christmas is a celebration of God's most personal one-to-one encounter with humanity.

What miracle is greater than the birth of a baby? How much more so when we consider who this baby is?

May you experience miracles in your life every day. Most of all, may you notice the miracles taking place all around you.

You can join us each Sunday in person or online by clicking the button on our [website's](#) homepage - [Click here to watch](#). This button takes you to our [YouTube channel](#). You can find more information about us on our website at [FlintAsburyChurch.org](#).

A reminder that we publish this newsletter that we call the *Circuit Rider* each week. You can request this publication by email. Send a request to [connect@FlintAsbury.org](mailto:connect@FlintAsbury.org) or let us know when you send a message through our [website](#). We post an archive of past editions on our website under the tab, Connect - choose [Newsletters](#).

Pastor Tommy

Parts of our series was inspired by Nancy Naigle. *Christmas in Evergreen: Letters to Santa*. Hallmark Publishing..© Crown Media Family Networks, 2019.



Before Polly's arrival, Kevin surprised Lisa with a second Christmas tree in the center of the store. He does not try to fully decorate the tree, however, knowing that decorating is Lisa's specialty. Kevin was against the idea when Lisa first wanted a second tree. His focus was on the critical repairs that were not as visible but could stop them in their tracks if ignored. He criticized the idea arguing there wasn't time for a lot of extra decorating with so much to do.

Kevin learned something else about working with Lisa. The secret to a beautiful display is not balanced perfection. Instead, Lisa leaves something slightly askew that makes her design more interesting.

Also, Kevin realizes something about himself. He focuses on what's left instead of experiencing the beauty found in each moment. He notices how much Lisa enjoys her work and makes the most of each moment.

Perhaps we can all learn something from Lisa about beauty.

On the other side of the balance between beauty and askew is violence. And the intersection between beauty and violence is often too close for comfort.

We celebrate Christmas living in a violent world. The death toll in Gaza is staggering. And the violence perpetrated against Ukraine is heartbreaking. Also, the shooting at Prague University the week before Christmas causes flashbacks of violence in our own backyard. Not to mention flooding and the persistent threat of devastating weather.

These events mirror the violence found in scripture. God is aware and present at the intersection of beauty and violence.

Scripture is full of violence. Scripture is full of violence because there is violence in the world. And scripture is about the world. A world full of stories of violence and darkness.

The story of our faith began when God first revealed God's self to Abraham. This introduction set off a history of emergence for Abraham, for his family, and for the world.

But Abraham's peace wouldn't last for long. Instead, a time comes when brothers turn against brother and the youngest is taken away, only to emerge later as a powerful leader who saves his family.

Generations later, the descendants of Abraham become slaves in Egypt. But God calls a leader to emerge out of the violence and lead his people through the wilderness to a promised land. A land of beauty. The rhythm between beauty and violence continues.

The people who  
walked in darkness  
have seen a great  
light.

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people of the covenant take part in violence and are victims of violence. And from time to time, darkness settles over the land and people. But beauty always emerges, God, speaking through the Prophet, Isaiah, says, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."



God's prophecy is a promise that God's light calls forth beauty once again and the people emerge from the darkness so we see their beauty. This prophecy was relevant when it was first spoken, but also points to a more powerful event when God spoke and beauty emerged from the aftermath of violence.

A young woman, her story foreshadowed by this prophecy and others, is visited by a messenger from God. She is puzzled by the sudden attention. Shaken by the interaction and perhaps doubtful that the angel's message could be true. Mary is left with a statement of divine insight. "There is nothing that God cannot do." How easily we forget!

The Son that Mary carried within her body was none other than God living among us. He knew that we creatures forget that violence never has the last say. That just as the violent beginning of the universe gave way to planet earth where God placed creatures who carry God's image, the light will overcome the darkness.

At the time of His birth, we read that there were shepherds tending to flocks of sheep in a field outside of Bethlehem, where Jesus was born. Common day-workers perhaps. Living with the animals they were hired to watch over and to protect.

But God's message is for all people. No creature is left out. No person is excluded. It does not matter what job we do, where we sleep, or who we sleep with, God's love is pervasive. God's light overcomes the darkness.

We read that God's messengers also came to these unnamed and unlikely persons. I can only imagine what it may have been like. Was the area lit up like a stadium, or was it just the glow from the messenger's demeanor?

Luke tells us, "The glory of the Lord shone over them, and they were terribly afraid. But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people." ALL PEOPLE!

On Monday, we celebrate Christmas. The evening before, we remember. We remember a time when God was so near that a young mother kissed his face. An expectant father held God in his arms. Beauty emerged out of the violence of systemic oppression, terror, danger, and ironic inconvenience. Beauty that shined so brightly others could not miss the opportunity to see for themselves.

My prayer for all of us is that we will emerge from whatever keeps us from sharing our beauty with each other. God so loves the world that each of us is special. A reflection of God's love. They made us in God's image. We reflect God's love for creation as the light of the world illuminates our beauty.

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Pastor Tommy

Parts of our series was inspired by Nancy Naigle. *Christmas in Evergreen: Letters to Santa*. Hallmark Publishing..© Crown Media Family Networks, 2019.





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