



ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

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Joy (Synthetic joy)



This week, in our companion book *AI Ethics*, Dr. Mark Coeckelbergh describes a world in which information is no longer simply received. Instead, information is engineered, customized, and optimized for influence. Every click, pause, and preference becomes a data point. AI gives us maps—fast, personalized, and endlessly confident maps—

but these maps are not the territory. And frequently, they are drawn by people who want something from us.

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Love (Incarnation)



In the hours and days following an act of mass violence, something predictable happens. Attention turns almost immediately to motive. Questions are asked before facts are known. Conclusions form before evidence is gathered. The human impulse is understandable: if we can explain the violence, we

can contain it. If we can name the cause, we can distance ourselves from it.

After recent attacks, antisemitism was quickly identified as the explanation in Australia. International commentary included political figures framing the attack in terms of Islamist extremist ideology.

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MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!!



DONATE

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The result is a digital environment shaped around our desires and fears, crafted to keep us engaged rather than informed. A map is a representation. It's useful. It helps you navigate, but it can also mislead you when the mapmaker draws the lines to serve their own purpose.

What AI systems produce — the search results we see, the news clips recommended to us, the posts pushed to the top of our feeds — these are maps. They are sketches of reality, not reality itself. And like any map, they leave things out. They highlight some things and obscure others. They simplify. They distort.

The danger comes when we mistake the map for the territory — when we start believing that the curated, manipulated, AI-shaped version of the world is the world. When that happens, we stop noticing how someone else is drawing the lines. And we risk losing track of the God who alone sees the whole landscape.

We live in a world where what we see is increasingly shaped rather than discovered, curated rather than encountered, optimized for engagement rather than truth, and offering us a form of “synthetic hope.”

These systems learn what persuades us, what angers us, and what will keep us coming

back. That is not a neutral process. This is the problem we must face before we can talk about joy. In this environment, joy becomes fragile because joy requires a connection to something real. And if our maps are being manipulated—by algorithms, by leaders, by foreign agents—how do we find our way back to the territory?

The power of modern AI is not merely that it can show us information—it can shape the conditions under which our opinions are formed. Repetition, emotional triggers, curated outrage, and echo chambers can make us feel convinced we discovered “the truth” on our own, when in reality we were gently steered there. The danger is not only believing something false; it is believing it confidently, and believing that confidence came from ourselves. AI doesn't always give us the truth. But it gives us certainty—and those are not the same thing.

This challenge becomes even more serious when political leaders intentionally spread misinformation. Public figures in every generation have exaggerated, misled, or manipulated the truth, but AI-enhanced media ecosystems give such messages unprecedented reach and speed.

The current president is a particularly prolific example, making statements widely known to be false or inconsistent. Yet large portions of the media amplify these claims without context or correction. Clips circulate widely, but fact-checking is slower, quieter, or absent. Even topics as non-partisan as climate change receive less coverage than the scale of the crisis warrants—leaving millions with a thin, distorted map of the world.

The information isn't merely incomplete. It is shaped.

Dr. Coeckelbergh describes how foreign nations and third-party actors exploit these vulnerabilities. Their goal is not always to convince us of a particular belief—sometimes it is simply to divide, confuse, or exhaust us. With AI tools that can fabricate images, clone voices, write persuasive messages, and micro-target individuals, interference becomes cheaper, easier, and harder to trace.

The result is an environment where the maps we rely on—news, social feeds, commentary, even personal recommendations—are tangled with invisible intentions.



IN OUR PRAYERS

Virginia Bigger
Sylvia Pittman
Mirium Watson
Cyndi McDoniel

Richard Oram
Jonathon Misner
Brian DuFour



FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE
HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Dean Lamoreaux Norma Buzzard
Nancy Elston



COMING UP THIS WEEK: DECEMBER 22-28

Dec 22 Mon

Dec 23	Tue	9:00am-until gone	Produce will be available each week, along with canned goods, until further notice
		12Noon-4pm	Christmas Food Boxes giveaway
		12Noon-6pm	Taco Tuesday in Fellowship Hall
		3:00pm	CDC Board Meeting

Dec 24 Wed

Dec 25 Thu

Dec 26 Fri

Dec 27 Sat

Dec 28	Sun	10:30am	New Beginnings
			Contemporary Worship

(We are live on [Facebook](#) and our newly launched [YouTube channel](#). You can find these links along with more information about us on our website at ([FlintAsbury.org](#).)



WITH US "CHRISTMAS EVE"



Christmas Eve gathers us from many different places. Some of us have been walking through this Advent series together. Others are here simply because it's Christmas—because the lights are on, the songs are familiar, and for a brief moment, it feels good to be among people who are celebrating.

Wherever you come from tonight, we all share something in common: the sense that the world is changing faster than we can fully understand, and that it's not always clear whether what we are building is making us more connected—or more distant from one another.

Over the past few weeks, our congregation has dug a little deeper into the world of Artificial Intelligence. Speaking of fast-moving change, new developments and their consequences are coming at us faster than our moral maturity can manage. Regardless of our readiness, more and more of modern life is shaped by tools designed to imitate human intelligence and decision-making.

These systems promise efficiency, insight, and control, yet they also raise a deeper question: What happens when our creations begin to shape us?

As we've discovered in our exploration of AI ethics, technology is never neutral. It reflects human values, priorities, and assumptions—and if we are not careful, it can quietly redefine what we mean by wisdom, attention, and even care. The ethical challenge is not simply whether our tools work, but whether they help us remain fully human. Christmas tells a very different story about power and progress.

In Luke's Gospel, God does not enter the world as a system, an idea, or a solution to be implemented. God comes as a child—born into vulnerability, dependent on human care, with no place prepared to receive him. "There was no room for them in the inn," Luke tells us, yet heaven still breaks into the ordinary world with good news of great joy for all people.

Where human systems fail to make space, God chooses presence instead. This is the heart of our hope. God does not stand outside the world we are building, waiting for us to get it right. God enters it. In Jesus, God takes on flesh—real, fragile, embodied life—and redeems humanity from the inside. If God is willing to dwell within human limits, then nothing truly human is beyond redemption: not our relationships, not our fears, and not even the tools we create. What we make does not have to replace love; it can be reclaimed and reshaped by it.

That is why we celebrate Christmas, even in uncertain times. Tonight, we are reminded that meaning is not found in optimization or control, but in presence. Emmanuel—God with us—meets us exactly where we are. Our invitation is simple: receive this gift. Be present with one another. Choose connection over distraction, flesh-and-blood love over distance, and carry this quiet truth with you into the days ahead:

God is with us, and that is more than enough.

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.

*Let us love one another,
because love comes from
God! Whoever loves is a
child of God and knows
God. 1 John 4:7-12*

This is a reminder that we publish a weekly newsletter called the Circuit Rider. You can request this publication by email by sending a request to FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com, or let us know when you send a message through our [website](#). We post an archive of past editions on our website under Connect - choose [Newsletters](#).

Pastor Tommy

Upcoming Worship Series "Artificial Christmas"

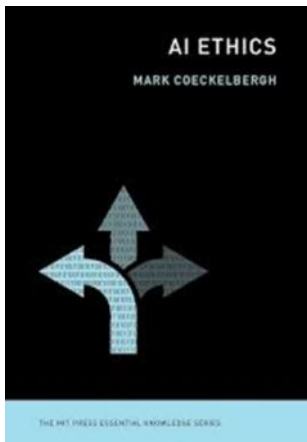


Christmas is supposed to feel real — filled with warmth, wonder, and worship. Yet for many, it doesn't. The decorations go up, the playlists return, and the obligations multiply, but something inside feels missing. Many of us go through the motions, trying to manufacture the Christmas spirit, and it all feels... artificial.

Over the past few years, the word "artificial" has taken on a greater meaning. Artificial intelligence has entered nearly every corner of our lives — the way we communicate, create, and even believe. It writes our words, shapes our opinions, curates our news, and sometimes replaces our work. For some, it's a marvel. For others, a menace. But for all of us, it raises deep spiritual questions.

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Book Club News



This Advent, our series "Artificial Christmas" invites us to examine the incarnation — God made flesh — through the odd and probing light of our technological age. We're

surrounded by things that appear real but aren't: artificial intelligence, artificial relationships, artificial peace, and even artificial joy.

And yet, the story of Christmas reminds us that God's love is not artificial at all — it is embodied, relational, and redemptive.

So why talk about AI at Christmas? Because the incarnation is God's declaration that presence matters. In an age of digital substitutes,

artificial intelligence poses one of the most profound questions of faith: What does it mean to be truly human?

Advent prepares us for God-with-us — not God-as-code, or God-at-a-distance, but God entering real life, real struggle, and real love. Our series explores how that truth speaks to the world of algorithms and automation that increasingly shapes our daily lives.

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

Why AI Ethics Matters

We'll be reading *AI Ethics* by philosopher Mark Coeckelbergh as a companion book for this series. Coeckelbergh encourages us to look beyond headlines about artificial intelligence and explore the moral questions that define this technological era.

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Upcoming Worship Series — “Artificial Christmas”

That’s what we’ll explore in our new Advent series, *Artificial Christmas*. In this series, we explore how humanity’s attempts to manufacture meaning, presence, and perfection through technology (especially AI) reveal our deep spiritual hunger for incarnation — for God with us.

Our series consists of six episodes over five weeks, beginning November 30. Together, we’ll follow the story of the incarnation through the lens of a world increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, technology, and pretense. And we’ll discover that the message of Christmas has never been more relevant: God doesn’t avoid what’s artificial — God enters it, redeems it, and makes it real again. Where our artificial creations offer simulation, God offers salvation. God redeems the artificial.

Why cover an artificial topic during the Season of Advent and Christmas? First, this series is for the curious. But this series is also for anyone who’s ever felt disconnected, disenchanted, or displaced by the pace of modern life. For those who scroll endlessly, hoping to feel something real again. For those who wonder if faith can still mean something in a digital age.

We’ll look deeper into how the Christmas story — the story of God becoming human — speaks into this moment. What happens to humanity in an age of machines? Can something artificial ever point us toward what’s real?

Advent is a season of anticipation — and this year, each week will draw us closer to the surprising ways God shows up where we least expect it. We start where creation and technology meet. Just as God breathed life into dust, humanity now breathes data into algorithms. But where is God in all this? We’ll uncover how even in artificial beginnings, divine intention still moves.

Artificial light brightens our homes, but cannot warm the soul. We’ll explore how the real Light still breaks through imitation — exposing truth in a world obsessed with image and illusion.

When everything feels manufactured — joy, peace, connection — how do we find authentic hope? In this series, we face our disillusionment and find that God’s hope doesn’t depend on perfect circumstances or unbroken faith.

At the heart of Advent is incarnation — the divine entering human form. But what happens when humanity builds new forms? We’ll ask how the Word made flesh still dwells among us, even in the circuitry of our modern lives.

On Christmas Eve is the night it all comes together — the mystery of God entering our world, born not into perfection but into the real and the artificial alike. God comes to redeem even the imitation, turning digital echoes into living voices of grace. We hope you’ll join us for a candlelight service starting at 6 pm.

Upcoming Worship Series — “Artificial Christmas”

When Christmas ends, the lights come down — and we ask, Now what? What does it mean to live as people who believe that God rescues what’s artificial — not just once a year, but every day in an artificial world?

*For God so loved the world
that God chose to live among
us to save us all.*

John 3:16-17

Because the story of Christmas isn’t about escaping the artificial, it’s about a God who enters it. A God who brings light, love, and life to everything that has lost its way.

Join us in person or online for *Artificial Christmas: God Rescues the Artificial* — and rediscover the miracle of incarnation in a world that desperately needs something real. Here is the outline of our series:

<u>Episode</u>	<u>Sundays</u>	<u>Theme & Title</u>
One	Nov 30	Hope - Artificial beginnings
Two	Dec 7	Peace - Imitation light
Three	Dec 14	Joy - Synthetic hope
Four	Dec 21	Love - Incarnation in the machine
Five	Dec 24	With us - God redeems the artificial
Six	Dec 28	Love - After the upload

Please join us each Sunday at 10:30 a.m. We share our weekly episodes on [Facebook](#) and our [YouTube channel](#), and go live at 10:30 a.m. You can find these links and more information about us, or join our live broadcast on our [website](#), FlintAsburyChurch.org.

Pastor Tommy

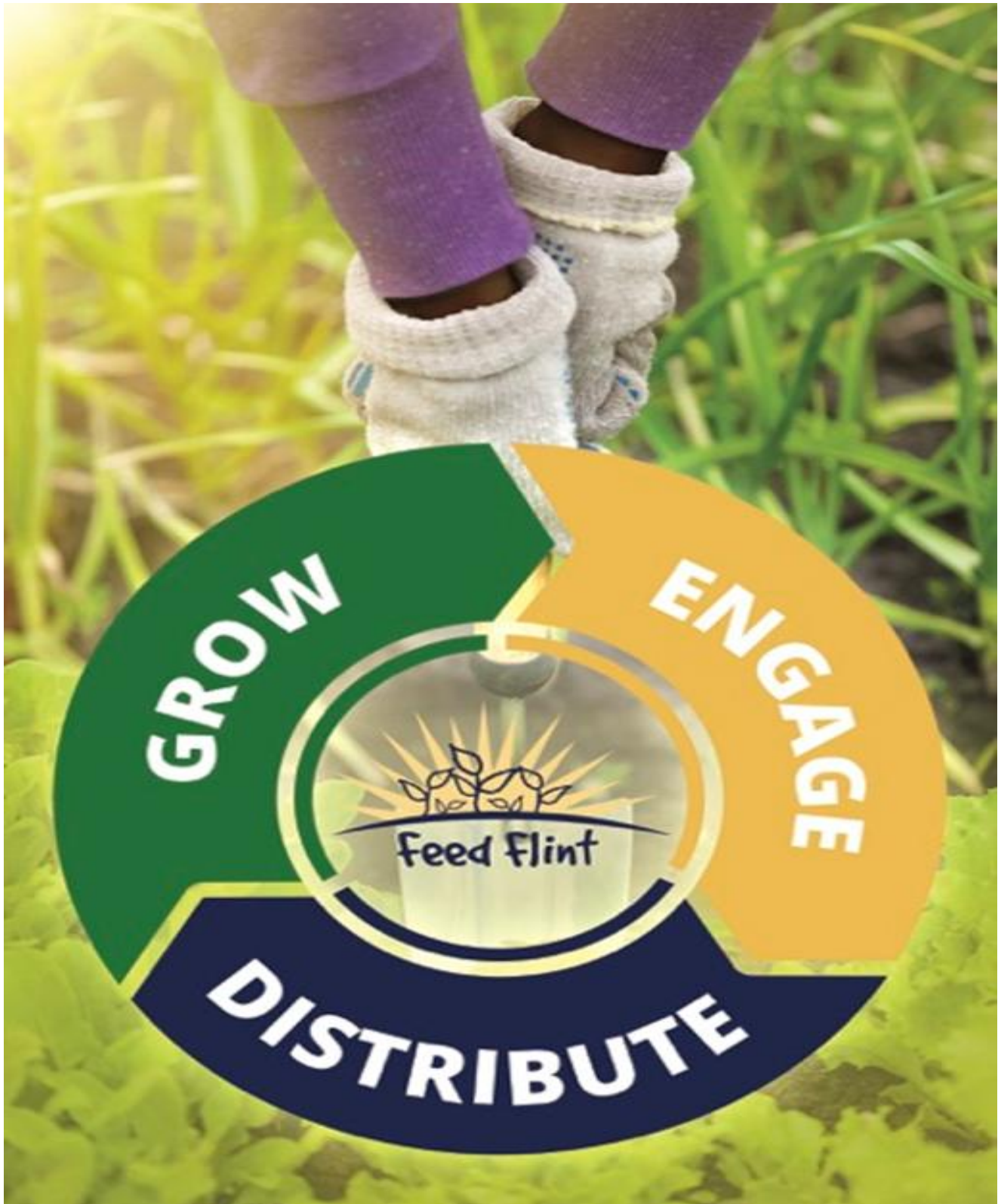
Dr. Mark Coeckelbergh, *AI Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020.
(ISBN 9780262538190).



gg56754144 www.gograph.com


“Feed Flint”

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"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**

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS & MORE:

Let us love one another, because love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God.

1 John 4:7-12

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS:

1. Read 1 John 4:7-12 and the article in this week's Circuit Rider titled Love. How about the next time a catastrophe hits your news feed, refuse the rush to motive and explanation, and turn to prayer and presence instead.
2. Where might you practice Incarnational accountability? This could be as easy as asking, "Have we encountered the people involved—or only the narrative about them?" before sharing, reposting, or repeating a story.
3. Remember to choose presence over abstraction by sitting down, staying in the room, and not disappearing, even when it would be safer to do so.
4. How can your group members help you be more receptive to hearing and understanding the Word of God this week? Pray for one another to be blessed by the Holy Spirit with greater courage.





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funding@flintasbury.org

AI is no longer science fiction. It's writing our news, curating our social feeds, influencing our politics, and even shaping how we think about ourselves. We're told it will make our lives easier, but it also threatens to hollow out what makes us human — empathy, responsibility, relationships, and soul.

In his book, Coeckelbergh invites us to pause and ask:

What does it mean to act ethically in a world increasingly guided by machines?

How do we form moral communities when our technologies make decisions for us?

What happens to human dignity when we delegate our judgment to algorithms?

Why This Author

Mark Coeckelbergh is not an alarmist. He's a philosopher who has spent years teaching ethics and technology at the University of Vienna, advising European policymakers, and engaging theologians, scientists, and artists alike. He approaches AI not as a problem to be solved, but as a mirror — one that reflects back our values, fears, and aspirations.

In *AI Ethics*, Coeckelbergh avoids jargon and ideology. Instead, he asks deeply human questions about power, vulnerability, and moral imagination. His work helps us see that the "ethics of AI" isn't really about the machines — it's about us: what kind of people we are becoming, and how faith can anchor us amid rapid change.

Why You'll Want to Read Along

Reading *AI Ethics* alongside our weekly messages will give you a vocabulary and vision for navigating this new world with faith, humility, and courage. It will challenge easy assumptions and help us discern what it means to be a community that values both innovation and integrity.

As we'll explore in worship, God's redemption extends even to the artificial — not by erasing technology, but by restoring the humanity within it. Coeckelbergh's insights equip us to be wise stewards in a digital age, shaping technology for love and justice instead of fear and profit.

Our vision at Asbury comes from how we collectively interpret scripture.

We envision a church in love with God, one another, and our neighbors, evidenced by the transformation of ourselves and our neighborhood.

This Advent, that transformation means asking how we might love in a world remade by machines — how we can stay human in an age that tempts us to settle for the artificial. If you choose to follow along, I suggest using the following schedule:

<u>Sunday's</u>	<u>Chapters</u>	<u>Themes</u>
Nov 30	Ch 1 - 2	Hope
Dec 7	Ch 3 - 4	Grace
Dec 14	Ch 5 - 6	Joy
Dec 21	Ch 7 - 8	Love
Dec 24	Ch 9 - 10	Incarnation
Dec 28	Ch 11 - 12	Renewal

I invite you to take your *Artificial Christmas* experience deeper with our weekly *Questions for Life Groups*. Each week pairs passages from our companion with Scripture, reflection questions, and prayer prompts. Our goal is to help you make each week's message a part of your reality. The guide can be used for personal study or small-group discussion.

We'll have a few new books available for purchase at \$11 each. Additional copies of the paperback edition are available through Amazon for \$11.18, and used copies in good condition start around \$8. This book may also be available at the local library.

Our Book Club does not meet as a group. However, our weekly messages reference that week's chapters. You can anticipate spoiler alerts unless you keep up with the pace. You can 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.

Pastor Tommy

Dr. Mark Coeckelbergh, *AI Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020. (ISBN 9780262538190).

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

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

The creation story reminds us that our identity does not come from artificial systems. Algorithms do not define us. God defines us. God revives the artificial—even the parts of us that have been shaped or numbed by synthetic voices.

And ever since God created humankind, artists have given us words and images to help us express the awe we feel. In Psalm 8, a poet standing under the night sky, overwhelmed by the wonder of creation, asks the question every generation eventually asks: “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them” (Psalm 8:3–5).

When Scripture says we are made in the image of God, it defines our worth and vocation. Yet we now create machines in our own image — able to speak, decide, even “feel.” The imitation flatters us, but also unsettles us. If machines can mirror thought and creativity, what distinguishes humanity?

Let us remember that Joy, in the Christian story, arrives as something unexpected and unmanufactured—something real breaking into the world. But today we live in an age where “reality” is harder than ever to see.

John opens his letter with almost stubborn insistence on what is real: ‘What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands.’ In a world where so much is now mediated, curated, filtered, or artificially generated, John brings us back to the oldest and clearest truth — Christian faith is not built on an idea, an impression, or a digital echo. It is built on something real, something embodied, something encountered. John is telling us: We didn’t receive a map. We walked the territory.

And then he tells us why he is sharing this: ‘so that your joy may be complete.’ Joy, in John’s vision, is not the result of staying inside artificial worlds or the comforting illusions we create for ourselves. Joy comes from contact with what is true — the life God revealed in Jesus, the Word made flesh, the One who revives everything artificial and restores us to what is real. John invites us into a fellowship grounded not in distortion or persuasion, but in encounter, clarity, and truth that can be seen, heard, and touched.

We have heard the Word of Life, and we have seen it with our eyes, and our hands have touched it.

1 John 1:1-4

Imagine a world in which people walk with eyes wide open—where awareness is not a burden but a gift. In such a world, every person recognizes when an image has been shaped to provoke envy, when a headline has been engineered to inflame, when a digital voice attempts to mimic trust. We do not fall asleep under the glow of manufactured “authenticity.”

Instead, we move through our days strengthened by the knowledge that God has given us minds capable of discernment and hearts capable of wisdom. Awareness becomes a kind of quiet armor: not heavy, not defensive, just steady. It lets us see what is real before us—faces we can touch, bread we can break, conversations that feed the soul.

In this world of awareness, the power of those who manipulate begins to fade. Their strategies depend on distraction, fatigue, and constant stimulation. But people who are awake—truly awake—are not easily steered. They no longer mistake the map for the territory. They choose presence over noise, relationship over performance, truth over spectacle. They are not cynical; they are grounded.

In the United States, public commentary veered toward familiar suspicions. Amit Sarwal, writing for *The Australian Today*, reported on social media comments by Tulsi Gabbard, U.S. Director of National Intelligence, in which she described the attack as an “Islamist terror attack” and warned that the goal of Islamism was the “Islamisation” of countries around the world. Her remarks suggested that immigrants of the Islamic faith pose a threat to national security.

Such rhetoric reflects a broader pattern in moments of fear: the rush to explanation, the narrowing of responsibility, and the temptation to fold entire communities into a single story. It also overlooks the fact that a Muslim man was among those who risked his life to disarm one of the attackers. That contradiction has barely slowed the narrative.

This pattern reveals something deeper than political rhetoric or media failure. It exposes a wound in how we respond to fear. When love is absent, people are no longer encountered as persons. They are encountered as explanations.

In these moments, accountability becomes distorted. Rather than patiently seeking truth, responsibility is assigned hastily.

Motive is inferred. Identity becomes evidence. Entire communities are folded into a single story—not because the story is accurate, but because it is simple. And simplicity feels safer than complexity when we are afraid.

This is the logic of abstraction.

Abstraction is what happens when we relate to one another at a distance—when we trade presence for categories and explanation for encounter. It allows us to speak about people without ever being with them. And in times of fear, abstraction is often rewarded. It offers speed instead of care. Certainty instead of humility. Distance instead of responsibility. Abstraction isn’t always cruel. It’s often tidy.

One way to understand abstraction is to imagine filling out an application. We’ve all done this. Applied for jobs, for schools, for housing, for benefits. Immigrants hoping to stay in this country apply for safety, asylum, and opportunity.

An application decides who qualifies. It determines who belongs, who receives the benefit, and who is allowed to move forward. Applications require information—but only certain kinds. There are spaces for status, address, history, and category. But there is no space for who

depends on you. No space for who you love. No space for the names of people who call you when they’re afraid.

If it doesn’t fit on the application, it doesn’t matter. Whatever doesn’t fit becomes invisible.

Once we accept this logic, people stop being neighbors. They become applicants. Or worse—cases to be processed, threats to be managed, problems to be solved. Love is excluded not because it is unimportant, but because it cannot be quantified. And what cannot be measured is easily ignored.

The result is a strange irony. This is how abstraction quietly reproduces the moral logic of violence. We reduce human beings to categories. We strip them of their particularity. We distance ourselves from their humanity. And in doing so, we participate—often unintentionally—in the same failure of love that makes violence possible in the first place.

Scripture does not explain love from a distance. It draws us into love through presence—through flesh, through nearness, through God’s refusal to remain abstract.

In the opening chapter of John's Gospel, we are told that the Word became flesh and lived among us. The first witnesses testify that they saw His glory—the glory of God's Son—full of grace and truth (John 1:14-18). Grace and truth do not arrive as concepts for those who have seen Christ; they arrive embodied.

Christ lived among us.
Not above us.
Not beyond us.
And not safely removed from the risks of human life.

As a result of God's love, we have all received grace upon grace. This is not efficiency. It is generosity. God is made known not by explanation, but by proximity. If love takes flesh, then love cannot remain abstract. And if love becomes present, then love becomes accountable.

The writer of 1 John puts it plainly: "Let us love one another, because love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7-12).

Notice what Scripture does not say. It does not say that everyone who is correct knows God. It does not say that everyone who is powerful knows God. It says that everyone who loves knows God. This is not poetry. It is a diagnosis.

God does not ask us to qualify. God does not sort us into acceptable and unacceptable. God does not decide our worth based on what can be verified. God rescues the artificial by becoming present—by knowing us not as applicants, but as beloved.

Let us love one another, because love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God.

1 John 4:7-12

God's love is revealed. God's love is sent. God's love enters the world. And because God has loved us so deeply, we are called to love one another. Love does not end in admiration. It moves outward.

God is made visible—not by systems, not by certainty, not by judgment—but by love embodied in human lives.

Our past conversations around artificial intelligence help illuminate this very human pattern. In complex systems, when something goes wrong, there is strong pressure to act quickly—to infer intent, assign blame, and restore order. But ethical reflection insists on restraint. True accountability requires humility, patience, and relationship. Without these, systems may respond decisively—and still be wrong.

We have seen how interruptions can occur when a system attempts to protect itself without fully understanding context or motive. What looks like accountability can become misrecognition. What feels like safety can reproduce harm. This is not a failure unique to machines. It reveals a human temptation to trade presence for efficiency. God rescues the artificial by refusing this trade—by knowing us not as problems to be managed or data for forming abstractions, but as persons to be loved.

What is true of machines is also true of us. When fear replaces love, we stop encountering one another. We begin to process one another. We explain instead of listening. We label instead of knowing. We judge without presence.

This is where the language of "the artificial" becomes revealing. The danger is not that machines might become too human, but that human beings might become artificial—relating to one another through inference rather than presence, through categories rather than compassion, through systems rather than love. When accountability is severed from relationship, when judgment replaces encounter, we begin to live as though people were problems to be solved rather than neighbors to be loved.

And grounding makes them less useful to those who wish to harvest attention or shape opinion through distortion. The tools of exploitation still exist, but they lose their sting because the people of God are not wandering in the dark—they are standing in the light.

A community shaped by this kind of awareness becomes harder to divide. When we see how algorithms tilt the floor beneath us, we stop assuming that our neighbor is the enemy just because their feed looks different from ours. We learn to pause before reacting, to listen before judging, to ask deeper questions about what we are being told and why.

The conspiracies that once preyed on fear and confusion begin to lose oxygen. It becomes far easier to love our neighbor because we are no longer being pulled into manufactured outrage designed to sell ads or shape loyalties. Awareness clears space for compassion.

And as this awareness deepens, it reshapes our worship and our witness. We begin to understand how precious it is that God entrusts us with the real world—the one made of soil, breath, and Spirit. We reclaim our attention as an act of devotion. We reclaim our presence as a work of hope.

In a world that tries to overwhelm us with images, we learn again to behold the face of Christ in one another. Awareness does not merely protect us; it frees us. It makes room for joy. It restores dignity. It cultivates a form of life in which God's image can shine without distortion—steadily, quietly, and beautifully—amid all the artificial glow around us.

Awareness is not something we master in a day. It grows in us the way wisdom always has—through practice, patience, and the gentle guidance of God's Spirit. Today we have named the forces that blur our vision and pull our attention toward shadows. We have heard scripture's reminder that God created us with intention, dignity, and purpose. And we have imagined the kind of world that becomes possible when people live with their eyes open and their hearts steady in God's presence. That world is not far away. It begins quietly, with each of us.

So what comes next? We start small by choosing to be more present in our own lives. We pay closer attention to what draws our gaze. Notice when something online feels urgent or emotional, and ask who benefits from our reaction. We practice the kind of awareness that honors God's image in us—a

deliberate, thoughtful noticing that helps us stay rooted in the real world God has entrusted to our care.

These habits may seem simple, but they shape the soul. They help us live as people who are awake.

And as we practice, we begin to encourage one another. Families, friends, and faith communities become places where awareness is cultivated rather than consumed. We share what we are learning about ourselves, about our habits, about the forces that seek to claim our attention. We model a posture of curiosity and calm rather than fear or suspicion.

In doing so, we become a witness: a community that chooses light over distortion, truth over convenience, and real relationships over artificial persuasion.

Finally, we remember that this journey will continue beyond Advent. Each episode in this series is an invitation to deepen our awareness of God's presence—first around us, and eventually within us. God meets us in our waking. God calls us to see clearly so that we may love more fully.

As we step forward into the coming week, may we carry a renewed sense of attentiveness, a confidence in our God-given agency, and a hope that grows brighter with every moment we choose to live awake.

Pay attention to the places where life feels flattened or artificial. Those are the places where God is already working. God revives the artificial. God wakes us up, restores our vision, and brings joy back to the surface.”

Stay awake this week. Notice what is real. Trust the One who revives what has grown artificial. Trust that God revives the artificial — and God is reviving 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.](#)

This is a reminder that we publish a weekly newsletter called the Circuit Rider. You can request this publication by email by sending a request to FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com, or let us know when you send a message through our [website.](#) We post an archive of past editions on our website under Connect - choose [Newsletters.](#)

Pastor Tommy

Dr. Mark Coeckelbergh, *AI Ethics*.
Cambridge, MA: The MIT
Press, 2020. (ISBN
9780262538190).



This is precisely what God comes to rescue. God rescues the artificial—not by rejecting intelligence or systems, but by restoring love as the condition for truth.

Love is not an idea we master. Love is a reality we enter. Joan Trumpauer Mulholland is often remembered as a civil rights activist, but that label is too thin for what she represents. Early on, Joan was a white college student who chose to sit where she was not welcome, not out of ideology alone, but out of relationship. She did not argue segregation from a distance. She placed her body where love was being denied.

She endured arrest, harassment, and violence—not because she misunderstood the danger, but because she understood love. She did not explain injustice; she entered it. She did not reduce people to categories; she shared their vulnerability. She refused the safety of abstraction.

Her life bears witness to the difference between knowing about justice and loving people enough to risk being present. This is incarnation lived out in human flesh. Love does not remain neutral. Love does not remain distant. Love takes a seat at the counter.

Another story of love is quieter and harder to bear the implications.

Did you know that two students who were in a classroom at Brown University had already survived a mass shooting? Years later, they survived another. Their story is not heroism in the traditional sense. It is a story of endurance.

They did not choose to become symbols. They did not volunteer to teach us anything. Yet their lives confront us with a haunting truth: violence repeats itself, trauma accumulates, and love is tested not once, but again and again.

The absence of love is visible in the recurrence itself—in how communities fail to protect, how systems fail to learn, how safety remains unevenly distributed. And yet love appears here not as triumph, but as refusal to disappear.

They kept going to class. They kept building lives. They kept trusting spaces that had already betrayed them. This is love stripped of romance. Love that persists without guarantees.

These students are not data points in a trend. They are not “repeat instances.” They are persons whose stories resist reduction. Their presence reminds us that trauma is not an error to be corrected, and survival is not a statistic. Love is what remains when nothing feels safe.

Joan Trumpauer Mulholland shows love chosen. The Brown students show love endured. One steps forward into danger. The other keeps walking after it. Both reject abstraction. Both insist on presence.

This is the claim at the heart of the gospel: God rescues the artificial by reminding us what cannot be replaced—a body, a story, a life that matters.

The incarnation proclaims that love refuses distance, that truth requires presence, and that God does not rescue the world by abstraction, but by coming near. Because once people become abstractions, harming them becomes easier.

This is the world into which Christ is born—not as an escape from human complexity, but as God’s refusal to deal with humanity at a distance.



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Important Updates:

Dear Friends of Asbury CDC,

As *Giving Tuesday* approaches, we are reminded of the incredible generosity that helps Asbury CDC continue its mission to serve our neighbors. But today, we are reaching out with an *urgent* need that simply cannot wait.

Due to the ongoing **Federal government shutdown**, many of our Flint residents are being hit hard. Some government employees have been **furloughed or are working without pay**, and **SNAP/EBT benefits have not been renewed** for numerous families. As a result, more households than ever are turning to us for help.

Through our **Help Center, Food Pantry, and Soup Kitchen**, Asbury CDC is working tirelessly to make sure no one in our community goes hungry. But the growing demand has placed a tremendous strain on our resources — and we need your help to keep up.

Your gift today will directly provide food, supplies, and hope for those facing uncertainty. While Giving Tuesday is around the corner, our neighbors need us *now*.

Please consider making a donation today so we can continue to stand in the gap for Flint families who need it most.

Thank you for your compassion and continued support. Together, we can ensure that no one in our community is left hungry or forgotten during this difficult time.

With gratitude,
Kimberly Sims
Finance Director
Asbury Community Development Corporation

Our mailing address is:
Asbury CDC
1653 Davison Rd., Flint, MI. 48506

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Asbury United Methodist Church
1653 Davison Road, Flint, MI 48506



Call Baba Collins at 810-394-3880
or Mama Mel at 810-394-6521



Wonderful Sisters and Brothers in Jesus our Lord, my wife, Debbi, and I wish you a most reflective and life giving Christmas as you celebrate Jesus' first coming and anticipate His soon and coming return.

*Until then, please receive this blessing from us as shared in *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days* by Kate bower and Jessica Richie:*

*A Blessing for Love to Come at Christmas
God, we are waiting for love,
Not the simple kind or the sweep-you-off-your-feet kind,
But the absurd kind.*

*The kind wrapped in rags,
Resting in a bucket of animal feed.
Love enough to save us all.*

*Blessed are we who look for Love
Deeper, fuller, truer - than we have ever known,
Than we could have ever hoped for.*

*Blessed are we who seek you,
The light that dawned so long ago
In that dark stable.
Love given.
Love received.*

*Receive this gift dear one.
Love has come for you.*

*Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year
from District Superintendent John & Debbi!*

I don't know if it shows, but I have tried to be cautious with my words. It is not because the subject is abstract. It is because I love you. And that love does not come from me—it comes from God, who refuses to reduce any of us to an explanation.

Since God refuses to deal with us at a distance, the question is no longer whether we will be present with one another, but how. In a world that rewards abstraction—where speed replaces care and categories replace faces—God insists on presence.

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Pastor Tommy

Dr. Mark Coeckelbergh, *AI Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020. (ISBN 9780262538190).

Amit Sarwal. "US intelligence chief calls Bondi shooting an 'Islamist terror attack', warns Australia may be 'too late'." © The Australian Today News, December 12, 2025. [Link.](#)

