


AT THE WELL

A PUBLICATION OF
LIFESPING 55



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*“Behold, the virgin shall be with
child, and bear a son, and they
shall call His name Immanuel,
God with us.”* —MATTHEW 1:23



SHEPHERDS

GOD'S ODD CHOICE

In Luke 2, God's angels appeared to shepherds to reveal the birth of Jesus Christ the Messiah. First one angel appeared and told the shepherds that he was bringing words of great joy for everyone to hear: the savior, Christ the lord, had been born (Luke 2:9-11)! This first angel also told them that they would find the baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Then Luke 2:13-14 went on to say that suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men. The angels told the shepherds that Christ would bring glory, peace and goodwill. With trusting hearts, these shepherds received the good news, believed and acted on it, and then, they went on to proclaim it to others with joy!

Have you ever wondered why God chose to reveal the birth of Christ to shepherds? Is it not interesting that God chose to reveal the birth of the Lamb of God to keepers of lambs? Did you ever wonder if God chose to send an angel to speak to the shepherds first because he knew that they could be trusted? We can see that God did not choose to announce the birth of our Lord and Saviour to a king or to the elite, or to the religious leaders of that time, but instead, he chose meek shepherds who He knew would believe and spread the message with joy.

Shepherds worked long hours and were often found praying and meditating. Therefore, they were close to God in their hearts. Shepherds were known to drop everything to take care of just one sheep. God saw that they would be honest messengers, willing to go out of their way to bring the Good News to a generation of lost sheep.

During this Christmas season, can God trust you to spread the Good News? God always looks on the heart! Let's prepare our hearts to be ready to receive and to share the Good News of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Solange Belluz
(Congregational Life Pastor)

LOIS ROBERTS NEELY

GRADUATION TO GLORY

On November 20, 2023 at 7:30 am, my grandmother Lois took her final journey and went home to be with Jesus. Or as we've been saying "her chariot finally came to carry her home." Son and daughter Keith and Susan spent her final hours together with Lois in the quiet of the morning. For months now, Gramma has been talking about angels and her time to go home. And November 20th 2023 was the day. Her "last supper" as far as we know it was a spontaneous Dairy Queen banana split with Susan on Thursday. A week before her death, Gramma contracted Covid, a UTI, had a bad fall, and we think a stroke. So it took quite a bit to finally carry our dear Lois home.

The family is not requesting particular donations be made in Gramma's memory. However, Lois loved being generous towards many different people, causes, and organisations. If you are moved and compelled to do so, consider a person or cause or organisation that you would like to bless in her honour and memory. And if you'd like, send me a note so I can keep track of the ongoing little ways that her life and legacy are reaching out. Grandma was particularly fond of the Scott Mission in Toronto and she talked about planting trees in Israel.

In her last couple of weeks of life here on earth, Lois described seeing angels and gold light and hearing heavenly music. One of the last hymns she sang was "My Jesus I love Thee, I know thou art mine..." I will sign off with verses 3 and 4 of this hymn - picturing Gramma singing these words herself:



This beautiful embroidered peacock was the latest gift of Lois Neely to The Peoples Church. With the gift came the story that Lois gave us about this tapestry. This exquisite embroidery is the handwork of Mrs. Pearl Scott, O.J. Smith's first Prayer

Warrior, beginning at Dale Presbyterian. Pearl and her faithful prayer partners followed their pastor to Christie Gardens, and finally to The Peoples Church.

*I'll love thee in life, I will love thee in death,
and praise thee as long as thou lendest me breath,
and say when the deathdew lies cold on my brow:*

If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

In mansions of glory and endless delight,

I'll ever adore thee in heaven so bright;


I'll sing with the glittering crown on my brow:

If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

With love and gratitude for you all - as Lois' friends, extended family, acquaintances and fellow adventurers along the way,

*Lisl Baker - Email: lislabaker@gmail.com
(Granddaughter of Lois, daughter of Susan)*

*Lois Neely Roberts was the author of **Fire in His Bones**, OJ Smith's biography; also **Paul Smith's "How-To" story: And the Gift Goes On**. Also the Reader's Digest article "**PEOPLES, Canada's Show-Biz Church**".*



*"This is the message we have
heard from Him and declare
to You: God is light; in Him
there is no darkness at all."*

—1 John 1:5

2023

YEAR IN REVIEW



CELEBRATING WHAT
GOD HAS DONE
THIS YEAR



2023 | YEAR IN REVIEW





69

DECLARED JESUS
AS LORD



340

NEWCOMERS
WELCOMED TO CANADA



67

REFUGEES FOUND
SAFE HOUSING



2023 | YEAR IN REVIEW



FRIAR FADI'S STORY



Friar Fadi was originally asked to go to Syria for three months, but he fell in love with the people and has been there for eight years now. Here is his story in his own words:

I grew up in a Christian family, and since I was five years old, I attended Sunday school at a church in Jordan. I grew in my faith as I learned about Christ through the Scriptures. When I was 18 years old, I decided to join the Franciscan Order as a Friar, to follow Christ as a missionary in the world.

In 2010, I had the opportunity to serve in Camden, New Jersey, at a home

serving children who were differently abled. This is where I experienced a big transformation in my life, and I realized my calling – to serve those who are in great need in the world. Then, in 2015, I was asked to go and serve in Syria.

When I arrived in Damascus, the first few years were very difficult because of the war. There was a lot of bombing, and the area was surrounded by ISIS. The darkness was everywhere – destruction, criminal activity, and leaders inciting to kill. In all the violence, people were very thirsty for God. So, when we went out to them to share the love of Christ, they noticed

something was different. We welcomed them without discrimination, and they felt seen, protected, and cared for. Our ministry cares for the many different needs of the people. There are major shortages here, of basic needs like food, medical support, and electricity. We share meals and food parcels, and we have a clinic that provides medicine and medical care.

There is a serious electricity shortage across the country, and we usually only get about two hours of electricity per day. We created a study zone with solar panels in the church so that there would be electricity and internet available for students to use. We also have programs to support people with jobs. One program focuses on jobs for our differently abled brothers and sisters. It's something I learned when I was in The States – ways to help our brothers and sisters integrate into society and generate a meaningful salary. Because in the Middle East, they are often excluded or marginalized. We produce gifts like soaps, candles, and ornaments for Christmas and Easter. These gifts are even sold in different parts of Europe!

We provide after school programs for orphans, and we have a tailoring room with sewing machines to help women support their families. These are some of the ways we share Christ's love with the people. And through our programs they learn about God's Word. We also have many groups that pray together. Most of the people we serve are those who have been internally displaced, due to the war, and the recent earthquake.

When the earthquake happened, we opened our doors to the people, and more than 400 people came to us. We

hosted them for over a month and a half, providing three meals each day, clothing, and medicine. Many of these people had never been inside a church before. They were afraid and came to the church to hide, and they felt protected. As people learn about Jesus through our programs, they develop a strong faith that actually teaches and inspires me more. They have powerful stories of hope, and they show me the power of Christ's light in dark situations.



There is a woman who is now a part of our ministry. Her husband was killed by ISIS in front of her eyes. She fled with her children and lost everything – her husband, her home, her livelihood. But she still found new hope to continue her life, despite the extreme brokenness she experienced. Today, she works in our tailoring room as she raises her children.

Our ministry started with 186 families, and today we have over 700 families! People are

drawn to Christ's light and as they grow in their faith, they are the ones shining His light.

But of course, it is also not easy for people to live openly as Christians here. Christians who have converted from a Muslim background are unable to confess their faith publicly because there is a lot of persecution. There is a lot of fear. Some people decide to leave the country to be able to live their faith openly. To live as a Christian in the Middle East, we must carry our cross daily, that is the reality.

Even with the challenges and risks, we are able to grow and serve more people with the love of Christ because we are doing this together with our partners – our global partners. We are all praying and working together, shoulder to shoulder.

Many people here, and all over the world, are in desperate need of the hope that only Christ can give. People are moving around everywhere due to immigration and forced displacement. Many people are in desperate situations. We need to remember that the church is not the building, the church is the people of God. So, wherever we are, and wherever God calls us to in this world, we must go out and welcome those who need Christ.

And I always say, "one day when things get better in Syria, I will go to somewhere more difficult... if that is where God calls me".

More than 600,000 people have been killed since the war began. Over 14 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes, with more than 6.8 million who are internally displaced. – UNHCR

Friar Fadi is with one of the ministries that is supported through our Faith Promise. Our partners at Bridges of Hope are committed to teaching, training, and mobilizing church leaders and local believers throughout the MENA region.

As we stand with them in the power of prayer, we will be sharing financially in what God is doing through their ministry across the region. Our goal is to share \$250,000 together as a church this Christmas. To join us, you can designate your gift to our Behold – Christmas 2023 Fund by December 31. Visit the church website for further details.

THEPEOPLESCHURCH.CA

"Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is Yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; You are exalted as head over all."

—1 Chronicles 29:11

HYMN REVIEW

It Came Upon A Midnight Clear By Edmund Sears



It Came Upon a Midnight Clear was written by Edmund Sears who earned a degree from Harvard Divinity School and was ordained a Unitarian minister in 1839, serving congregations throughout Massachusetts. His hymn, *It Came Upon A Midnight Clear* was first published in Boston on Dec. 29, 1849, at a time when social strife plagued America as the Civil War approached.

It Came Upon A Midnight Clear may be the only commonly sung Christmas carol in our hymnals that does not mention the birth of Christ! Instead, the focus is on the words the angels spoke to the shepherds in Luke 2:14. The original third stanza is missing from most hymnals, but it sheds some light on Edmund's concerns about his country's social situation at that time:

*But with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long.
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong.
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring; -
Oh, hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing!*



***“My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my
heart and my portion forever.”***

—Matthew 6:6



WINTER MENTAL HEALTH TIPS

By Solange Belluz

It is very easy to feel discouraged, depressed, or anxious during the busyness of the Christmas season. Going from the highs and lows of rejoicing with our friends and loved ones during the holiday season to finding ourselves alone, broken and depleted after a season of endless shopping and family festivities can leave many empty and depleted.

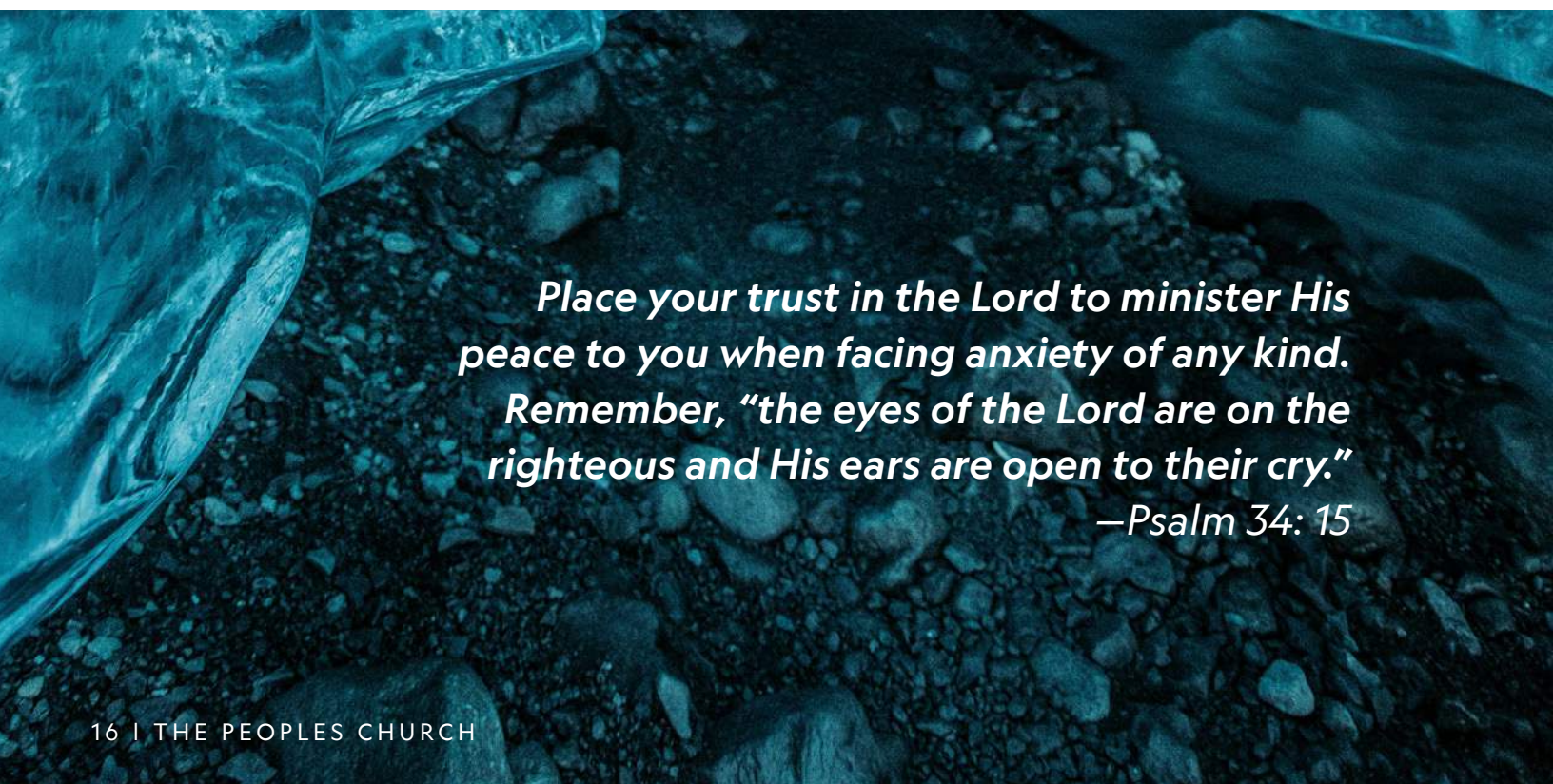
The National Institute on Aging describes symptoms of depression as follows:

- Persistent, sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Continuous feelings of hopelessness, guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Irritability, restlessness, or having trouble sitting still
- Loss of interest in once-pleasurable activities
- Decreased energy or fatigue
- Difficulty sleeping, oversleeping, or waking up very early
- Eating more or less than usual with unplanned weight gain or loss
- Thoughts of death or suicide

If you are experiencing sadness or anxiety, do not worry. Here are some tips to help beat the winter blues that you can easily follow as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ:

1. **Admit that you have a problem:** This is a good starting point so that you can reach out to get proper support.
2. **Guard your mind:** The mind is the place where the enemy normally attacks believers. Set your mind on God's truth and believe what God says about you.
3. **Reach out to others to get help:** Don't feel ashamed or afraid to talk to someone as soon as possible. Don't let anyone make you feel ashamed to ask for help. Call the church to request prayer and visitation.
4. **Brighten your home:** Winter blues are often associated with inadequate access to sunlight. Establish a normal routine of opening your blinds and curtains to let the sunlight in.

5. **Pray and talk to God:** In 1 Peter 5:7, God is calling us cast all our cares upon him. Let God help you address your concerns through prayer.
6. **Listen to praise and worship songs:** Invite God's presence into your home through worship music.
7. **Embrace community:** Don't hesitate to socialize with others. You can join a Life Group or make sure that you attend our Lifespring 55 monthly meetings.
8. **Eat healthy and nutritious food:** Eating a balanced diet is a great way to boost your immune system and energy levels.
9. **Stay active:** Whether it is walking, swimming or any other type of sport, incorporating a regular exercise routine into your schedule will boost your mood.
10. **Allow yourself to grieve a loss:** If you have lost a loved one, don't rush the healing process and take time to lament. You may join our GriefShare support program.



Place your trust in the Lord to minister His peace to you when facing anxiety of any kind. Remember, "the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their cry."
—Psalm 34: 15

LAUGHTER

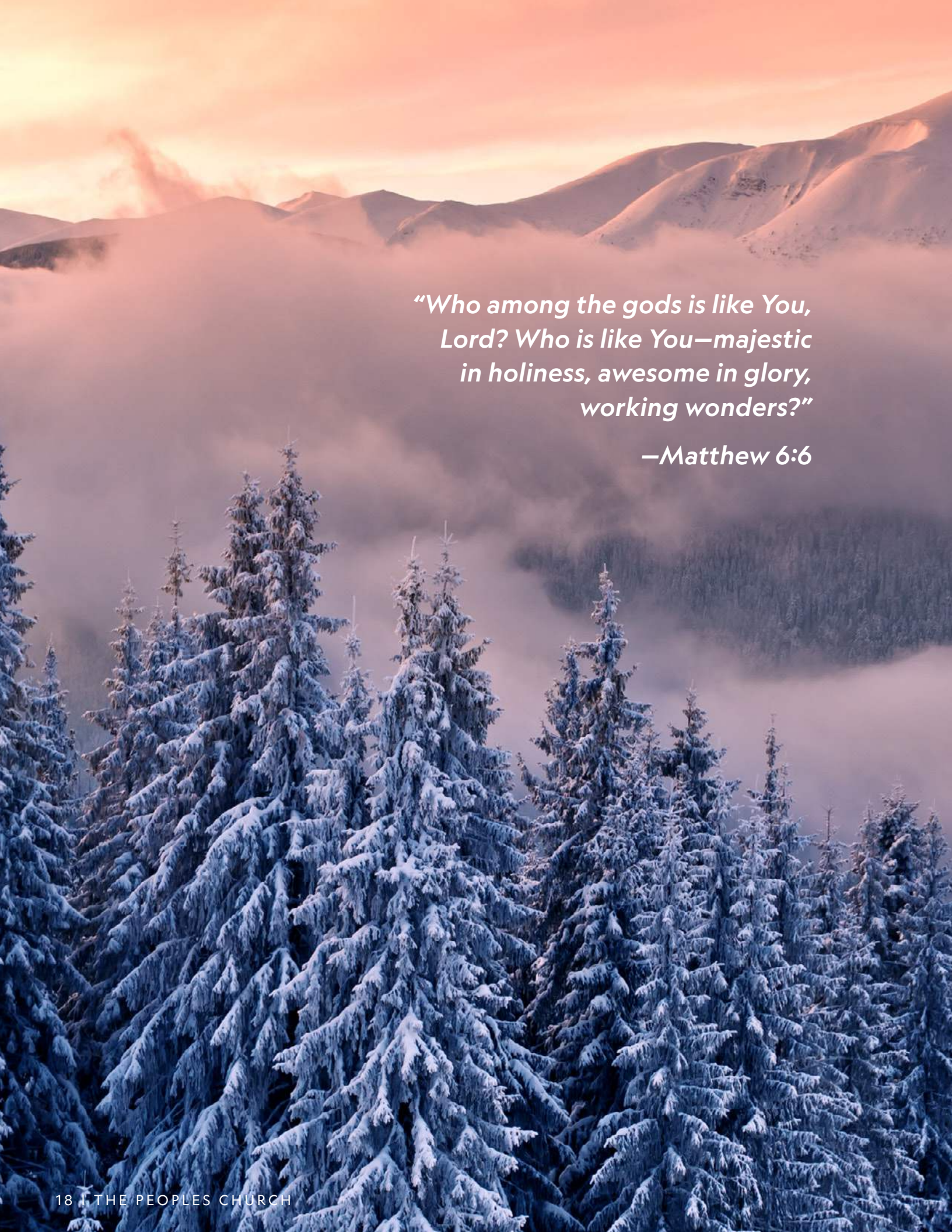
– GOD’S MEDICINE

NOT TALKING TO YOU

At our weekly Bible study, the leader asked an elderly gentleman, Walt, to open the meeting with prayer. Walt did so in a soft voice. Another man, straining to hear, shouted, “I can’t hear you!” Walt replied, “I wasn’t talking to you.”

—Richard Steussy

1. **Why didn’t Noah go fishing?**
He only had two worms
2. **What is the best way to study the Bible?**
You Luke into it
3. **How do you know that atoms are Catholic?**
They have Mass
4. **What do you call a priest who becomes a lawyer?**
A father-in-law
5. **What did God do to cure Moses’ headaches?**
He gave him two tablets
6. **Why is Abraham considered the smartest person in the Bible?**
He knew a lot
7. **What kind of man was Boaz before he married Ruth?**
Ruthless
8. **Why did the unemployed person get excited while reading the Bible?**
They thought they saw a Job.
9. **What type of car would Jesus drive?**
A Christler
10. **Why is Adam considered the fastest person in the Bible?**
He came first in the human race



*“Who among the gods is like You,
Lord? Who is like You—majestic
in holiness, awesome in glory,
working wonders?”*

—Matthew 6:6



CHRISTMAS

AT THE PEOPLES CHURCH

OUTDOOR LIGHTS & NATIVITY DISPLAY

Invite a neighbour or friend to join you on our front lawn at any time of the day throughout the holidays. This is a great way to enjoy the sight and sounds of Christmas as you are immersed in scenes displaying the Christmas story.

CHRISTMAS EVE CELEBRATION

Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday this year. Please Note – there will be NO morning services on Christmas Eve Sunday. Our regular Sunday service times will resume on December 31.

We will be gathering instead on December 24th at 2 PM 4 PM and 6 PM to welcome Jesus Christ together. Each hour-long service will be a fun and meaningful time for everyone as we remember and celebrate that Christmas is all about the birth of Jesus. Join us for a festive celebration filled with Christmas carols, testimonies from our global partners and the telling of the Christmas story. Our outdoors petting zoo is also back this year – so invite your family, friends, and neighbours!

LIFESPING 55

MONTHLY MEETINGS

We look forward to resuming our regular monthly meetings in the new year. Here are the scheduled dates for the first half of the year 2024:

SAVE THE DATES

JANUARY 17

FEBRUARY 17

MARCH 16

APRIL 20

MAY 18

JUNE 15

OTHER CHURCHWIDE EVENTS

February 24th: Black History Month Celebration

April 28th & May 5th: We Serve Ministry Fair

May 24th – June 9th: Global Mission Conference



**At the Well is a quarterly publication of Lifespring 55,
the seniors ministry of The Peoples Church.**

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