

***Something to Ponder on the Advent Journey,  
A Gift of DuBois Center  
&  
The Green DuBois Initiative***



**An Advent Devotional written for and dedicated to  
*DuBois Center***

**A Church Camp of the Illinois South Conference  
Of the  
United Church of Christ**

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**And to Introduce  
*Green DuBois***

**An initiative which celebrates, honors and shares the wonder of  
God's biodiversity found in this sacred setting**

***Written by Donald C. Wagner  
Edited and Prepared for distribution by Jill Baker***

## Foreword



Church workrooms are holy ground. It is in places such as these that God sometimes chooses to speak boldly in that *Still Small Voice* which grabs you by the collar and holds you in place until you listen more closely and act most faithfully.

Here, in the work room of St. Paul United Church of Christ in Lebanon, Illinois, I was talking with Becky Harrison, the St. Paul Office Manager, concerning the nearing deadline for the writing of this Advent Devotional for Green DuBois. My grandson, Holden, and I had recently returned from the 'Just You and Me Camp' at DuBois Center and I was describing to Becky some of the fun which had transpired there when, out of the blue, Becky simply asks, "What is it about that out-of-the-way, podunk place which makes it so special to so many people?"

That is when God grabbed me by the collar and made me listen more closely: So, what *is* it about this out-of-the-way, podunk place which makes it so special, even sacred, to so many people? I pondered for a bit, then like a Star rising in the night sky, the Light glittered on the waters of the DuBois Camp Lake and I knew . . . DuBois Center is not unlike Bethlehem! Unexpected Gifts of God are born there and, for those who are open to Wonder, who knows what sights God is revealing in that place and in this age!

So it is that this Advent Devotional, simply entitled, *Something to Ponder on the Advent Journey*, comes to you. Who knows what Rare Sight may appear along the way towards DuBois/Bethlehem? Who knows what Angel voices we may hear in the night skies above? Or what camp counselor's/shepherd's footsteps will announce another arriving visitor to the Rustic Campground where newborn Holiness now resides? What is it about this out-of-the-way, podunk place which makes it a place God would appear in the face of a Child?

Many thanks to all of the former camp counselors who answered a query concerning the question of out-of-the-way, podunk places and so eloquently shared their experiences, feelings and faith encountered there. Thank you, as well, to Kelly Klemp Neighbors, Cara Magee Johnston and Susan Benedick Fuchs who made the necessary connections, encouraged, cajoled and/or persuaded the counselors to email their responses to me in a timely manner, facilitating my own writing goals. You will find all of their names and read their quotes throughout the Advent journey. Blessed are you all.

Thank you, too, to Dr. Jill Baker, consummate professional, encourager, proof-reader and production facilitator of this Advent devotional, whose passion for the Green DuBois Initiative is second only to her capacity to make someone, seemingly anyone, do her will by simply looking at you and smiling. No-one can say no to you, my friend, and I am grateful that you and the Green DuBois Steering Committee have trusted me with yet another project of your energy and imagination.

Deep, deep appreciation to Ms. Angela Hausmann and Mr. Marty Kemper whose photography of DuBois Center in the Winter months will be found throughout this devotional. Your eyes have the

capacity to see the Wonder of God's Creation and share it through the lens of your cameras. You are so very talented and we are so very blessed that you choose to share your passions and talents with all of us.

Scripture passages are All passages are from the Common English Bible translation, abbreviated CEB.

Heartfelt gratitude to Ms. Becky Harrison, the St. Paul UCC Office Manager. This is the second devotional she has assisted on, though it seems far more than that, I'm certain. Throughout the process she has read, mulled with me, proof-texted and chided me on in writing, all with her own two eyes in the process of recovering from detached retinas. You, my friend, are a gift to the Church and in our congregation, a witness to the nearness of God in Christ each day of your living. Thank you.

To the faith family of St. Paul United Church of Christ, Lebanon, Illinois, thank you for allowing, even encouraging me to follow my heart and write of the faith as we encounter it in Jesus Christ. Your support is phenomenal and our ministry together is a gift of Wonder and Peace, in season and out. God bless you and all of us as we continue to seek and serve God's call in our lives.

Finally, to my dear wife, Nancy, and our family, Matthew & Sara, Mary and Ava; Ray & Kara, Norah, Holden and Liza; and Ched: You, all of you, bless my life in ways you cannot imagine. In the midst of the writing, you encouraged, loved, held down the fort and offered care in a thousand of quiet ways, all while understanding as I kept up with hospital calls, weddings, funerals, counseling, worship services and the 'usual meetings'. You are incredible and I love you.

To those of you who choose to read on, I trust you will find in each day's devotional something which causes you to fold your hands, bow your heart and open your soul, giving thanks to God for the gift of Jesus in the most out-of-the-way, podunk places, such as DuBois Center . . . and wherever it is you reside. God's blessings in this Advent season.

There is *Something to Ponder on the Advent Journey*.

***Don Wagner***



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## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

*“In the days to come the mountain of the  
Lord’s house will be the highest of the  
mountains.*

*It will be lifted above the hills;  
people will stream to it.”*

**Isaiah 2:2 CEB**

“[DuBois Center] is love and it has a power over  
me that even now I can’t resist.” Chrystal  
Ruhmann

Even the rabbits in the heart of Winter know it,  
their tracks revealing their quiet trek along the  
paths of God’s holy mountain at DuBois Center:  
There is something pure here worth tending to,  
something holy drawing all creatures in,  
something not even the angels can ignore. God  
is at work here. God is tending to God’s creation here. God is preparing to introduce Gilead’s balm in  
a way no one thought possible.

At DuBois Center, it is not the noise which pulls you up short, like a horse chafing at the bit and  
bridle. No, at DuBois Center is it the silence, the quiet, the subtleness, the calmness which surrounds  
you along the way, stopping you in your tracks of certainty. In such moments some might find  
themselves alert, watching for danger, yet the wise ones are not dissuaded by fear. Like ancient  
scholars watching the heavens for signs or shepherds studying the stars by night, those who hope  
beyond words and those who pray beyond faith open the ears of their soul to hear that One whose  
Voice is of salvation, that One who makes the mountain tremble all the way into the heart of the sea.

‘Silent Night’ is more than a Christmas hymn in this place, it is the Sentinel announcing the arrival  
of the Host in royal array. He who comes shall not be turned away. He who comes will not be  
ignored. The mighty will bow down and the humble will be raised up. The loud rabble will be muted  
and the ones previously unheard will sing His praises.

In the days ahead Love will be lifted up, for it has a power that cannot be resisted. Still, as we begin  
this journey, Love is preparing to come down and meet us, face-to-face. What more holy ground to  
experience that sight? What more unexpected place to make that arrival?

Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord in this out-of-the-way, podunk place some today call  
DuBois Center - and those who came before us know as Bethlehem.

Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Open me, Lord, to Your coming that, whether You arrive in DuBois or Bethlehem, I would be  
found ready to receive You with a humble heart and a welcoming spirit. Amen.





## FIRST MONDAY OF ADVENT

*“Come, let’s go up  
to the Lord’s  
mountain, to the  
house of Jacob’s  
God so that he  
may teach us his  
ways and we may  
walk in God’s  
paths.” Isaiah  
2.3b CEB*



*“Who, but only God, could have created such a serene, out-of-the-way, podunk place that takes me  
‘home’, even if only in my mind, heart and soul?” Cara Magee Johnston*

The Advent journey is not about getting the Christmas tree out of the attic or bringing the decorations up from the basement. It is not about stringing lights along the roofline or placing an inflatable Santa and reindeer on the front lawn. Nor is it about purchasing the correct gifts for each person in your household (Like you could ever really figure that one out!) or making sure that your Christmas card list is up to date. No . . .

The Advent journey is about going up to the Lord’s mountain and listening to what the Lord has to say. It is about preparing your life to receive a Gift no-one ever thought would possibly arrive. It concerns settling down in the fields around the Bethlehem of your being in the certain trust that God will meet you there and save you in ways you could never have imagined.

The Advent journey begins in the instant you begin to wait, watch and wonder how God will, again, act in power and authority to astound the world, beginning in this small corner of creation. Not unlike when Moses, while tending to his father-in-law’s flock, was witness to a burning bush which was not consumed, out of which the Lord’s Voice spoke the words, “I have heard the cries of my people and I have come to save”, so God still chooses to makes God’s Presence known to those whom God chooses, where God chooses. Bethlehem was one such place in the birth of Jesus, DuBois Center is another such place in the fire and roar of the Holy Spirit. There we taste of the manna and quails of God’s surprising and breathtaking beauty; there we drink of the water from the rock of God’s Spirit pouring down upon all who walk her trails.

“Who, but only God . . .”, indeed, makes a home wherever it is God is being born again. Watch. Wait. It is happening before your very eyes. Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Teach me to walk in your ways, Lord God, because it is You who is my deepest desire.  
Amen.

## FIRST TUESDAY OF ADVENT

“God will judge between the nations, and settle disputes of mighty nations.”

**Isaiah 2.4a CEB**

“DuBois Center is a safe, magical part of God’s creation.” Sue Schmidt Wilson

The casual observer at DuBois Center will see the reed bent over in the ice, pity the victim of the elements, and hardly linger on the unwilling contributor to design and effect in the shallows of the lake as Winter winds blow. The more practiced eye will study the form and texture of the ice, consider the direction of the breezes as they are brought to a solid which moments before had been a liquid, then ponder the unseen Force which allowed a once vital reed to bend over in death and, in so doing, provide a line of continuity between one design and another in this frigid piece of art.

Could the design be a butterfly in flight? Mountaintops touching from opposing directions? A blending of gold and blue-green brushes? Or merely a reflection of the skies above on the skin of ice below? The photographer’s lens captures the result of creation at work and gives reason for our imaginations to run rampant, but what no lens can bring into focus are forces at work beyond the eye’s capacity to see. Look closer . . .

In this safe, magical part of God’s creation we are firsthand witnesses to God doing a new thing. Can’t you see it? You can walk on this water! What once would have drowned you, now supports your very life! What once threatened your existence, now is the sure foundation for you to reach the shore on the other side! God is settling the dispute about who is in control in the claiming of power and authority in creation, and who among us can argue?

In this lowly, out-of-the-way, podunk place, God asks the harder questions, ‘Who among you can make solid the waters and shape art with the wind? Who among you can give hope in the depths of despair and joy when night seemed to rule and bend over our best efforts? Who among you can redeem the downtrodden and grant life and texture to those forgotten?’

It is from places like DuBois Center and Bethlehem that those questions are answered again and again, if only we have the heart to listen, the eyes to see and the desire to learn.

Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.



**Prayer:** Slow us down, Lord God, that we might linger in prayerful faith on your Wisdom before us. Amen.



## FIRST WEDNESDAY OF ADVENT



“Then they will beat  
their swords into iron  
plows and their spears  
into pruning tools.”

**Isaiah 2:4b CEB**

“It is hard to pin down why  
it [DuBois Center] is so  
special, but I believe it is  
because every nook is  
infused with Love, and that  
kind of impact is something  
to treasure and protect.”

Ann (Sterrett) Gilcrease

Advent is the prayer for transformation in the heart of the seeker, it is the journey towards a hope forever sought in the community of humanity. Not every Advent has a road pure and white, nor does every journey find the path to be straight and true. Still, we move forward, moment by moment, day by day, week by week, listening, watching, waiting, praying, hoping: God hear our prayer.

When God spoke to Moses and said, “I have heard the cries of my people and have come down to save them”, Moses had no idea what God was about to do. I would argue that is the one consistent reality which still exists today: We have no earthly idea what heavenly thing God is about to do.

We practice the liturgies, prepare the hymnody, get ready to present the pageants, sing the carols, mark the days and count down until the candles shine, but do we really have any idea of what God is about to do for the sake of God’s people? We name salvation as Jesus, place Him in history, mark the place of His birth, thank God for His parents and relish telling the Story just one more time, but in so doing are we locking the door on anything new transpiring in the Love of God? Are we freeing Love to happen all over again in a new way? Only time and practice will tell.

DuBois Center is less a piece of geography than the topography of a new Relationship, it is the coordinates of Mercy and Grace awaiting the arrival of Hope. It is the Beginning place for those dreaming of a Destination, it is Bethlehem in South Central Illinois, just outside of Jerusalem. “. . . infused with Love . . .” for those whose pleading voices call out for deliverance. This out-of-the-way, podunk place opens the door where Jesus knocks and God comes in. Watch and see what next God will do here . . .

Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Just when we would box You in to doing one thing, remind us to open the door to the Stable and see the fire of your Love shining brightly before us, O God. Amen.

**FIRST  
THURSDAY  
OF  
ADVENT**

“Nation will  
not take up  
sword  
against  
nation;  
they will no  
longer learn  
how to make  
war.”

**Isaiah 2:4c  
CEB**



“[One] Reason I love DuBois [is that] as a kid, camp was an escape from my not so great childhood.”  
Kelly (Klemp) Neighbors

Snow has a way of covering over reality, much in the same way the songs of angels cover over the shouts of war or the light of a star reveals a Joy in the midst of darkness. Snow is a blessing that way. When the world about you seems harsh, the answers to heartfelt questions appear far away and it seems doubt is the only thing certain in your days, Advent is the friend who takes you by the hand and leads you to places, times and people who bring unexpected, yet desperately needed resolve to the challenges before you. Advent is the light Winter snow turning an unwanted honeysuckle bush into a work of art not to be missed. Advent is the bitter, clear cold of a Winter day clearing the sound of a nearby passing deer so you do not miss the sight. Advent is the brilliance of sunlight in the midst of the timber showing you the path to take which leads to life.

Advent stills the nations and quells the anger of warfare. Advent exposes the bigotry and prejudice of one against another and humbles them before a Peace which passes all human understanding. Advent gives the weary travelers a place to lay their head and gathers the marginalized in from their fields of desolation. Advent broods over a Child’s cry and quiets a mother’s distressed birthing pains. Advent carries our heart to Hope and our soul to Faith even, maybe especially, when others cannot imagine our need or desire.

The Season of Advent is, in so many ways, the best of DuBois seasons, for there are few people present to muck it up, as it were. As the rest of the world busily hustles and bustles in their preparations for Christmas day, at Dubois Center Advent finds a holy site to tell her Story, to speak a Truth which challenges and heals Creation, and to begin the slow unveiling of Joy forever reflecting God’s Smile. Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** God, grant me the Season of Advent in my heart, wherever I am, that I may be ready to receive the gift of Mercy You are, now and forever more. Amen.



## FIRST FRIDAY OF ADVENT

“Come, house of Jacob, let’s walk by the Lord’s light.” **Isaiah 2:5 CEB**

“Camp has always been my happy place. It’s a place where I could go unwind and be myself.”  
Carrie (Brazelton) Clayton

‘You look like a Cadillac sort of person.’ ‘Only the best can wear a Rolex.’ ‘No-one knows the fine apparel you need quite like Macy’s.’ ‘Your day can only be made better with Pillsbury.’ ‘When you sport the Nike symbol you become the symbol of sport in Nike.’ ‘No one does it better for you than Jeep.’ So the advertisements drone on in seemingly endless array, offering their sweet promises of salvation, if only you can afford their wares. It makes no difference, whether on television, radio, computers, cell phones or billboards along the highway, your soul is being sought, your life is being claimed and your time on earth is waiting to be defined. To whom will you listen?

Maybe this is where the intersection of Advent and DuBois Center are most vividly experienced, at the intersection of leaving the world behind and starting up the path of just being yourself. I’m not certain, but to this I can witness, when you take a moment in this out-of-the-way, podunk place to walk by the Lord’s light up the path and across the bridge to Lakeside or when you dare to spend a few moments at the boathouse away from the world’s siren calling, spiritual, even seemingly magical things occur. Life appears. Cries are heard. Love transcends.

Biblical scholars are wont to link Bethlehem with David and the coming of the Shepherd with the one who was the shepherd king, which all makes sense and aligns the prophetic voice with the arrival of the Fulfillment. But what if there is more than what is obvious? What if Biblical scholarship does little more for us in Advent than Macy’s does with advertising? What if, just what if we look with God’s Light to observe what we have never before imagined? Could we there discover Wonder? Only God knows.



Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Lord God, lead us to being ourselves before You, that we might be Yours forevermore in Jesus. Amen.



## **FIRST SATURDAY OF ADVENT**

“Seek justice:  
help the  
oppressed;  
defend the  
orphan; plead  
for the widow.”

**Isa.1.17b CEB**

“DuBois means  
peace, devotion,  
and friendships.”  
Bonnie Newlin  
Lair

Sometimes you walk where no one else will walk. Sometimes you take the shortest route between shores. Sometimes you trust your steps to lead you home, wherever that may be.

Deer tracks across the melting ice on DuBois Lake cause you to think about such things, especially as the First Week of Advent nears the end. Sometimes it is the journey itself which beckons you to move beyond your shores of comfort towards a place unknown, uncertain and unyielding, yet still you go, still you seek, still you move towards that Voice which calls. This out-of-the-way, podunk place whispers of Truth in a language only heard by those who long for Good News no other can offer.

Not unlike Bethlehem of a short time ago, God still comes to such anguished longing in a manner no one else could imagine, taking the shortest route between Creator and created, trusting God's own steps in the Child to lead us Home. What deer might have imagined taking a similar journey? What human among us would cross the treacherous depths that peace, devotion and a new friendship might be achieved?

How does God count God's steps to Bethlehem or DuBois? In donkey steps? In deer steps? In our steps taken to discover such an answer? Only God knows . . . and Advent is the revelation of that answer. Walk on in Wonder with God pointing the Way.

Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Lord God, keep us from becoming so busy counting our steps that we lose track of where we are going in coming to meet You. Amen.

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

“A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse; a branch will sprout from his roots.”

### Isaiah 11.1 CEB

“At DuBois Center, the Holy Spirit blows through the tree tops . . .” Priscilla Self

If you are not looking you will not see it. It blends in as though a natural part of the landscape. Even the Winter’s harshest cover cannot contain it, but to the casual observer nothing is out of order. So it was meant to be, so God wants it, so God intends the Messiah’s arrival.

From what was  
thought to be dead,  
Life. From what used  
to be the way things  
were,  
Transformation.  
From what was once  
cut off low to the  
ground, a Rising  
Hope.

Sometimes the tops  
of the trees are not as  
high as we think  
them to be and  
sometimes the  
Breath of the Holy  
Spirit causes the



smallest of Trees to raise the most Wondrous Songs in the night. Here in DuBois Center the words of the Prophet find fulfillment along the shores of the lake, where no one would think to look, especially at this time of the year. But, look closely!

There! Like a lowly stable in Bethlehem, like a manger meant to feed the livestock, like the straw meant to guard against the gathering chill, there, there it is! The shoot emerges from the stump, like the birthing of a Child in the midst of many peoples. DuBois Center has so many such stumps, remnants of trees once vital, decaying markers of life given up, but this one, this one is not like all the others.

This one is different, promising, challenging, clinging to life at the edge of the water while both drinking from it and stilling it in the storm. This one comes up away from the regularly trodden paths, in the midst of grass and weeds long ago forgotten. This One comes and will not be dismissed. The stump of Jesse, the stump of oak, the Stump of God sends for a shoot.

Are you watching for it? Are you listening for the Spirit to blow through its leaves? Are you ready to gather near? Advent is the season for such things and today is a good day to consider what God is doing for you. Salvation is not as far away as one might think . . . He is as close as DuBois Center. Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Lord, slow me down that I not miss the subtle announcement of your Powerful Arrival.  
Amen.



## SECOND MONDAY OF ADVENT

“The Lord’s spirit will rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of planning and strength, a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.”

### **Isaiah 11.2 CEB**

“It didn’t matter who you were at home; jock, nerd, popular or unpopular, everyone was the same at DuBois.” Scott Thompson

Look across the lake with me. On this frosty morning, the boat house and all of the boats stacked along the shore glisten brightly in the midst of the white shrouded sentinels of Holiness. The waters reflect the Joy of God’s Breath upon Creation

as, in their multi-hued blues, there is a sparkle of delight from the sights which tower above them. On days such as this no one and nothing is exempt, the clarity and purity of cold captures the moisture in the air and delightedly places the resulting artwork on everything in its path. What once was multi-colored, distinct and Autumnal now dances in the pure white gown of God’s own choosing.

It does not matter who you were before or where you were before, God is doing a new thing. God will give a new look, God will design a new beginning, God will shape an outcome like we could never have imagined, even in our wildest dreams and visions. Regardless of who we were when we left home for Bethlehem . . . or DuBois . . . God comes to us in the One who views us as one: as God’s own. This One will give us reason to rejoice, a hope for tomorrow and a confidence for today. This One will be filled with the Spirit and the fear of the Lord. This One will cover us in Love and present us in Grace and, in that day, the angels will sing, ‘Gloria!’, now and forever more.

Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Lift up my eyes to see You and open my soul to receive You this day, Lord God. Amen.



## SECOND TUESDAY OF ADVENT

“He will delight in fearing the Lord. He won’t judge by appearances, nor decide by hearsay.” **Isaiah 11.3 CEB**

“I can remember how the screen doors sounded when they closed, and the way I felt walking on the paths from vespers back to the tent.” Amanda Gaines-Borders

There are some who say the best time of the day is in the morning, others contend that evening is better. Some like it when just a smidge of snow is on the shoreline, others prefer a deep layer to cover the land. A few are partial to just a bit of ice on the lake, so that sound skitters across the waters as on the wings of a hummingbird, others want the waters covered deeply with ice providing opportunity for skating and sledding and the laughter of families at play.

When it comes to the topic of a Messiah, not much is different. Everyone has an opinion, everyone their certainty, everyone their expectations. Each has a sense of how Messiah’s coming will be, where Messiah will arrive, to whom Messiah will listen, with whom Messiah will spend time, how Messiah will make salvation possible and who will be first on the train Home when Messiah leaves. All of which makes me truly, truly hope that the One for whom I am waiting will not be like everyone else. In fact, I pray Messiah is not at all like me.

Like a screen door slapping shut on Oak Lodge, whether heard across the lake in the barn or down by Deer Run, there is something known about the sound, something comforting, something magical.

It is as if we know the sound, yet do not know the purpose. In my mind, the One who comes will be like the screen door slapping shut, known, comforting, even magical, much like a walk on the path from vespers to the tent during Summer camp. Still, I pray Messiah will not be limited by my thinking, my lack of imagination or my reluctance of faith. I pray Messiah thinks



beyond my thoughts, perceives beyond my vision and listens beyond my hearing. I pray Messiah looks at me like I believe Messiah views Bethlehem or DuBois, that there will be a smile, an understanding and a love which is birthed anew in my heart in such an arrival . . . sort of like a screen door banging shut across the lake: A Sign of Home Among Us. Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Lord God, open me to You in the comfort of things known and the surprise of what is yet to be revealed. Amen.



## SECOND WEDNESDAY OF ADVENT

“He will judge the needy with righteousness, and decide with equity for those who suffer in the land.” **Isaiah 11.4a CEB**

“I needed to know if I had it in me to relate to young people. [DuBois] Camp not only showed me I did, but helped me to learn more about who I am.” Matthew Bawden

Researchers tell us that the average person needs only milliseconds to accurately judge the trustworthiness of someone they just met. Milliseconds.

Have you ever wondered what the infant Jesus thought as He looked up into the eyes of His mother? Joseph? The shepherds? Or even the Wise Men? Do babies make such distinctions? Or do they just take it all in? How much time does God need to judge you or me? And, will we be found among the righteous, exercising equity in the land? Or among those living off of the labors of others for the sake of ourselves?



The Advent journey in DuBois Center reminds us that, just as it rains on the just and the unjust alike so, too, does ice form on the just and unjust alike. The way things are here on earth are not the way things will be in the nearing Kingdom: The One who comes announces God’s judgement in the healing of the sick, giving sight to the blind, cleansing the lepers, casting out demons, sitting at table with sinners and tax collectors and raising the dead. Those who believe themselves in this life above the effect of rain or ice may well be the ones begging a drop of water from poor Lazarus at the feet of Abraham.

The One for whom we wait bears a message to all of Creation: In His arrival we come to know more about ourselves in the sight of God. In His living we come to learn how it is we are to live in faith. In His dying and being raised, we discern that there is nothing in the heavens above, nor in the earth beneath which can separate us from the Love of God. God already knows that. Do you?

Get ready to look God in the face in the gift of the Son. God has made God’s judgement for you. Have you made your judgement regarding God? You probably have, it takes only milliseconds.

Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Before I even considered You, O God, You knew and loved me. Thank you. Prepare me to receive that gift in Jesus. Amen.



## SECOND THURSDAY OF ADVENT

“Righteousness  
will be the belt  
around his  
hips, and  
faithfulness  
the belt around  
his waist.”

**Isaiah 11.5**  
**CEB**

“Some of my  
fondest camp  
memories are . . .  
making or fixing  
little mundane  
oddities that can  
still be found  
today. What

could I possibly mean by that? That automatic air freshener on the wall in Oak Lodge that looks a bit cockeyed? That was me in 2006.” Aaron Fuchs



My Dad, at age 94, has steadfastly maintained throughout his life that there is always something to do, if you only take the time to look for it . . . and have the ambition to get things done. I think this was just another way from him to say, ‘Idle hands are the devil’s workshop’. Much to his chagrin, I am still mulling on that notion, but the One who is coming has a toolbelt on, there is much to do and His hands are ready, cockeyed air fresheners in Oak Lodge notwithstanding.

Is it not odd how God is preparing to entrust the biggest of jobs, in dealing with unrighteousness and unfaithfulness, to the smallest of Hands? Hmmm. What does God know that we need to be considering?

Standing on the Advent road while at DuBois Center might give us a clue. Perhaps our frigid regard towards those who are different from us might stop us from meeting Him. Possibly the weight of our self-serving behaviors threatens to undo the most vulnerable among us. Maybe our chosen road in life is less about meeting and worshipping the Messiah and more about getting through the holidays unscathed by human emotion, spiritual need or cause to dirty our hands for others. Or could it be that there is no road to Redemption which is not littered with unfulfilled good intentions and broken promises?

It is time to get the chainsaw out and open the roadway to Bethlehem. It is time to clear the way for His arrival in out-of-the-way, podunk places where our littered lives still lay strewn about the streets, like the palms after Jesus arrived in Jerusalem. It is time we do the hard work of repentance, reconciliation and renewal in preparing for the Carpenter. His toolbelt will be on. Is yours? Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Lord God, I am quick to tell others how to prepare their lives to receive Him, let me not be so quick to look away from the mirror and get to work on my own life. Amen.



## SECOND FRIDAY OF ADVENT

“The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf and the young lion will feed together, and a little child will lead them.”

**Isaiah 11.6 CEB**

“[DuBois Center] is where my mind and body yearn to be when I seek peace.” Chrystal Ruhmann

They are so diametrically opposed, wolf and lamb, leopard and goat, calf and lion! One should devour the other, one is a predator and the other the hunted, one injects fear the other encourages peace, one is a sign of dominance the other a sign of subservience yet, there they are, all of them in one place, a family as it were. What sort of upside down, turned over, crazy, mixed up sort of world is it that this Messiah will usher in, one might wonder?

And then you come to DuBois Center, a hub of biodiversity and learning, an isolated garden in the midst of the plains and an out-of-the-way, podunk place where sacred lessons are taught on holy ground by the most unexpected of teachers God could ever have sent. This is the place where the mighty horse and the young human become friends and walk the paths together. This is the place where deer and opossum are as likely to use the paths as campers and counselors. This is the place where troubled waters at home become the waters upon which parent and child, grandparent and grandchild, neighbor and friend will likely row a canoe, walk like Jesus on the waters with the help of a water mat, or cast a line to fish, not so much hoping to catch something, but to reel in an answer to a question of the heart. This is the place where miracles happen in relationships, where people discover and rejoice in their similarities, where differences are regarded as gifts to be worked out and where God’s sense of ‘good’ in Creation finds definition in how folk treat and respect one another. This is the place where the burning off of dead grasses will open space for the emergence of Buffalo Clover, where honey bees find new homes and pollinate the world around them, where a patient soul can tend to the migration of birds in both Fall and Spring, and where an observant watcher might see the birth of a star or even a star announcing a birth.

What sort of upside down, turned over, crazy, mixed up sort of world is it that this Messiah will usher in? I’m not certain, but know this: God has a way of using out-of-the-way, podunk places to show us.

Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Lord of heavenly surprises and earthly amazement, come confound us with your Wisdom and Understanding. Amen.



## SECOND SATURDAY OF ADVENT

“They won’t harm or destroy anywhere on my holy mountain. The earth will sure be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, just as the water covers the sea.”

**Isaiah 11.9 CEB**



“ . . . the thing I enjoyed the most [about DuBois Center] was the solitude . . . At night, there were only the sounds of the night.” June Benedick

Have you ever listened to the snow? Just stood there in the midst of the snowfall and took it in, tending to every sound? It is quieter, you know, in the times when it is colder and the snowflakes are thinner and lighter. The closer to the freezing point the temperature, the heavier the snow, the heavier the snow the more you are aware of the sound snow makes. Take the temperature down towards zero and the snow becomes light and feathery, causing barely a stir as each flake floats down.

Now, of course, if you add wind into the equation, the blunt force of a weather front bearing down upon you, sleet mixed in or, just for effect, lightning and thunder, then all bets are off. In those moments snow, like rain, can be pounding, harsh and even hurtful and all divine images of beauty are left at the door as you go running in for cover.

So it is, I imagine, with the One who comes. In that day heaven and earth will be silenced, except for the sound of angels rejoicing. Blessings will be falling as lightly as snow and the purity of the vision will be bright as snow on a Winter’s morning, causing women, men and children to hush their voices and listen in awe as Peace enters the land. As surely as the water covers the sea, so the respect and honor of the people will cover the earth as Holiness arrives and takes His place.

An Advent morning such as this makes me stop and think of such things, to pray with desire for such visages, to hope upon hope for such rampant Stillness, to long for that Appearance which makes mute the world’s chaos. Easily, even unwittingly, DuBois Center invites the weary traveler to witness the arrival of the Sacred in the midst of the mundane, like snow powerfully and quietly finds its way to the ground and God’s Holy Mountain is named and defined on earth, as it is in Heaven. For thus we watch, for thus we wait, for thus we prepare. Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Remind me, Lord, that your Holy Mountain is not just ‘out there somewhere’, but right here next to me, before me, inside of me, waiting to receive you in Peace. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.



## THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

“The desert and the dry land will be glad;  
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom like the crocus.”

### Isaiah 35.1 CEB

“To me DuBois Center is ‘church’ (and I love church), but without buildings of brick walls, stained glass, organs and pianos, green, blue or wine colored carpet, banners, elaborate religious symbols, pews or chairs.” Priscilla Self

Advent is a time to put aside our certainties, to let go of our stiff-necked ways and seriously consider the God who does not regard our expectations as limitations upon that which

God is preparing to reveal.

God’s Creative Imagination continues to spin the cosmos and everything beyond the cosmos into being, so what makes us think,

even if only for a nanosecond, that God is perfectly predictable? That God will always do as God has always done? That God will always be as God always has been? That God’s Work can be packaged up, boxed in or shipped out as we think is most acceptable? Especially when it comes to the Birth Narrative of Jesus?

Who would have considered an icy coating on a bush like that of being a blossom on the crocus? Who among us could imagine a desert dancing or dry land giving thanks with abundance? Who in the world could fathom a wilderness rejoicing in colorful beauty or a church existing without walls? They all seem so farfetched, unbelievable and fantastic that they well could be the ramblings of an

eccentric prophet speaking to Judah and Jerusalem of Deliverance, even as they are being annexed to the Assyrian empire. Oh, wait. That is what this text is, a reimagination

of current circumstances into something far beyond our capacity for which to dream.

God’s coming Liberation will be nothing like what has transpired before or ever will happen again. Palaces will be as rubble

and sanctuaries will be empty. Kings will be paupers and presidents will bow in awe. The unseen will be Glorious and the unheard will sing Joy. The forgotten will be Honored and the downtrodden will stand and see Peace. Put away your tired pageants, quiet your weathered carols, still your usual readings and watch! A new day is coming – and places like DuBois Center announce it.

Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Lord, shatter my illusion of understanding with the reality of your Authority made new this day. Amen.





## THIRD MONDAY OF ADVENT

“They will burst forth into bloom, and rejoice with joy and singing.

They will receive the glory of Lebanon, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon.

They will see the Lord’s glory, and the splendor of our God.”

**Isaiah 35.2 CEB**

“I love DuBois [because] there is no need to pretend .... You are able to just be yourself [in the midst of] God’s beauty and creation.” Kelly (Klemp) Neighbors

“Comme ci, comme ca” (Come see, come saw) is a French phrase which can be loosely translated as, ‘Like this, like that’, there is no one way to see something. Comme ci, comme ca.

Yet, in Advent, God is insistent that there is something coming which God wants us to see in one particular manner, one which will startle everything in its tracks. Nothing will be the same, no one will be unchanged. It will not be a matter of how humanity perceives what is being done for the sake of our salvation, but it has everything to do with how God desires humanity to perceive what is being done on our behalf. Not unlike a parent trying to find the words to explain how a child should prepare to live out the days ahead, God says to us, ‘Look! Blooming beauty! Joyous songs! Nations lifted in glory! My Splendor in your eyes!’ And our response? We look at a picture of ice droplets on the lake and say, ‘How cute’, completely missing the reflection that they are of the Creator or even pausing a moment to wonder how they formed. ‘How cute.’ Comme ci, comme ca.

Too often we are more intrigued by what other people think is important or by what is going viral than we are mindful of God’s labors on our behalf. We pretend to be something that we are not just to impress others who will only accept us as they want us to be, not as we are. The crazy thing about what God is doing is that . . . as God created you just as you are to be you always as you are, so God births Jesus to be Jesus, just as He is where He is. No pretend, no games, no this, no that, just reality: God’s reality. Imagine that! Flourishing Hope in dry valleys!

Some are searching for their visions in the cities, others seek them among the nations, still others will not be satisfied until they have tested the deepest waters of the Amazon still, God chooses to appear as only God might appear where God can appear – and of such are two ice droplets formed on Lake DuBois just outside of Oak Lodge. Do you see them? Can you see God? Watch.

Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Lord, transform my wishy-washy faith in the gift of Your Advent beauty. Amen.



## THIRD TUESDAY OF ADVENT



“Strengthen the weak hands, and support the unsteady knees.”  
**Isaiah 35.3 CEB**

“I am looking forward to my twins growing up with the love of God’s devotion and friendships through Camp DuBois.”  
Bonnie Lair

When I was about 10 years old, I climbed up the outside of a concrete stave silo, ring by ring, not having the sense God

gave a goose concerning the use of a ladder, whether on the outside of the silo or the one in the chute. I thought nothing of the climb, the height, nor the danger, even when I tumbled about 6 feet into the silo on silage and couldn’t get out. I had done what I set out to do, which was to retrieve a target arrow I had ‘accidentally’ shot into the open silo. My parents were not amused. My older brother had to get me out. I was told not to do it again, period. I smiled. The thrill of it all was not lost on me.

Today, though I love to fly, I am not a fan of heights. If I look at a picture of someone on a tightrope or the at the edge of a canyon, the bottoms of my feet become all tingly and my hands turn cold. An explanation is beyond me yet, even still, once upon a time I climbed up the outside of a concrete stave silo and survived.

So it is with this nice little bridge between Oak Lodge and Hickory Lodge at DuBois Center. You better believe I thank God for good engineers and carpenters every time my feet take the rest of my body across this span. Add a few inches of snow and, ‘Shazam!’, you have the ingredients for knocking knees and weak hands about ten feet out into the crossing. If God had wanted me over there quickly, God would have given me wings. I’ll go the long way around by the road.

There are those among us for whom Advent is a little climb up the silo, then there are others for whom Advent is a walk across this snow-covered bridge. Into our third week of preparing to receive the Presence of God, the prophet reminds us to take special care of those with us for whom this is an especially hard journey. Maybe they are afraid, maybe Advent and Christmas do not have good memories, maybe this is one of those ‘firsts’ in grief, maybe this is a time of looking in the mirror and not liking what is seen or maybe they are just a bit tired. Regardless, do not be haughty about it. Remember, Advent reminds us that we all are in need of some sort of saving. Yours may not be as awkwardly apparent, but it is just as needful.

Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Holy One, strengthen my trembling knees and warm my cold hands in the Gift of your Salvation. Amen.



### THIRD WEDNESDAY OF ADVENT

“Say to those who are panicking: “Be strong! Don’t fear! Here’s your God, coming with vengeance; with divine retribution God will come to save you.”

#### Isaiah 35.4 CEB

“I grew up in a podunk town .... It wasn’t until I went to camp at DuBois that I finally felt at peace.”  
Ann (Sterrett) Gilcrease

Most geese migrate. They fly South in the Fall in those majestic ‘V’ formations, then fly North in the Spring, having added to their number so that the formations are even larger. Most geese migrate.

Which makes me wonder why some geese don’t migrate. Do they not fear the Winter? Do they not worry about having enough to eat? About having unfrozen water in which to swim and from which to drink? Are they not concerned about predators, whether on shore or from the waters below? Or has the changing climate lured them into some sort of false confidence, turning off centuries of instinct and conditioning for the ease of not having to strain on a long flight? I’m not sure, yet suspect that some ornithologist has a clue or an answer that would make perfect sense. Still, there they are, swimming in DuBois Lake in the middle of Winter. What can they be thinking?

What is it like to trust unquestioningly? To allow your days to reflect a sense of peace? To swim in the waters where you are, until you feel moved to fly to another place where you can feed?

Panic is what causes the geese to scatter over the field of hunters. Understanding and



conditioning are what guard them against the reaches of Winter. Confidence is what causes geese to fly high in formation towards a place where only instinct can take them. Strength is what gets them there. Truth be told, human beings are not so much different from geese.

We long to find a place where we are at peace, to measure its shorelines and scout out places of safety for feeding. We carefully test the waters and stay close to those we know best and, when conditions change, we fly away, sometimes just for a bit and at other times a long way away. It often depends on the people with whom we hang out.

The Advent season is a time for taking account of where we are, the choices we make and the directions we are headed. It is not a time of panic, but a season of faith, believing that God is coming to make all things right, to protect God’s own and to bring all people safely home, much like a gaggle of geese following their leader across the skies. DuBois Center has much to teach us about the one who comes and the geese are a part of that lesson. Are you watching? Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Cause my wings to fly in the strength of your Presence and Deliverance, God. Amen.

## THIRD THURSDAY OF ADVENT

“Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be cleared.”

### Isaiah 35.5 CEB

[At DuBois] “We learned group dynamics by studying the herd. We experienced the unconditional love of the horses. Many life lessons were learned “under the radar”.” Sue Schmidt Wilson

Even if you did not have sight to see them or hearing to hear them, your nose would tell you where the horses were at DuBois Center. There is something full of delight, mystery, knowing and warmth



in the smell of a horse, just ask anyone who tends to them and loves them. The horses of DuBois are a gift of God among us and are easily some of the best teachers on the property. If you don't believe me, look at where the horse in the foreground is headed: to see if the person who just brought the fresh bale of hay remembered to

completely chain the gate shut, preventing a mid-Winter romp of the herd! Ah, the things neither we, nor the horses, will ever forget . . . and the ways they keep us on our toes!

If so among horses, how much more so with God? The coming of the Lord is all around us and the things which once kept us from experiencing such a Gift are swept away in Love. Those who cannot see will perceive it, those who cannot hear will listen to its sound – and the heavens will declare God's Arrival and earth will echo their Praise. Remember God's ongoing history of salvation!

Remember how God has delivered you: from anonymity, from slavery, from hunger, from thirst, from wandering, from selfishness, from self-righteousness, from those who oppressed, from those who stole your dignity, from those who caused you to question, from those who taught you never to question, from those who can kill the body but not the soul . . . Remember.

Advent is not about testing the fences, but in giving thanks for the One who provides Freedom.

Advent is not about running off to escape but, rather, of running to the One who Cares. Advent is about knowing your place in God's herd, where everyone is welcome and all are safe and tended to along the way. Advent is about watching for the One who comes to take us by the halter and safely lead us Home.

Amazing the sacred stories a horse can teach if only we are willing to learn. Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Before I just walk by the pasture ignoring your Gifts, cause me to linger and give thanks for the One who comes that we might see You, hear You and praise You, O God. Amen.





## THIRD FRIDAY OF ADVENT

“Then the lame  
will leap like the  
deer, and the  
tongue of the  
speechless will  
sing. Waters will  
spring up in the  
desert, and  
streams in the  
wilderness.”

**Isaiah 35.6 CEB**

“When I am in deep thought, somehow memories of DuBois seep into the center of that thought, not only in my mind, but in my heart and soul.” Cara (Magee) Johnston

What is it about this out-of-the-way, podunk place – that you can never escape it? Were I to see the lame leap like the deer, it would be here. Were I to hear the tongue of the speechless sing, it would be here. It is here where waters well up to quench the thirst in the desert of my soul. It is here where streams flow defiantly on in the wilderness of my choices. It is here where God makes Divine Pronouncements in the tender and unexpected paths of the hills, valleys and lakes. It is here that God introduces the coming Kingdom as Counselors teach, Cooks feed, Chaplains listen and Nurses heal. It is here that God astounds the established community with Uncommon Hospitality, welcoming the wounded, the challenged, the diverse, the marginalized and the forgotten. It is here where God’s Future for us begins to seep into our memory and cling tightly to our being, inspiring the poet to write and the painter to paint, the photographer to click the camera and the author to record the moment, the one lost along the way to find their way home and the one so busy in themselves to stop and find their way back. Who could have imagined how God could use such a place?

Who could have imagined Bethlehem? Or, for that matter, DuBois Center?

Politicians promise us the world, if we will only trust them with all which is our world. Corporations promise us ease, if we will only get over our dis-ease and pledge obeisance to their way. Technology promises us progress and advancement, if we will only we will kneel before the electronic gods, pledging allegiance to their wares. Religion promises us salvation, if only we buy into the dogma, liturgy and rituals which have nothing to do with faith.

God offers us Good News, then comes to us in an out-of-the-way, podunk place, not because we trusted God or gave God our money or gave God our attention or bought into all the dogma, liturgy and rituals. No, God comes to us – precisely because God is God – God keeps Covenant, from Beginning to Beginning. Such Goodness causes the lame to leap, the speechless to sing and the deep in thought to remember and rejoice. Wondrous are the gifts of out-of-the-way, podunk places. Thanks be to God. Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for clinging to us, long after we have let go of You. Such Love changes everything. Amen.



### THIRD SATURDAY OF ADVENT

“The burning sand will become a pool, and the thirsty ground, fountains of water.”

**Isaiah 36.7a CEB**

“No judgement. No ridicule. Only love and acceptance and the feeling of belonging.” Chrystal  
Ruhmann

Have you ever wondered why God chose Mary? If we believe what we read in the Gospel according to Luke, it was because she was engaged to Joseph, who was of the lineage of David. So . . . because she was engaged to Joseph, God favored her with the privilege of birthing of God’s Son so prophecy would be fulfilled. Hmmmmm. Not to be sacrilegious, but doesn’t that narrow the field of God’s vision and possibilities just a bit? That God would only choose Mary because of the man to which she is engaged? I really have a hard time with that notion, because it is not honoring Mary, but burdening her with a boatload of prophecy-keeping over which she has had no control. This makes God the keeper of all thing’s ‘men’ – and women are here only to serve that notion. I just cannot buy it. That is not the God we meet in Jesus. This neither honors Mary, nor kneels in awe of God.

I do believe with all my heart God favored Mary, God honored Mary, God chose Mary, God even called Mary. Not because of her engagement which, though convenient for prophetic purposes, does not celebrate Mary as a person worthy of God’s choosing, but because she listened, obeyed and was willing to serve God. Mary knew God and trusted God’s Authority and sense of commitment to Covenant with the people of Israel. She was as a teenager who walked upon the shores of DuBois Lake and was moved to awe by the sights around her. She was as one who had heard the stories of Creation and in the sands upon the shores saw her own place in Abraham’s descendants. She was as one who looked up into the night skies over the woods and believed as the stars filled the heavens, so she was numbered and counted as one who mattered to God here on earth. In the God she knew and trusted, there was no judgement or ridicule because of who she was as a woman, but only love, acceptance and the feeling of belonging because she was a child of God.

She listened, she questioned, then she believed and she served, not as a minion of a prophecy, but as a person whose intrinsic value was in her DNA as one of God’s own before ever the Story was written. So, it is with you and me, right here on the shores of DuBois Center. Believe it? Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Cosmos Creator and Divine Caller, create in me, call forth in me, the faith to serve You.  
Amen.



## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

“A highway will be there. It will be called The Holy Way. The unclean won’t travel on it, but it will be for those walking on that way.” **Isaiah 35.8 CEB**

“At DuBois, all of those things were left behind . . . We could be whomever we wanted to be and we were accepted for that. Accepted without all of the preconceived notions of who we were at home.”

Scott Thompson

It seems so simple it becomes nearly impossible to grasp: We have to move on before we can be accepted without all of the preconceived notions of who we were at home. On the road to Bethlehem, do you think Mary and Joseph were worried about what people thought about them in Nazareth? About how the neighbors and Joseph’s carpentry customers must have gossiped concerning this somewhat scandalous relationship of a man engaged to a woman already pregnant with someone else’s child? Or, along the way, do you imagine they found themselves walking The Holy Way, less and less concerned about the thoughts of those they left behind and more filled with wonderment about what and Who was before them?

Sometimes we have to go somewhere else to become the most authentic version of who we are and who we are called to be. It just cannot be helped. Time spent at DuBois Center, as with a trip to Bethlehem, opens the door for new things to happen which the cloak of ‘knowing who you are and what you have done all your life’ would never allow to see the Light of Day.

From this perspective, Jesus speaking the

words in Matthew 13.57b, “Prophets are honored everywhere except in their own hometowns and in their own households.”, was more than an observation concerning His current experience, it was a naming of His Legacy from Mary and Joseph’s journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem: It isn’t until you travel to another place and spend time among people who didn’t know you ‘before’ that you are able to discover the Voice being birthed from you to speak, the Love which is in you to live and the Difference which is of you to make in all the world. Distance can change all the parameters of accepted conversations, enlarge the scope of possibility regarding what God can do and allow the soul space to consider how God might be doing a new thing in you. Come with me to DuBois Center or Bethlehem, either one, and explore how God is waiting to birth something new in you. This has never been a ‘once upon a time’ thing. God is still speaking,

Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.



**Prayer:** Pull me, drive me, move me, summon me, send me to be more in You, O God, and there find who You are shaping all of us to be together. Amen.

## FOURTH MONDAY OF ADVENT

“Even fools won’t get lost on it; no lion will be there, and no predator will go up on it. None of these will be there; only the redeemed will walk on it.” **Isaiah 35.8b-9 CEB**

“I served as the world’s ‘okayest’ Counselor (let’s be honest, there are great Counselors . . . and *okay* Counselors) . . . Along the way, I met summer acquaintances that I still cherish to this day – not to mention the wife I found along the way.” Aaron Fuchs

The sun is to the southeast, based on the directions of the shadows. The fact that snow is covering the water over which this deck normally stands would be an indication that it was, first, cold enough to freeze the lake and, second, winterish enough to hold a fair amount of snow upon the lake ice. That the perspective of this scene is from above, on the patio of Oak Lodge, says the photographer decided that, first, it was too pretty a scene not to take the picture and, second, it was too cold and probably too slippery on the deck to go down to the deck itself to take a photo close-up. So, here we are, taking in beauty from a distance.

The Good News of the Gospel is this: contrary to what Bette Midler sang in her hit, “From a Distance”, God has chosen *not* to watch from a distance, never has, never will. The song may be a hit, but the lyrics are, at best, inaccurate. Unlike the photographer who took this wonderful picture while choosing to remain in the relative safety and comfort of Oak Lodge’s patio, God has been in process throughout the course of Biblical history of sliding down the hill, coursing over the ice and snow and coming to the place where we can best know that God is ‘Immanuel’, ‘With Us’. God does nothing from a distance. Even Creation itself is birthed by the Word and Breath of God and is found, in the sight of God, to be good. How much closer does God need to get?

It is only when we are *with* each other on the road, *next* to each other in our labors, or *beside* one another in our witness that we are most likely to find the one, that One, who has been meant to spend all of time with us on the way, whether that is during Summer camp, while taking Winter pictures or anywhere in-between. It is all about connections. God knows that, DuBois Center lives it,



Bethlehem reveals it anew.

Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Thank You, God, for being close as breath even as we view You in the farthest Star. Amen.





## CHRISTMAS EVE

“The Lord’s ransomed ones will return and enter Zion with singing, with everlasting joy upon their heads.” **Isaiah 35.10a CEB**

“The boathouse holds a special place in my heart. This is where we officially started dating, where he proposed and where we took wedding photos. [We were] married at Deer Run at Camp in Sept. 2012. It was always a dream of mine to get married at camp . . .” Carrie (Brazelton) Clayton

One might argue that ‘home’ is in your heart, not a building, nor a piece of geography. Home is that which you hold dear in family, friends, experiences, hopes and dreams. Home is that gathering outside of which you feel adrift, wandering, even lost. Home calls to us over the miles and years, her voice as sweet as honey from the rock, her embrace as powerful as a Mother holding a Child.

Though home is often identified with a place or building, home is about what happens in those places or buildings. Home is about connections . . . and God has always had a dream of fully sharing the Home of God’s heart with all of Creation and, to that end, came to a little piece of geography, an out-of-the-way, podunk place like Deer Run to be birthed in a setting not that much removed from the boathouse. God is the One who is completing every connection, marrying us, that we might experience Home along the way . . . and the Groom is Jesus.

I love a good wedding! I love the way a bride and groom look at each other, the tenderness they speak in their vows, the manner in which they hold hands, touch, even kiss. I adore family pictures, generational celebrations complete with tired, crying little ones and older ones so full of joy the corners of their mouths touch their ears in smiles. And, I rejoice in wedding banquets and dancing!

It doesn't matter the food or how much, the music or how good. What matters is everyone sharing the Joy, like angels filling the night sky with singing and shepherds running in from the fields, animals of all sorts gathering around and the newest of family members being fed, swaddled and lullabied to sleep. Home comes to those who wait, who watch, who believe. The Groom is arriving, be ready.

Something to ponder on the Advent journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Cause me this day to hear and heed only the music You bring - and to be ready to dance with You, O Lord. Amen.





## CHRISTMAS DAY

“Happiness and joy will overwhelm them; grief and groaning will flee away.”

### Isaiah 35.10b CEB

“It definitely shaped my childhood in a way I don’t think I can fully describe, even now. It was a place for fun, but also a chance to reconnect with nature and God. It always felt like holy ground to me.” Amanda Gaines-Borders

As the story goes, there was no place for them in the Lodge or in any of the cottages, even though they had made reservations online in advance before the deadlines and held the email confirmation letters in their hands. So, they picked up their backpacks, extended the handles on their suitcases and walked out of the parking lot, trudged across the dam road, then made an immediate right into the horse barn, where they found lodging in a stall. Of all the things this young couple had heard about the hospitality of this place, the lineage of faithfulness and service which surrounded the community, even the talk of a new building to accommodate more travelers in private rooms with each having their own bathroom and shower, nothing could have prepared them for this: childbirth, on their own, with little more than horse blankets, sleeping bags and straw to comfort them, all in a world busily praying for a Messiah, while doing the will of the government. It seemed an ironic and cruel dream . . .

Until the side door of the barn slid creakily open on rusty wheels, then first one Summer counselor peered in, then another, then another, until all twenty-something of the counselors stood around the couple and their Child. The light of a nearby new Star shining through the cracks between the boards of the barn walls made each of them shine like angels. The counselors were silent except two: he was oddly named as Shark-bait and she was named Sparkle. Those two, they kept chattering on about hearing music from across the lake with guitars and tambourines, choirs of kids and strangely wonderful camp songs! So, they came running to see what was up and, being led by the sound, their

journey led them to the barn, which really surprised them, because no-one was to stay in the barn, it is a human health hazard and you never know what could happen in a place like that. They kept talking on, like there was no tomorrow for them to tell their story until, finally, one of their leaders, Mama Bear, silenced them with a look and they all knelt down and thanked God for allowing them to walk on this holy ground and see the sight of Salvation before them. Then, they left, rolling the door closed behind them.

The couple had never imagined it would be anything like this. Not even Gabriel could prepare them for such an experience yet, here they were, living into God's will as it had been told them. It would have been nice if God had told them the little caveat about a hay rack having to serve as their first cradle, but that can be straightened out soon enough with a few boards, a hammer, saw and a few finishing nails. Joseph needed something to do anyway, since feeding a baby wasn't quite up his alley and he had never signed up for the advance course in diaper changing.

He had noticed something which troubled him, though, just outside the barn. It was a sign which simply read, "To Rustic Camping Area" with an arrow pointed away from where they had come. He wondered how much more rustic the camping could be somewhere else, over being in a barn with a baby. He wondered, too, where that arrow was pointing. It seemed like it could be towards Egypt, but that is a long way from where they are in this out-of-the-way, podunk place. It couldn't be there . . . well, time will tell.

For today, Mary needed her rest, their son, Jesus, was content seemingly taking stock of everything His eyes saw and Joseph needed to finish the forms which were required of them. Seems you cannot stay anywhere, not even in a barn in Bethlehem, without letting the Camp Director know where you are, how many days you are staying and if you expect them to provide meals for you in the lodge.

"Just another day in paradise", thought Joseph, "in this little out-of-the-way, podunk place" . . . and little did he know how close that was to the Truth.

Have a blessed Christmas, from an out-of-the-way, podunk place like Bethlehem, here in DuBois Center, Illinois. May His Peace rule all Creation wherever such Peace might need to find you.

Something to ponder on the Christmas Day journey, a gift of DuBois Center.



## THE FIRST DAY OF CHRISTMAS

“Praise the Lord! Praise  
the Lord from heaven!

Praise God on the  
heights!”

**Ps. 148.1 CEB**

(of DuBois Center) “To  
know such beauty at such a  
young age. It pales  
everything by comparison.”  
Kelly Downs



I remember wondering about this particular star at a very early age. Back in the days of my youth there were no streetlights, no dusk-to-dawn lights in the yard and not much else which would pollute the darkened night sky, other than the stars and moon which shone above. Growing up on a dairy farm, away from the hustle and bustle of even the smallest of communities, was such a blessing, one that continually fills my heart with gratitude today. At night, when you take the time to just watch, you can see God’s creational activity at work with stars pointing the way to the new things which are there, just beyond you in the distance.

This particular star, Antares, which literally means ‘red star’, held my attention like no other, mostly because of its color and size. I have to confess never having looked it up in the complete collection of the World Book Encyclopedias which we had in our home (the ancient form and predecessor of Google and Sky Map). No, instead I just marveled at it, twinkling with such vivid and wondrous colors there in the depth of the sky above. It was only later in life when my curiosity got the best of me that research led me to the constellation of Scorpion and beating heart of Scorpion, Antares. How aptly named!

Today, even in the midst of rampant light pollution unlike any other time in history, Antares continues to shine brightly, drawing attention, inviting wonderment, teasing our senses with beauty and hearkening the soul to consider holy mysteries far beyond grasping. From the places of quiet and peace which is DuBois Center itself, the Green DuBois Initiative appeals to the star-gazers of every generation, wise folk who understand that not everything worth knowing is found on earth, for it is in the darkness that the light seems to shine most brightly, that direction seems most sure and that a sense of call seems most imminent.

No one is absolutely certain what tipped off wise folk in the days of Jesus to be watching for the extraordinary sight few others seemed to perceive, yet they saw it and, being people of curiosity and inquisitiveness, they chose not to stay on the farm and wonder . . . they went to see. So, should we. The Christmas journey is just beginning. Something to ponder on the Christmas journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Lord God, open my eyes to You and create in me a willingness to follow where You lead. Amen.

## THE SECOND DAY OF CHRISTMAS

Praise God, all of you who are his messengers!

Praise God, all of you who comprise his heavenly forces! **Ps. 148.2 CEB**

“DuBois Center was my favorite place to spend time when I was growing up. I just loved being there. The horses, the lake, the food (those rolls, amiright?!?[sic])” Amanda Gaines-Borders

There is a voice of praise rising out of the prairie soils found in DuBois Center. Its scientific name is *trifolium stoloniferum*, but to the people who know its beauty and history it is simply called, Running Buffalo Clover or Buffalo Clover. It is an endangered species of perennial clover native to the eastern and midwestern United States and was believed to be extinct for quite some time, still remaining as one of the most imperiled plants in North America. Yet, on the grounds of DuBois Center, Buffalo Clover continues to make its appearance as only such plants might, on their own terms and in their own good time, delightfully rewarding the patient, faithful souls who watch for it in around the camp.

It is believed that this particular plant relies greatly upon woodland disturbance created by large animals, such as bison . . . or kids and horses at camp, to stimulate their growth, flowering from mid-May through mid-June and with the potential to provide fruits in July. What better voice to proclaim Hope in the midst of obscurity, to focus praises to God while surrounded by despair or to declare a New Day when all others are ready to write you off as a lost cause?



Such is at the core of Christmas: Israel is written off as having any hope; the Israelite people are governed by Rome; much of institutional faith has become the servant of the government; and the people themselves are surrounded by despair. Some might ask, what kind of a God allows such things to happen? But a better question might be, what sort of a people allow the God who loves them to become secondary to the culture in which they find themselves?

The implausible part of the Christmas story is that God did not, has not and will not remain silent. God creates a big disturbance in the woods no-one saw coming. Some might feel themselves entitled to know God's plans and others believe themselves to be privileged in witnessing what God is doing but, truth be told, God has little time or energy for such people. God makes a habit of doing what God wants to do, where God wants to do it, as God determines is best for all the people, thus the birth of Jesus in an out-of-the-way, podunk place to people others have written off as dispensable, complete with witnesses no sane person would ever believe . . . kind of like finding Running Buffalo Clover in large numbers and spreads in DuBois Center. Who would have ever thought it possible?

On this Second Day of Christmas we are reminded that not every angel's voice is from above, that sometimes shepherds in the fields are also observant botanists around camp, and care needs to be taken before declaring extinct any hope of being a part of new life. God is Still Speaking, if only we listen, if only we watch. Something to ponder on the Christmas journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** While I am looking down in prayerful gratitude, O God, surprise me with a new Reason to look up in praise, in discovering You all over again. Amen.



## THE THIRD DAY OF CHRISTMAS

“Sun and moon,  
praise God! All  
of you bright  
stars, praise  
God!”

**Ps. 148.3 CEB**



(My fondest memories of DuBois are) “Alone in the hay loft. Staff horse rides behind the barn. Stopping a hayride on Deer Run’s dam – to gaze at the stars.” Aaron Fuchs

Rare is the person who has not seen one. You have seen them, I have seen them, others have seen them, maybe not intentionally, most likely not because we had set ourselves out to be witness to their appearance, yet in that happenstance moment there appeared a flash in the peripheries of our vision, a ‘shooting star’, if you will . . . and we were left in awe. Yes, most likely it was a meteorite or some sort of space debris violently crashing into or along the atmosphere of the earth and, yes, in some cases it might have been a comet tracing its path along the heavens, but there it is – and to the surprised observer, the holy has been made imminent.

Then how much more so the appearance, the absolute delight and brightness of a Baby born in the government controlled, religiously oppressed areas of Judah? How much more powerful the stories of shepherds running in from the fields or folks traveling from distant lands to see where such a shooting star may have come to rest and what sort of impact it had? How much more sacred the news of angel choirs and a prophetically named Child as, both, their Audience and Benefactor? In the days of Jesus’ birth, whether long or short, journeys gave those on the way time to think, space to really contemplate and silence through which to measure one’s steps. No radios, AM or FM bands, no Sirius satellite or Bluetooth, no tapes, cd’s or televisions hooked up to occupy the miles, just the people who were with you and the thoughts running through your own mind to shape your faith and hopes . . . and, that one exceptionally bright shooting Star, which seemed never to touch the earth, nor to leave its appointed placement. It was as nothing observed before, nor ever will be again, and those on the way sought out its meaning.

Stars do that to us, you know. We observe their shining locations and name their imagined constellations. We offer opportunities to name them for loved ones, selling for money that which was never ours to own, pretending to be giving a gift of love, while handing to another a piece of paper indicating a proprietorship which has as much legal authority as the black hole in space. Such are what stars can do to us. God knows that . . . and so God points the way with a Star, that we might dream of a new day and travel towards a brighter future for us all.

Something to ponder on the Christmas journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Starlit God, Manger-born Christ, keep us steadfast on the journey to find You and serve You. Amen.



## THE FOURTH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

"You highest heaven,  
praise God! Do the  
same, you waters  
that are above the  
sky! Let all of these  
praise the Lord's  
name because God  
gave the command  
and they were  
created!

**Ps. 148.4-5 CEB**

"DuBois Camp is a place  
where I made life long  
friends and I thank God  
for the beautiful place. "

Carrie (Brazelton)  
Clayton

Where is that place for you? You know, that place where magic happens, where mystery unfolds, where dreams are transformed into reality, where what could never be spoken becomes the language which will never cease? Where is that place where earth touches sky and starlight tickles the fantastic, where heavenly sounds become earthly rejoicing and earthly visions find their cosmic expression? Where is that place where childhood hopes took root, where the games of a day long forgotten became the joy of a new dimension in living, or the unexpected delights in growing up became transfigured by the light of daily revelations? Where is that place for you?

Is it like a boathouse along the lake? Or a horse barn next to the pasture? On the paths where deer run to shelter? Or in the cottages along the shore?

Is yours a tree in the forest? Or the dew upon the May Apples? The gentle nuzzles of a steady steed standing next to you? Or the understanding paw upon your leg and lick on your face of a four-legged old friend who will not retire without you?

Can you imagine for a moment having someone else name your special place for you? Having another presume to name with whom you will share it? Being put upon by an insistent relative who requires you to name your loved ones as they choose, rather than yourself?



Can you imagine a special place with no expectation of privacy, no voice over who sees you there and no options concerning what transpires there? Can you imagine savoring a holy ground you have never walked or observed? Or a sacred pilgrimage you did not plan? Or receiving gifts you did not request?

Perhaps one of the most understated gifts DuBois Center offers and the Green DuBois Initiative celebrates is that of being a place which is like no other. In such a place one has the privilege of pondering the daily blessings away from the incessant grind, considering the things which we take for granted along with those for which we are still praying, and allowing the arms of God to encircle all which is life between the joys and struggles of being at peace where we are. I think Mary and Joseph would like such a place . . . and, perhaps, they do – in the ways we walk with them during this Christmastide.

Something to ponder on the Christmas journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Teach me to value these special places You lead me, O God, even when I am not ready. Amen.

## THE FIFTH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

“Praise the Lord from  
the earth, you sea  
monsters and all you  
ocean depths!”  
**Ps. 148.7 CEB**



“Without the distractions from tv, radio, school, work, parents, or popularity, we actually talked to each other. I mean really talked. We spent quality time with our friends, nature and God – 24/7.”  
Scott Thompson

You are never outside the Love of God.

Think about that for a moment. You are never outside the Love of God. Though the atheist denies God, God does not deny them. Though the agnostic is not certain of God, God is certain of them. Though a person worship God by some other name, God believes in them by the name God gives them. You are never outside the Love of God.

Distractions abound daily, in the myriads we are part of them, as many as are the stars they consume us: We have work to do, places to go, things to accomplish, calendar events to attend, expectations to meet, family demands, personal hopes, school and continuing education requirements, social media connections and updates, attention to loved ones, oversight by bosses, perspectives of coworkers – and in proportion to the growth of the list so diminishes our attention to God. Still, you are never outside the Love of God.

Though Roman rule demands your worship, God attends your praise. Though the religious institution insists on your allegiance, God receives your prayers. Though experts declare your ineffectiveness, God leads you in paths of righteousness. You are never outside the Love of God.

Take a moment and breathe. Breathe in as you take a moment at Deer Run Lake. Breathe out as you walk the paths of the Rustic Camp. Breathe in as you sit on the porch of Oak Lodge. Breathe out as you laugh and giggle with S'mores at a campfire. Breathe in the amazement of a bullfrog's deep bass voice. Breathe out wonder in the flight of a dragonfly. Breathe in Salvation being born in a place like this. Breathe out relief in discovering in a place like this a Mercy you never expected. Breathe in the songs of children filling the sky. Breathe out the ecstasy of receiving Love without merit. Breathe in the Breath of God, for in the gift of a Child born in such a place as this, Gods reminds you – and me – that we are never outside the Love of God. Breathe out, Praise the Lord. Something to ponder on the Christmas journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Love without beginning or ending, encompass my life in the Breath of Your Being. Amen.



## THE SIXTH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

“Do the same, fire and hail, snow and smoke, stormy wind that does what God says!”  
**Ps. 148.8 CEB**

“It is where my heart returns when I think of my love for Jesus and love of friends,  
of whom I made many.” Chrystal Ruhmann

Be who you are birthed to be to the glory of God!

Can there be a fire without heat? Or hail without frozen water? Or snow without flurries? Or stormy wind without things being blown about?

Can a flower blossom without a bloom? Or a tree provide shade without leaves? Can a cactus be prickly without spines? Or sands in the desert shift on their own?

Where does love find its beginning? Or the love of Jesus an ending? When does the love of friends leave us alone? Or can the deepest care of friends ever turn away?

Be who you are birthed to be to the glory of God!

Some wonder why God sent Jesus, I wonder how God continues sending Jesus. Some marvel over a Savior coming as a Baby, I marvel how this Baby continues to be Savior to us. Some insist that the Birth narrative never really happened as it was recorded, while I insist that, despite any recordings, Jesus is born again and again and again, in out-of-the-way, podunk places where less time is spent insisting on accuracy and more time is spent in receiving the Gift, however birthed.



Some require that all the prophetic jots and tittles be completed before any second coming of Jesus might occur, I believe that God has never felt compelled to meet any of our requirements for God to act in ways of Mercy and Grace, regardless the age.

Some say the Wise Men took years to make it to Bethlehem, others say it was days, I believe wise people in every age take whatever time they need to follow the signs before them on a pilgrimage of faith and discovery.

Some contend that there is an exception to every rule, I would contend that the birth of Jesus reminds us that there is no exception to God's gift of Covenant and the Love that entails, Friend-to-friend. Something to ponder on the Christmas journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Allow me the great privilege and humble gift of praising with Creation your Name, O God. Amen.

## THE SEVENTH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

“Do the same, you mountains, every single hill, fruit trees, and every single cedar!”  
**Ps. 148.9 CEB**

(At DuBois) “I’m in a canoe in the middle of the lake, I feel its tranquility and see the surrounding woods as being a sanctuary of nature.” Cara (Magee) Johnston

A blessed New Year to you and yours!

Whether you are in the middle of a lake, the middle of the woods or the middle of the desert, you have in you the DNA of God and, thus, must live to praise the Source of your being!

I grew up the third of four boys. My oldest brother was the experimental son and got to try everything first.

He drove tractors first, drove the truck first, did chores first, learned to fix equipment first, built things first – and set the tone at school with all of the teachers, again, first. At school, as at home (in heaven as on earth) the rest of us were always compared to him: Your brother was always a good student; Your brother was always nice; Your brother was always doing good things for others – ad nauseum. At least I was not the second son and did not follow right after him.

Still, my next older brother continued the now established trend of setting the bar even higher by being the first to play in the band, play in the jazz band, hold offices in 4-H and F.F.A., and make a record (which was a big thing at that time) with the school dance band. Oh, the horrors of following those two! He was friends with everyone, so it seemed!

Suffice it to say, my younger brother had it made because of my concerted effort to lower the bar of efficiency and affability along the way. Long before it was trendy to play the

middle-child card, I knew my place and was certain my fate would be to stay in the shadows of my older, much more talented brothers, while trying to stay out of the way of

my younger brother who, as the youngest, got everything he wanted – or so I thought. Little did I know that the desert I thought I was in was actually an oasis offering me opportunities to find refreshment, develop my own

strengths and discern the manner in which I felt called to go.

Looking back, now with many years of context and understanding, I am not certain how my brothers put up with me, but I am glad they persevered for they are, without reservation, among my very best of friends . . . and my parents are saints. Because of them, not in spite of them, I found my voice and heard God’s Voice, I discovered my value in the Value God names in us all, and in the Trust of God came to trust in God the gift of Jesus we have been given. I praise the Source of my being with all my heart, mind and soul, like a sunflower in the woods. I pray the same for you.

Something to ponder on the Christmas journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** When my voice is silent, Lord, cause Your DNA in me to rise up and give You praise! Amen.





## THE EIGHTH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

“Do the same, you animals –  
wild or tame – you creatures  
that creep along and you  
birds that fly!

**Ps. 148.10 CEB**

“[DuBois] is a place to meet folk  
from all over the world; a place to  
be who you are without  
judgment; a place to explore your  
faith, learn about God and expand  
your beliefs.” Sue (Schmidt)  
Wilson



There is nothing quite as unnerving as walking along in the woods, just as the darkness overcomes the light, when seemingly out of nowhere a ‘swoosh’ passes near you, then a few moments later a Screech Owl laughs at your discomfort for all the world to hear. God’s little Henny Youngman of the woods (If you are too young to know who that is, Google him and listen to a few of his bits, then you will know what I mean by that reference). No one is exempt to the Screech Owl, their call piercing the soul with clarity and sometimes thought to be the voice of a person in distress calling out in the distance. The experience that day left me glad I had heard them before, yet still with goosepimples on my arms in the first moments of recognition.

Such as these praise God and welcome Baby Jesus into the world of DuBois Center. Screech owls, barn owls, falcons, hawks, turtledoves, quail, sparrows, nuthatches, cowbirds, rusty blackbirds, robins, cardinals, hummingbirds, bluebirds, wrens, meadowlarks, a wide variety of ducks and geese, and a myriad of other species, some better known than others, all sing their songs of glory. Whether perched in trees along the shores, swimming in the waters, from the center of fields or on the posts lining the fences throughout the grounds, these are the sentinels of hospitality and welcome, from God’s own Creation to Creation’s own God come to it. It is an amazing cacophony of sound, frequently blending as though in a church choir, creating a new composition with an avian chorus lifting every note to the heavens in praise. Incredible.

For many people, by the eighth day of Christmas the tree has been taken down, ornaments boxed and put away, tinsel disposed of in the trash, wrapping paper either recycled or straightened out for reuse (depending on how the gift was opened), gifts to be returned are lined up at the door or already taken care of and the radio stations have all dumped the Christmas carol programming for New Year trends and the latest artists. But, on the grounds of DuBois, the Lord’s chorus continues to sing His praise with unfettered and undiminished reckless abandon, allowing their voices to name the glory in their hearts. For them – and for those who choose to intentionally acknowledge it among the species of humans – Christmas is more than a day or a season, it is the core of their being: Christ is being born again and again and again for the sake of a world that is so busy going on to the next season that it loses any semblance of caring for the One who gives every season. Listen to the birds and learn: In the Baby of Bethlehem, DuBois Center is rejoicing, every day of the year. How about you? Something to ponder on the Christmas journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Let me not make of You a seasonal faith or a temporary joy, O God. Cause me to sing your praises each day. Amen.



## THE NINTH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

“Do the same, you  
kings of the earth and  
every single person,  
you princes and every  
single ruler on earth!”

**Ps. 148.11 CEB**

“At DuBois Center the  
wood’s floor supplies  
carpet for pretty tiny  
flowering plants and safety  
for small creatures.”

Priscilla Self

The Monarch butterfly, *danaus plexippus*, lives six to eight months, is approximately the size of a teacup, with a wingspan of 3.7 - 4.1 inches and an average weight ranging from .001 - .002 of an ounce (Yes, that is one to two thousandth of an ounce!) and yet has the strength, capacity and range to migrate up to 3,000 miles to California and Mexico in the winter. They primarily prefer milkweed plants as a food source and for that reason many of these luminescent beauties find their way in migration through the grounds and region of DuBois Center. Truly a Monarch among kings and monarchs, this stately and lithe creature flits its way in praise of the Newborn Savior with a grace and awe reserved for only a few in all of God’s kingdom . . . and its very being is in danger of disappearing from the earth.

Appropriate natural habitat and food sources are disappearing under the weight of human residential and business expansion, a reality which is complicated further by the continuing farm use of herbicides which eradicate milkweeds and other potential food sources in the fields and fence rows of their existence. As numbers of Monarch butterflies dwindle so, too, do the benefits they bring to the pollination cycle of flowering plants, farm fields and woodland regions. What once was taken for granted in the appearance, wonder and work of the Monarch and several of its cousins and friends in the butterfly world has now become the basis for a delighted exclamation by one of our grandchildren in our backyard, “Look, Papa! There is a butterfly!”, as they point to one, yes one butterfly lightly making its way around our flower beds. What once existed in abundance in our region is now in danger of disappearing altogether, which makes me wonder, ‘Who will sing the Monarch’s song of praise in the birth of Jesus if the Monarch no longer exists to sing?’

For that matter, who will sing your song of praise if you no longer exist to praise?

The Green DuBois Initiative takes such conversations and realities seriously, establishing opportunities and spaces for Monarchs to feed, rest, grow stronger and sing their praise. The same is true for you in the ministries of DuBois Center.

Something to ponder on the Christmas journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Lord God, remind me that my life and existence is intimately tied to that of the Monarch, as all of ours are to You. Amen.

## THE TENTH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

“Do the same, you young men – young women too! –  
You who are old together with you who are young!” **Ps. 148.12 CEB**

“I am able to live with confidence because I know that no matter what, I have a place in this world that holds my fondest memories and that same promise for future generations.”

Ann (Sterrett) Gilcrease

“Dad! Dad!” Imagine those words being spoken loudly to get your attention. Pretty easy, is it not? And, what parent among us does not immediately look around to see if it is our child calling when we hear those words? Now, imagine those same two words being spoken urgently in a whisper, as though both speaking a secret and still wanting to have your full attention. How much more quickly would you turn to see what the problem was?

That was precisely what happened as our youngest son and I did a ‘quiet walk’ through the woods of a friend a couple of years ago. Since I knew the trails and was more watchful about where we could go and still remain the most unnoticed in the woodlot, I led the way with our son following. We were nearly ready to move from one section of woods into another when I heard those words, in as direct and forceful a manner as our son could muster, “Dad! Dad!” I paused, careful to turn slowly, instinctively knowing by the way he said it that he was not in danger, but wanted me to see something he was seeing and there, not five or so yards behind him, was this tiny fawn following the both of us on wobbly legs along the path. It could not have been more than a few days old and I am quite certain Momma doe was somewhere close by carefully watching what was taking place, yet there it was, walking after us as though we could lead it home. It must have been hidden near where we passed, so camouflaged we did not see it until it got up and followed – and we were so quiet our passing did not give it reason to fear, so it sought us out.

It came up to us both, carefully inspecting, sniffing, eyeing us up, uncertain what to make of us, but not spooked by our being there

until, finally, realizing we were not going to lead it to Mom, it turned and wobbled back the way it had come. Momma doe must have let out a huge breath of relief, though I never heard it, as she watched her little one walk away from the predators in the woods, grateful no harm had come to her child. Perhaps, we were the ones most relieved, for we did not inadvertently interfere with nature’s order and were the ones most rewarded as God’s Creation came alive in a way we would never have imagined. Blessed. We were all blessed, young and old, alike.

One of the gifts the Green DuBois Initiative affords the one who seeks out God’s wonders in this place is the opportunity to have God’s Creation surprise you, causing you to urgently whisper a heads-up to another and to stop in watchful awe of how even the youngest among us make their way in praise of God along the paths of life. Newborns have a way of doing that, you know. Something to ponder on the Christmas journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** Aging or newborn, open us all to what you are revealing in Wonder this day and allow our praise to fill your years with unashamed Laughter and Peace. Amen.





## THE ELEVENTH DAY OF CHRISTMAS



“Let all of these praise the Lord’s name because only God’s name is high over all. Only God’s majesty is over earth and heaven.”

**Ps. 148.13 CEB**

“I worked at camp as a counselor and lifeguard for several years in the mid 90’s . . . I’m looking forward to my twins growing up with the love of God’s devotion and friendships through Camp DuBois.” Bonnie (Newlin) Lair

Have you ever just stood there in the sunshine looking at the shadow you cast? Have you ever wondered about the correlation between the length of your shadow and the purpose of your life? Have you ever contemplated the connection between your shadow and that of those who came before you?

How long are the shadows of the Wise Ones in every age?

We read their words in the Bible and in other books we hold dear, we study their sage quotes from places of hardship and despair, we consider their perspectives in life and death situations and we utter their phrases when most we need to call upon their hopefulness, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” Psalm 23.4 KJV

We lean into such shadows for comfort, support, direction and strength, even as we contemplate our place among them in the lives of generations to come. Do you think the Three Kings, the Wise Men, the Holy Ones of Jesus’ birth narrative, ever gave thought to such a thing? Did they muse over folk like you and me considering their journey as something along the kind of pilgrimage we would want to take? That their perseverance in locating and reaching an out-of-the-way, podunk place in order to bring gifts and worship a newly arrived Messiah would somehow inspire and encourage people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to follow a similar calling and pour out themselves at His feet? That their heeding the warning of a dream about returning to their country by a different road might give us pause today about doing the same things, the same ways, while expecting different outcomes no matter what?

Shadows can reach a long way. On the tee area of a golf course, your shadow might interfere with the drive of another golfer. The shadows of trees along a highway are fully capable of hiding the deer who just stepped into your lane as you approach. Shadows along the bank of a lake are a wonderful place to cast your fishing line on a hot Summer’s day in the hope of a strike. And, the shadows of those who inspire our lives lead us to walk on in the light of a Star, eager to meet the One who is both cause and focus of such Light, even as we find our own way, cast our own shadows, prayerfully reflecting His shadow each day. Something to ponder on the Christmas journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** May Your shadow comfort me, Your light lead me and Your calling move me, O God. Amen.

## THE TWELFTH DAY OF CHRISTMAS – EPIPHANY

“When they saw they star, they were filled with joy. They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him.

Then they opened their treasure chests of and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” **Luke 2.10-11 CEB**

“I love DuBois . . . [because] I found myself at camp and I grew up there . . .  
I began my real faith journey at camp.” Kelly (Klemp) Neighbors

Just when you think your story does not matter that much to anyone, that your faith will not make a difference in the course of history or your gifts are not necessary in helping humankind, think on this story of the Magi and their journey to Bethlehem.

This story is only found in the Gospel according to Matthew. What did the author of Matthew know about the Magi and their travels which no one else knew? Why did this author choose to include this account in an otherwise sparse recounting, in comparison to the Lucan version, of the birth narrative? What was it about these people who saw what no-one else saw, who traveled in a way no others traveled and who gave of themselves in a manner unlike anyone else? What did the author want us to know, to consider, to pray about or to be inspired by? Could it be that the greatest gift the Magi brought to the Baby Jesus is you?

Could it be gold is just gold, precious metal that it is? Might it be that frankincense is just frankincense, a precious aromatic resin used in perfumes and ointments? Is it possible myrrh is just myrrh, taken from the resin of a tree and used to anoint the dead or as a perfume for the living? We connect such things with the gifts due a newborn King, yet, could it be the author of Matthew was recalling the story in this fashion to inspire you, me and others to bring only the very best of ourselves to the One who has come to save? That in the telling of the story we would dare to be among the learned to watch the skies and follow the signs? That we would move beyond the conventional and comfortable of our lives into the unknown and ambiguous which requires of us faith, hope and love to guide our steps? Could it be the fundamental presence of the Magi is to warn those caught up in a sense of entitlement regarding who would know when the Savior is coming and who should be there when the Messiah arrives, that God has other plans in mind? That the world is more aware of God’s promises than are God’s own people? That turning to God could be dangerous?



I’m not certain, yet this I do believe: Wise Ones in every age understand that God will be God – and the rest of us are not – and that God will be found where God wants to be found, even in out-of-the-way, podunk places like Bethlehem . . . or DuBois Center. So, be who you are birthed to be and seek the Gift wherever He is to be found, bringing only the best you have to offer for, clearly, the Child treasures the gift of your heart most of all. May it be so for us all in

the Light of this New Day. Something to ponder on this Epiphany journey, a gift of DuBois Center.

**Prayer:** By the Light of your Son, lead me in paths of faithfulness and service throughout all my life, giving to others as I would give unto You: only my best, O Lord, only my best. Amen.