The traffic has already started picking up for the holiday season—reminding us of the sometimes-chaotic time of shopping and holiday activities that lies ahead. In this season of Advent, we long for a sense of peace in our personal schedules and lives.

Many church families are facing difficult times. Some are worried about health or the health of loved ones. Some are grieving the death of someone they love (including us as we grieve the recent death of Bruce’s mother). Some are worried about employment issues and family finances. In this season of Advent, we long for a sense of peace in our families.

In the news, there are stories about North and South Korea, Iraq and Afghanistan, Israel and Palestine, violence in Haiti in the midst of elections and a cholera epidemic, car bombings, airport security and more. In this season of Advent, we long for peace in our world.

In Advent, we look forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus. “Emmanuel” means “God with us.” “Jesus” is a form of the name “Joshua” which means “God saves.” We look forward to the Christmas celebration of God-with-us, the One who saves us. We look forward to hearing again the Christmas story, where the shepherds heard the angels singing, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors” (Luke 2:14). We find our peace in God’s gift of a baby in a manger.

And yet even during this season when we celebrate Jesus as a tiny baby, we also remember the grown-up Jesus who called his followers to work for God’s peace and justice in this world that God loves. In his first sermon, Jesus said that he came to help the poor, the oppressed, and others in need (Luke 4:18-19). The adult Jesus also said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Luke 5:9) God wants us to know peace and justice here and now, and he calls us to share those gifts with others. Try these ideas for enjoying and sharing God’s peace during Advent and Christmas:

--Pray and work for peace in the world that God loves so much. Check out the film about Middle East peacemaking to be shown here on Dec. 11th.

--Read the Peacemaking Program’s Proclaiming the Good News of God’s Peace: Advent Devotions 2010; this resource is available in the church office.

--Be informed. Pay attention to the news. Learn about world issues from a faith perspective. Write to government leaders about peace issues.

--Give up some “shopping days” before Christmas. Instead of running from store to store in traffic all the time, give yourself the gift of some evenings at home with family and friends.

--Buy and give gifts at our church’s Alternative Gift Market in December— for example, give a gift in honor of a loved one to Heifer Project— to make the world a more loving, peaceful place for others.

--Let Christmas be a time to forgive a grudge and work for reconciliation in your family.

--Look at how our lifestyles are part of a bigger picture; how does our use of the world’s resources put a strain on others? For example, do we buy cheaply-made gifts at the expense of poor, exploited workers who produce them?

--Look for ways to bring peace and calmness in schools and at work.

--Bring peace and hope to a child’s life. Help a single parent. Help a child in Foster Care. Adopt.

--Help someone who is facing a situation of family violence.

--Give to the church and to organizations that work for peace and justice, in honor of the Prince of Peace on his birthday this Christmas.

We hope that, during this season when we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, you will know God’s gift of peace in your life, and you will find ways to share that gift with others who need it. We welcome exploring further with you the above suggestions. Have a joyful Advent and a Merry Christmas.

Grace and Peace,
Carolyn and Bruce Gillette

A Note from Our Pastors: On Earth Peace!