

INTRODUCING THE 2014 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

It was the last week of March 2014—after a week beginning with snow and ending with rain, when I decided to purge my book shelves. The first book I picked up was a study book REVERENCE and two articles dropped to the floor: LIVING WITH THE CHALLENGE OF OLD AGE and THE PURPOSE DRIVEN CHRISTMAS. Reading them reminded me of Advent and I wondered if I would be able to find them in October.

Well, Advent Season is upon us. I always think of the ‘busyness’ during these four weeks and wonder why we get ourselves into such frenzy distancing us from God. This should be a time of study, reflection, peace, joy, love, openness, gentleness, restoration and celebration of God’s love. But how do we get off this busyness treadmill? Rick Warren suggests that we think about five simple key purposes to simplify our schedules:

Meaningful Fellowship
Joyful Worship
Helpful Service
Cheerful Sharing
Personal Growth

Reduce stress, increase joy and experience the holiday in a more significant way.

We sing MARY HAD A BABY, BORN IN A STABLE, HIS NAME IS KING JESUS. In 2014, are we closer to Jesus or is He still a babe in our hearts? Has our spirituality grown this past year?

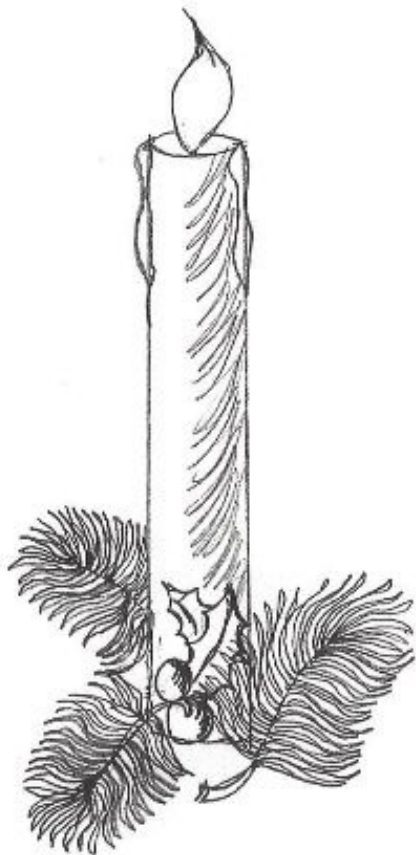
As you read the scriptures and the meditations contained on these pages, we hope you will allow yourself to slow down and have a renewed spiritual experience during this most

joyous of seasons. Let us use these coming days to strengthen our devotion to God, live in hope, surround ourselves with peace, spread joy, love one another as the Lord taught us to do and be open to God’s spirit who leads and guides.

Elsie Young



FIRST WEEK IN ADVENT - HOPE



John the Baptist prepared the way for the coming of the Christ. So must we prepare our lives to receive his spirit anew within us. This calls for repentance on our part just as it did in the days of John the Baptist.

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 30, 2014

Morning Psalms 24; 150
Isaiah 1:1-9
2 Peter 3:1-10
Matthew 25:1-13
Evening Psalms 25; 110

Worship Readings
Isaiah 64:1-9
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:24-37

“Who is this great king?”

Psalm 24 tells us that a great king will come. The Jewish people assumed that this meant a strong and mighty king who would free them from Rome.

My Savior is and was a strong and mighty king; He just wasn't dressed in battle armor.

Jesus stood up to Satan and refused to be tempted by him, something I cannot do. Jesus, died for me, was victorious over death and flung open the gates of hell on the third day. Jesus freed me from sins. My mighty King also taught me about love, compassion, peace, forgiveness and grace.

Jesus came into the world humbly bringing me my hope and salvation.

“Who is this great king?”

The triumphant Lord Jesus - He is the Great King!

Cathy Yantz

Monday, December 1, 2014

Morning Psalms 122; 145
Isaiah 1:10-20
Thessalonians 1:1-10
Luke 20:1-8
Evening Psalm 40; 67

Advent: coming, arrival. In Christian understanding the arrival of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem's manger and his promise to come again. We live "in the meantime", celebrating the "Word who became flesh", born of Mary, Jesus of Nazareth, who dwelt among us, teaching, healing, eating with sinners, and dying on a cross for the world's salvation.

In this "meantime," we wait in hope of Christ's coming again to bring to fulfillment the kingdom of God. And in this, and every season, our hope is grounded in the faithfulness of God, and our waiting is to be an active waiting, filled with acts that reflect and demonstrate the love, grace, and peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Terry Fouse

Tuesday, December 2, 2014

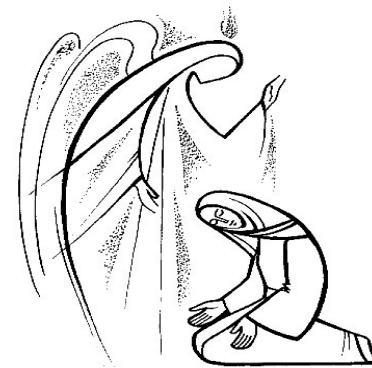
Morning Psalms 33; 146
Isaiah 1:21-31
1 Thessalonians 2:1-12
Luke 20:9-18
Evening Psalm 85; 94

A CHRISTMAS THOUGHT

God is our only hope. God alone will not fail us, for God came to abide in our hearts to receive him. He came to glory in our glory, to suffer in our sufferings, and in this hour of fears and tears, God is no stranger to what we experience.

Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you. [Psalm 33:22]

Flora Beaver



Wednesday, December 3, 2014

Morning Psalms 50; 147:1-11
Isaiah 2:1-4
1 Thessalonians 2:13-20
Luke 20:19-26
Evening Psalm 53; 17

As I read the scripture passages for this 4th day of Advent, a song popped into my mind. I used to teach this song to my students when I worked in the public schools. The words are a paraphrase of Is.2:4.

For every man 'neath his vine and fig tree, Shall live in peace and unafraid, and into plowshares turn their swords, Nations shall wage war no more....

Then we would sing 'Shalom Chaverim', which is in both the old and new hymnals. These words are a plea for peace. "May I turn my sword into the cutting blade of my plow, and may there be no more war." The year was 1968, a violent year in the life of our country with the assassinations of both Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bobby Kennedy; and Vietnam. This beautiful song is also appropriate now because conflict and war is being waged in so many places—from the streets of Ferguson, MO. to Syria and Iraq and in Africa and the Ukraine....This is a beautiful song, tinged with sadness and yet filled with hope. As we enter into the Advent season, many of us are filled with feelings of sadness and melancholy as we remember loved ones and worry about the future. Jesus came into the world to bring hope to a sad and worried people. Advent reminds us of Jesus' journey to bring all people hope, peace, joy, and love. Those were his gifts to us. May we continue to pass each of these gifts on to this weary world.

May peace be with you, May peace be with you, Shalom, Shalom. Till we meet again, Till we meet again....Shalom, Shalom.

Bev Bailey

Thursday, December 4, 2014

Morning Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12-20
Isaiah 2:5-22
1 Thessalonians 3:1-13
Luke 20:27-40, (Luke 21:5-19)
Evening Psalm 126; 62

"You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your soul." [Luke21:17-19]

The first week of Advent represents HOPE. Hope is a gift from God that sustains us in the face of adversity and tragedy. Without this gift most of us would perish in the face of the challenges life brings. We are raised in a faith in which answers and solutions to life's problems are seldom forthcoming. Many throughout history have had their faith tested through illness or the loss of a loved one. Hope is that ingredient that enables humans to "work through" their oppression in an effort to see beyond and find peace. We all hope for more "things" not knowing if we will ever receive gifts of our desires. In the end, however, faith in God will be our reward whether or not our cup is full or empty.

Bruce Hobler

Friday, December 5, 2014

Morning Psalms 102; 148
Isaiah 3:1-4:1
1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
Luke 20:41-21:4
Evening Psalm 130; 16

"I wait for the Lordand in his word I hope."

We are so fortunate in our period of history to have God's WORD written and translated and to be guided in understanding by bible studies and gifted teachers that help clarify and explain what God wants us to learn and feel through Jesus Christ.

It is through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus that we can turn from ourselves and live through Christ. Believing the promise Jesus made to us, that he will return, gives us our strength, fills us with His love and provides our hope for redemption and everlasting life.

Liz Hobler

Saturday, December 6, 2014

Morning Psalms 90; 149
Isaiah 4:2-6
Jude 17-25
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Evening Psalms 80; 72

The season of Advent focuses us on awaiting the coming of the Christ, in the Nativity and in the Eschaton. Advent is a gift of hope for those of us in this "in-between time".

First Thessalonians is the earliest New Testament writing, a mere 20 years after the death and resurrection of the Christ. The missionary Paul was corresponding with the community of new "believers" in a Macedonian city.

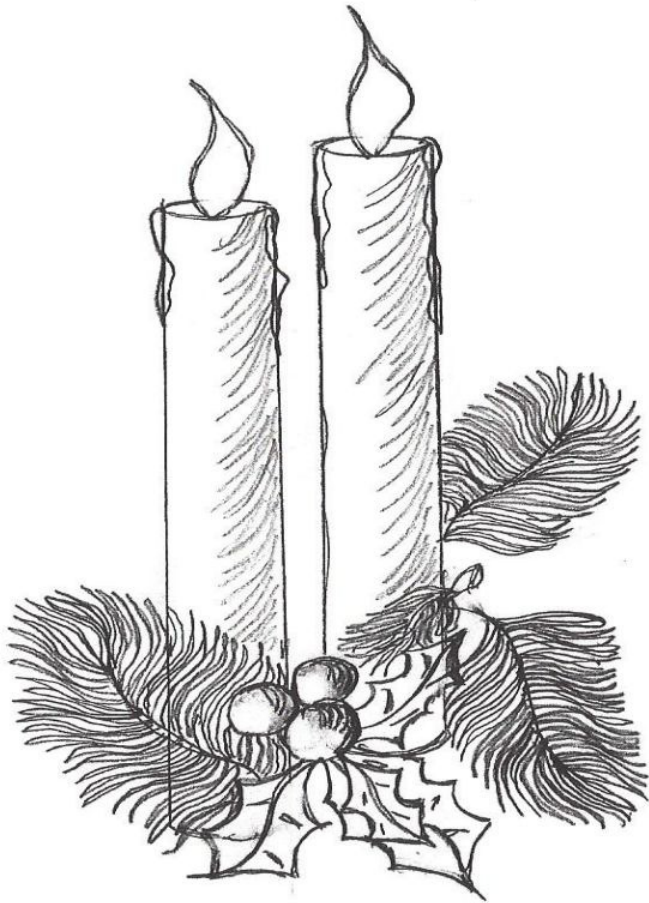
He addressed their elementary concerns about those who were dying before the second coming of the Christ. This paragraph is relevant to us after two millenniums of cultural portrayals of immortal souls, the rapture, and the "left behind".

In the midst of culture apathetic or resistant to faith, we struggle with evil, injustice, and suffering, with anxiety, fear, and grief. As "believers" in this in-between time, we care and comfort one another pastorally about those who die in faith, and about our own eventual death should that be prior to the return of the Christ.

Hope is the encouraging vision to persevere through the promise of our Savior and Lord, Christ Jesus. As we await another celebration of the Nativity, we too await the Messiah's triumphal return at the Eschaton.

Gary Lyle Baer

SECOND WEEK IN ADVENT - PEACE



We praise God for the promise about to be fulfilled through him. We thank him for the revelation of his love for humankind through the gift of his Son.

Sunday, December 7, 2014

Morning Psalms 24; 150
Isaiah 5:1-7
2 Peter 3:11-18
Luke 7:28-35
Evening Psalm 25; 110

Worship Readings
Isaiah 40:1-11
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13
2 Peter 3:8-15a
Mark 1:1-8

“...To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” (2 Peter 3:18)

We often bemoan the frenzy and commercialism that seems to engulf almost every aspect of the Christmas season; but at the same time we fall into the grip of the very ‘evils’ that we complain about. How many times have we stressed for weeks prior to Christmas morning to make sure everything was perfect just to experience the intense anti-climax that follows the festivities of the day? I think that in many ways, Peter is teaching us about this very thing – about being patient, loving our neighbor, and being in right relationship with God. The scoffers in Peter’s epistle are much like the distractions that take our attentions away from the season – losing sight of the promise God made to us all and depending on only what they ‘know’ – and telling us what we ‘need’. God is patient – wanting us to get it ‘right’. Enjoy and rejoice in the season and celebrate with glad hearts – but slow down, spend time with the Scriptures and these meditations – be in fellowship with your neighbor - and be at peace.

Advent – we have come to know this as more than just a pre-Christmas vigil leading to the birth of the Christ. It’s the period of anticipation of His return – ‘Christ will come again’.

Bob Wolf

Monday, December 8, 2014

Morning Psalm 122; 145
Isaiah 5:8-17
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Luke 21:20-28
Evening Psalm 40; 67

Jesus Christ was born in a cattle pen under the worst circumstances. His birth was contrary to the laws of life; His death contrary to the laws of death.

He had no wealth but could feed 5,000 at his table with bread and fish to spare. The waters supported him as he walked.

He preached his Gospel, wrote no book, built no church and had no money.

To this day he is the one central character of human history and the perpetual theme of all preaching. He is the pivot from which the events of age revolve; the regenerator of the human race.

We cannot help thinking:

"Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will toward men"

Carole Trent

Tuesday, December 9, 2014

Morning Psalm 33; 146
Isaiah 5:18-25
1 Thessalonians 5:12-28
Luke 21:29-38
Evening Psalm 85; 94

This first letter from Paul to the Thessalonians may well be the first of Paul's letters. It is certainly one of the first Christian documents. Having founded the church in Thessalonica (Macedon) only a few months earlier, Paul is concerned that this group of Gentiles (and probably some Jews) is under duress. He seeks to reassure them and to bolster their spirits.

Reflecting on our world as well as our own small Christian community in Ocean View, I am drawn to the first two verses in today's readings, verses 12 and 13:

"But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves."

This is a radical concept in today's world. Who would esteem one of our church leaders after they had admonished us? More likely we would be furious. Our culture cherishes self-importance. Each of us assumes that our judgment is better than others, even better than our leaders who are tasked to study difficult situations and make wise decisions. We challenge the advice of others with our thoughts, and even with words and actions. We challenge every decision even though our knowledge of a problem is minimal; much less than our leaders who have done their research, and collectively discussed possible solutions. Trust and respect have become responses we demand, rather than offer. We even challenge God's guidance in our lives.



Perhaps, as our little church continues to grow and flourish, we can all help by offering our trust and respect to those around us. We can esteem our leaders even when our first instinct is to disagree. The more we are at peace within our Christian community, the more we can effectively reach out to serve others.

I have been moved by a prayer attributed to St Francis. Part of the prayer asks God to: “Grant that I may not so much seek to be understood as to understand”. Amen.

Bill Colwill

1st Candle: The Prophecy Candle - Candle of Hope

We can have hope because God is faithful and will keep the promises made to us. Our hope comes from God (Romans 15:12-13)

2nd Candle: The Bethlehem Candle - Candle of Peace

As we prepare for the coming of Jesus, we remember that Jesus is our hope and our peace. (John 14:27)

3rd Candle: The Shepherd Candle – Candle of Joy

The angels sang a message of JOY! (Luke 2: 7-15)

4th Candle: The Angel Candle – Candle of Love

The angels announced the good news of a Savior. God sent his only son to earth to save us, because he loves us! (John 3:16-17)

5th Candle: Christ Candle

The white candle reminds us that Jesus is the spotless Lamb of God sent to wash away our sins. His birth was for his death; his death was for our birth! (John 1:29)

Wednesday, December 10, 2014

Morning Psalm 50; 147:1-11
Isaiah 6:1-13
2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
John 7:53-8:11
Evening Psalm 53; 17

Morning Psalms 147: 1-11

He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. He provides for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call..... the Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in His unfailing love.

In short, Our Lord loves and cares for us! It's just as simple as that - *unfailing love*. Something so easy we make difficult. We add "what ifs" and all sorts of stipulations and exceptions we think exclude us from accepting a God whose Love is so pervasive and true that the Baby He sent us He sacrificed for us. He wants us to acknowledge this. Every day we have evidence all around us that He supplies what we need. We have only to believe this is true. And believing gives us the reassurance that as we struggle with whatever is in our lives at the moment; health issues, family concerns, moving to new places, taking on responsibilities we have not had before, even belonging to a church which is at the crossroads of change, that our God has taken our hand and leads us where He wants us to be. Praise God!

Lori Hartsig

Thursday, December 11, 2014

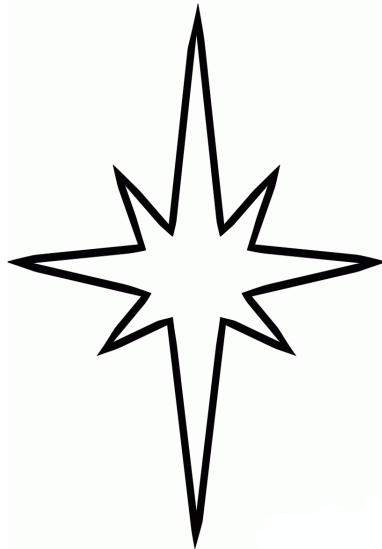
Morning Psalm 18:1-20; 147:12-20
Isaiah 7:1-9
2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
Luke 22:1-13
Evening Psalm 126; 62

Coquina. What do you use when you need to build a fort that won't burn down and you are lacking in building materials? You use a resource that is free and readily available. You use a limestone that is found near the coast, which has been formed over years from the shells of the tiny coquina clam cemented together through time and nature into a soft stone. Beginning in the late 1600s, the Castillo de San Marcos protected St. Augustine, Florida against numerous enemy attacks and its soft coquina walls amazingly protected the fort from cannon fire better than harder stone that blows apart upon impact. In addition, the low walls of the fort provided a less-visible mark for which the enemy to aim its fire. And yet despite its technologically advanced construction, the fort's first objective was to stand as a symbol. It shouted to its enemies, "Don't attack. I am ready for you. I will protect this city." If an enemy did decide to attack, it was more about a game of waiting. Can we starve out the troops? When will they run out of resources? Will they just decide to surrender? The devil can be this way -- sending out a series of attacks, trying to break us, waiting for us to lose hope and give up. How long can we withstand? Do we call upon the Lord to be our Fortress? In Psalm 18, David did. "I call upon the Lord... and I am saved from my enemies." (Psalm 18:3) There is assurance in this prayer of David's. With confidence in his salvation from his enemies and with faith in his Fortress, David prayed. And God answered David's prayer. The earth quaked, the mountains trembled, and David is rescued and placed in a place of

Morning Psalm 102; 148
Isaiah 7:10-25
2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5
Luke 22:14-30
Evening Psalm 130; 16

comfort because God delighted in him. (Psalm 18:7, 17, 19)
David's Fortress is our Rock too. God will not falter when we are under attack. He will protect us. He will deliver us. He will save us from our enemies -- whether it is an aggressive attack or a prolonged siege. And in this season of Advent, may we see not only David and ourselves in this passage, but may we see Jesus, our Savior, who was born to die. Who in the sorrow and distress of death and separation called out to God. The earth shook and trembled. Jesus rose and ascended into Heaven and God delighted in Him.

Kim Benjamin



God is the source of true hope and the One able to fulfill all his promises and the hopes of those trusting in him. It is through his undeserved kindness that he has given mankind "comfort and good hope." (2 Thessalonians 2:16). He has been the hope of righteous men in all ages and many are the expressions of hope, trust and confidence in him in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Hope is indispensable to the Christian. It accompanies joy, peace and power of the Holy Spirit. It enables the Christian to endure with rejoicing, no matter what the conditions may be.

Peggy Schaffer

Saturday, December 13, 2014

Morning Psalm 90; 149
Isaiah 8:1-15
2 Thessalonians 3:6-18
Luke 22:31-38
Evening Psalm 80; 72

THIRD WEEK IN ADVENT - JOY



The reading from 2 Thessalonians draws red lines between us and people who we know that behave in ways that are contrary to the Ten Commandments. We should separate ourselves from acts that would be offensive to Jesus and his followers. This chapter, if faithfully followed can cause us much concern because precious few of us behave in a totally righteous manner ourselves. It seems that the best we can do is to not participate in the offending ways that others subscribe to. It would seem that a more manageable way to approach this separation that is called for is to treat the offending individual in a way you would like to be treated. Too often the direct rebuke ends up in a personal conflict. Of course, a reasonably friendly effort should be pursued to eliminate the offensive behavior. Each of us is disorderly from time to time.

Marjorie Schaefer

We rejoice because his coming is near at hand. Our faith is strengthened as we are reminded that he will come to earth again, as he did many years ago. Our hearts are filled with joy as we proclaim that the realization of his promise is near.

Sunday, December 14, 2014

Morning Psalm 24; 150

Isaiah 13:1-13

Hebrews 12:18-29

John 3:22-30

Evening Psalm 25; 110

Worship Readings

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Psalm 126:1-6

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

or

Luke 1:46b-55

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Monday, December 15, 2014

Morning Psalm 122; 145

Isaiah 8:16-9:1

2 Peter 1:1-11

Luke 22:39-53

Evening Psalm 40; 67

ADVENT?

When one reads John 3:22-30, the thought comes to mind, what does this scripture have to do with Christmas?

Advent, meaning coming/preparation, is seen in this passage as well as in the telling of the birth of Jesus in the well-known Christmas Story.

The Angels heralded the coming of Jesus' birth as a little baby in a manger. John is announcing the coming of the now grown man Jesus' ministry. John also had disciples who wanted him to be in the limelight. John was very charismatic and people easily followed him. He quickly set them straight on who was of importance and told them of the lesser role that he was meant to play. Perhaps this is an example for us as well, to focus on the message of God rather than the messenger.

Both the Angels and John were sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus. During his Ministry, he would tell all who would listen about God's Love which is deeper than the deepest sea. God's Love is so deep that he sent his Son for our Salvation so we can have eternal life with him.

From a little baby to a grown man to the cross, to the resurrection.

A Gift beyond measure! Merry Christmas!

Sandra Gayle

"Let the nations be glad and sing for JOY..." Psalms 67:3

When at this season of the year we wish our friends a "Merry Christmas." it is essential to realize that true merriment (joy) of heart is contingent upon the recognition of the truth that Christ was born in Bethlehem for our salvation. The word "merry" is from an old Anglo-Saxon word that sometimes meant "famous", "illustrious", "great", or "mighty". Originally to be merry did not imply to be merely mirthful, but strong and gallant. It was in this sense that gallant soldiers were called "merry men". Favorable weather was called "merry weather". Brisk winds were called a "merry gale". The word "merry" carries with it the double thought of "might" and "mirth" and is used both ways in Scripture.

Christmas carols are sung rejoicing the birth of the Christ Child. One of the early Christmas carols was "God Rest You Merry Gentlemen". "Joy To The World" is one of the many other carols sung in celebration of Jesus' Birth. When singing these Christmas carols, we express our joy and happiness. The Christian is to engage in spiritual merriment as he thinks upon the fact that through the redemption, he becomes a Child of God's family... The Bible teaches that the angels made merry (joy, happiness) at Christ's birth.

Prayer: Dear Lord, This Christmas our hearts are indeed merry and joyful when we think of your birth. We rejoice with the angels and praise your Holy Name.

Charlotte and Grayson Wheatley

Tuesday, December 16, 2014

Morning Psalm 33; 146
Isaiah 9:2-7
2 Peter 1:12-21
Luke 22:54-69
Evening Psalms 85; 94

There are nine days left till Christmas Day! Joy, what joy?

Now is the time we all turn just a little into a Christmas Grinch. Bah Humbug! Who wants all this bother? There are cookies to bake, presents to wrap, trees and houses to decorate. Be honest don't you just get a little tired of it about now.

Psalm 146 is not a scripture reading we associate with Christmas, but it is a song of joyful praise. Take a minute sit in a favorite chair and read the Psalm again. Who is this Psalm about? Does it sound like someone you know? Could the author be talking about Jesus?

Jesus always keeps his promises. He fed the hungry. He set us free from the prison of sin. He helped strangers, widows and orphans.

Now let's go back to the Grinch. Yes, we are tired and our days are full of hustle and bustle, but for good reason. We are celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior. He is the reason for our joy! He came to us, to live with us and to save us.

“Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, my soul! I will praise him as long as I live; I will sing to my God all my life!”

(Ps. 146: 1&2)

Cathy Yantz

Wednesday, December 17, 2014

Morning Psalm 50; 147:1-11
Isaiah 9:8-17
2 Peter 2:1-10a
Mark 1:1-8
Evening Psalm 53; 17

Music and nature are two of my interests. Thus I related to verses 7 – 11 of Psalm 147.

Verse 7 states “Sing to Yahweh in gratitude. Play the lyre for our God.” Singing and making music continue to be an integral part of practically all worship services. To those of us who are truly touched by music, it creates joy within us.

Verses 8 – 10 tell us of the daily wonders of the world that God intended for us to have – clouds, rain, grasses, plants to feed the animals, and both plants and animals able to feed their young.

Verse 11 lets us know that God is pleased with us who are in awe of Him as the provider of all, and who continue to trust in him with steadfast love.

This certainly is an appropriate reading for the “Week of Joy”.

Carol Kratch

Thursday, December 18, 2014

Morning Psalm 18:1-20; 147:12;20
Isaiah 11:1-9
Ephesians 6:10-20
John 3:16-21
Evening Psalm 126; 62

Dear Lord, as my feet hit the floor each day, I know that I will need the strength of Your Holy Spirit in order to be the servant you want me to be. I also know you've given me everything I need to do this.....the armor of God.

First, I place the helmet of salvation on my head. Protect my mind and imagination. Guard my eyes, allowing no sin to creep in. Focus my thoughts on the things of God. Let the breastplate of righteousness keep my heart and emotions safe. I pray that I won't be governed by my own feelings, but by your truth. Wrap Your Word around me like a belt. Safeguard me from vanity and judgment.

I put on the sandals of peace to guide my steps as I walk the path you have chosen for me. Sometimes I need your courage to stay the course. Next, I take up the shield of faith, my daily comfort and guide. Finally, I take up the sword of the Spirit. Help me discern your truth in all the words I hear today.

I know I'll face uncertainties and assaults today, Lord. But you've empowered me to stand firm. Give me strength to be the Child of God I want to be, to be your servant in this world.....Here I am Lord, please send me out to do your will.

Mike and Jen Read

Friday, December 19, 2014

Morning Psalm 102; 148
Isaiah 11:10-16
Revelation 20:1-10
John 5:30-47
Evening Psalm 130; 16

In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean.

Biblical times collapse into today's news in today's passage from Isaiah.

Hamath today is called Hama. As in Isaiah's day, the town is in Syria. It has remained significant since the Bronze Age. King David counted the King of Hamath as an ally.

Hama was captured by Arabs in 637 ad. It became a stronghold for Sunni Muslims, although a Christian presence remains to this day. Violent uprisings against the ruling Baath Party began in 1964 and have since erupted often, sometimes aided by the Muslim Brotherhood. Thousands of Hama Sunnis were killed by government forces in 1982, when the al-Assad family rose to power. Protests flared dramatically in 2011 in a pro-democracy movement against Bashar al-Assad. Hama took the biggest hit.

Ironically, one of the places that Isaiah prophesied as a renaissance of the peaceful reign of King David – “out of the Root of Jesse” – finds itself on the front lines of an internecine war among Arab Muslims.

Jerry Egger

Morning Psalm 90; 149
Isaiah 28:9-22
Revelation 20:11-21:8
Luke 1:5-25
Evening Psalm 80; 72

“Grace AND Peace BE MULTIPLIED UNTO YOU THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OF God, AND OF Jesus OUR Lord.”
2 PETER 1:2

The Christmas Season brings us “good news of great joy which will come to all people”. The theme of the third week of Advent is JOY. Christmas is truly a season of joy for Christians everywhere.



CHRISTMAS COOKIES

By Terry Deffenbaugh

When I think of Christmas I always think of the special cookies that my Mom baked for Christmas. She shared these blessings not only with her family but also her friends, for whom she cared so much. About the beginning of Advent she started baking cookies. It took many days to complete this act of love. My Mom had many gifts that she wanted to share with others. Of course the smell in the kitchen was heavenly, and sometimes she would let me help and that made it more special.

The way my Mom made the cookies reminds me of God. She spend a lot of time and energy in doing something extra for the people she loved. Just as each one of us is made in God's image and likeness, she also only used the best ingredients. Just as Jesus was sent to the world to redeem us all, God gave us His best.

The Christmas cookies that my Mother made were not only a nourishment for the body. They were also a nourishment of love for the heart. The shapes she used were also nourishment for the soul. Each shape reminds us things that we should never ever forget about Christmas.

STAR – It reminds us that we have to be ready to see the glory of God around us. Many people saw Jesus' star but it took the Wise Men to see with the eyes of faith that there was something more to this star.

ANGEL - The angels were the heralds of Jesus. They told the shepherds that the Messiah was born to the world. We too must not be afraid to tell the world about Jesus and that Christmas celebrates his birth.

BELL - The bell produces a simple joyful sound. We need to remember that Christmas is a time of simple joys, caring and sharing, priceless, yet within everyone's reach.



Psalm 90:16 says “Let us see your miracles again let your children see glorious things”. May the joy of Christmas be with you and your loved ones now and always.

Carol Kester

CANDLE - It gives light in the darkness. Jesus is referred to as the light. We should make sure at Christmas to bring the light of kindness into the darkness of a world feeling loss and despair.

WREATH - The circle of a wedding band is to symbolize that love is never ending. In the same way the Christmas wreath tells us that God's love for us is never ending.

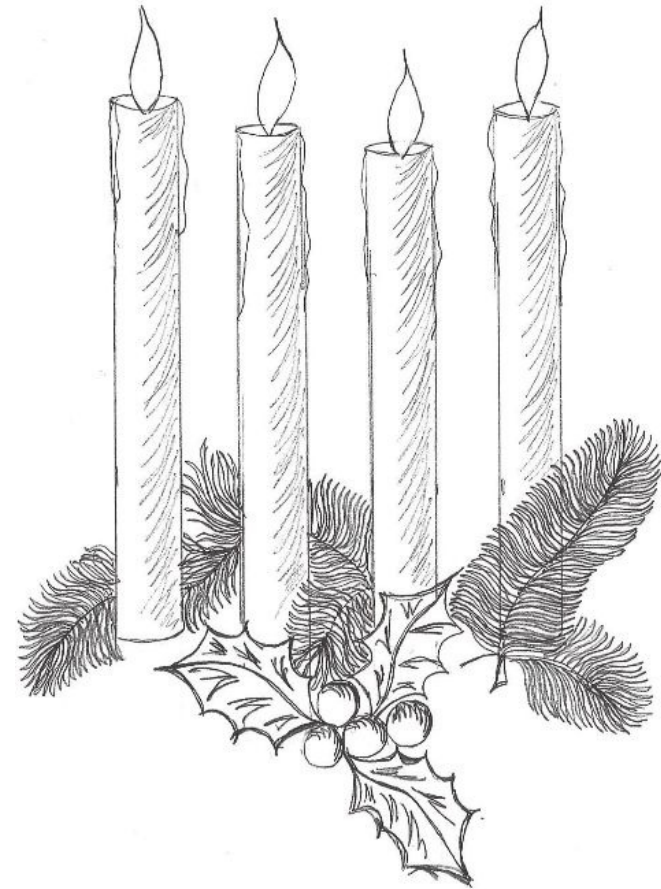
CHRISTMAS TREE - With its top branch always pointing up to the heavens, it is to always remind us that all our focus should be on God, our loving creator.

CANE - With its colors of white and red, it reminds us of the white of Jesus' purity and the red for the blood he shed for us.

Christmas cookies can be nothing more than a sweet treat, gobbled down and forgotten. Or they can be a gift of love that nourishes the body, heart, and soul. So when you are given edible Christmas gifts, remember it all depends on how they are GIVEN and RECEIVED.



FOURTH WEEK IN ADVENT - LOVE



God's love is one that never dies, never tires of pursuing us and never gives up on us. We are reminded that since God loves us so much, we also ought to love one another. We love because he first loved us.

Sunday, December 21, 2014

Morning Psalm 24; 150
Isaiah 29:9-24

Revelation 21:9-21

Luke 1:26-38
Evening Psalm 25; 110

Worship Readings
2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
Luke 1:47-55

or

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38

Psalm 24:1-2

“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.”

The theme for this Sunday in Advent is “love”.

We take God’s earth for granted in that we pollute the seas and the rivers without thinking that the earth is God’s.

There are some organizations that are working to change this attitude. Let us each in our own way do more to support these organizations in our daily lives.

Let us LOVE God’s earth in all that we do.

Prayer:

God help us to love your earth and all that is in it with all our heart and soul and mind until you come again.

Amen

Mike Quinn

Monday, December 22, 2014

Isaiah 31:1-9
Revelation 21:22-22:5
Luke 1:39-48a (48b-56)
Evening Psalm 40; 67

One of the best-selling books this season is ‘Everything I Need to Know About Christmas I Learned From a *Little Golden Book*’. It is filled with nostalgic excerpts from the little books of my childhood. Most endearing are those illustrated by Eloise Wilkin whose works of art emphasized friends and families guided by the precepts of Christ. They bring to mind a memorable Christmas in 1958.

Dad had been transferred to a city 100 miles away and this would be our first Christmas far from ‘home’. After opening our gifts and eating our breakfast Mom began dressing us in our new Christmas outfits. “Where are we going?” Dad asked. “To Mother’s” replied my Mom. “But it’s starting to snow!” “So? We always go to Mother’s on Christmas Day”.

We started out on that 100 mile journey much to Dad’s dismay. The snow was fluffy and beautiful, but as we drove on it became heavy and blinding. At one point we stopped under an overpass so that Dad could clear the windshield. We pressed on as Mom sat firmly resolved in her seat.

Finally, in the dark, we arrived tired and hungry hoping there was something left of Christmas dinner. As we trudged up to the door we could hear the merriment of my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins inside. “They’re here!” someone called out when the door swung open. As we passed through the huddle of hugs and kisses my Nan declared “Now we can eat”.

It warms my heart when I think of all the love shared that Christmas with a family that wasn’t complete until Charlie, Jean, and the children showed up. I only wish that Eloise Wilkin had been there.

Dear Lord, my heart fills with joy when I witness expressions of the Love given to us by Christ ---- Amen

Lee Grace

Tuesday, December 23, 2014

Morning Psalm 33; 146
Isaiah 33:17-22
Revelation 22:6-11, 18-20
Luke 1:57-66
Evening Psalm 85; 94

CHRISTMAS EVE CHRISTMAS DAY

Revelation 22: 20

The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Our time of Advent is drawing to a close. Christmas is almost here. The time of waiting is almost over. Today's passage from Revelation moves our focus to the second coming of Christ. Do we live out our daily lives thinking about Christ coming again? Do we have the same anticipation as we have for Christmas morning? Of course no one knows when Christ will come, but how would I spend today, if I knew it would be the day after tomorrow?

Prayer: Loving and gracious God, help us live each day knowing that your love and grace are always with us as we await your coming. Help us find ways to share your love with one another. Amen.

Marlene Quinn



*The promise of God has now become a reality.
The prophecies of long ago have been fulfilled.
God's plan for humankind has been completed
by sending the Son into the world and we
celebrate his coming.*

CHRISTMAS EVE

Advent Reflection

Morning Psalm 50; 147: 1-11
Isaiah 35:1-10
Revelation 22:12-17, 21
Luke 1:67-80
Evening Psalm 53; 17

Worship Readings
Isaiah 9:2-7
Psalm 96: 1-13
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

The time of Advent always brings to my mind the prophet Isaiah, whose strong and often poetic words point straight to the Coming of the Messiah. Isaiah received a vision of God and his angels, and, when God asked for a helper, answered “Send Me” The Bible simply introduces Isaiah as “Isaiah, the Son of Amoz”. William Barclay writes that Isaiah was an “aristocrat and friend of kings”. This is the same man who, at God’s direction takes off his shoes and clothes and walks naked and barefoot for three years while warning of dire consequences for Egypt.

Isaiah is very frequently quoted in the New Testament, even by Jesus. We have been gifted with Isaiah’s wonderful visions of holiness, peace, joy, and comfort. And tonight we can hear again the prophet’s most wonderful message.

For us a child is born,
To us a son is given,
And the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
(Isaiah 9:6)

Betsy Henifin

Three of the four weekly Advent themes are listed as fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22; and two are identified as graces in I Corinthians 13:113. Love is found in both places, and is described as the greatest. All have intrinsic value and are not dependent on external circumstance.

I John 15: 1-17 on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus talked to his disciples about love, about abiding in him, about the Father’s love for him and his love for them. Scripture tells us ‘love the lord thy God with all the heart...soul...strength, and all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself.

I have asked myself – ‘where is hope, peace, joy, and love found in my life?’ I am aware that God is a triune God – three persons in one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I also believe he made, created, and formed man/woman in his spiritual image. That I am triune – body, soul, and spirit; and function as such.

Someone has likened the body as sense consciousness. We are normally endowed with five, but we have a sixth called ‘common’. The soul is likened to self-consciousness, and refers to the inner life. It is the emotional seat of our heart where love, hate, ambition, memory, etc. exist. It is the fruit/graces that abideth there and our mind manifests them to deal with the external circumstances encountered by the body. The spirit is likened to God-consciousness. Jesus said, ‘God is spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth’. Of all the creation, only man was created like God, a trinity.

George Schafer

CHRISTMAS DAY

Morning Psalm 2; 147:12-20
Zechariah 2:10-13
1 John 4:7-16
John 3: 31-36
Evening Psalm 98; 96

Worship Readings
Isaiah 52:7-10
Psalm 98:1-9
Hebrews 1:1-4 (5-12)
John 1:1-14

In the churches we now designate as Eastern or Orthodox, John's Gospel, not Luke's is the reading for Christmas, which they celebrate when we usually observe Christ's Epiphany. Indeed, Christ's nativity – his becoming one with us - is God's full revelation, the manifestation of Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As the writer of Hebrews gladly proclaims: *"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,.... The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word."* What before had been merely the semi-historic tales of some unimportant Semitic clans, was now seen as God's word pointing to a new reality, a rebirth, if you will – *"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."* Yes, we are all God's Children if we pattern ourselves on Jesus. So, in a way, today is your birthday too!

Indeed today is special. It celebrates the day, the event that marks our coming to know God in a very personal way. Today marks the start of the rest of your life. Merry Christmas!

Rev. Peter G Maurer

Recipe for Christmas All Year Long

Take a heap of child-like wonder
That opens up our eyes
To the unexpected gifts in life –
Each day a sweet surprise.

Mix in fond appreciation
For the people whom we know;
Like festive Christmas candles
Each one has a special glow.

Add some giggles and some laughter
A dash of Christmas food
(Amazing how a piece of pie improves our
attitude!)

Stir it all with human kindness
Wrap it up in love and peace
Decorate with optimism and
Our joy will never cease.

If we use this healthy recipe
We know we will remember
To be in the Christmas spirit
Even when it's not December

CHRISTMAS

Merry Christmas! In John 1:14 we hear: And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.

For many of us, Christmas comes so loaded with memories and traditions that it can be hard to find anything fresh and new in it. Our minds are filled with childhood impressions of presents stockings, and good things to eat; churches filled with poinsettias and sweet-smelling evergreen branches; familiar carols, the Christmas crib, a dinner with family. But all these things, good as they are, are not Christmas. Christmas is God doing something utterly new, becoming human like us, and coming into the world – not just any world, but our world, this world, full of sin and sadness but also full of hope. God is with us, and nothing will ever be quite the same again.

Merry Christmas!

The Worship Committee would like to offer special thanks to all of those who participated in the production of this Devotional Booklet. The result is a sharing of special talents, gifts from God, whether they are authoring daily meditations, providing artwork, organizing the writings, generating the computer version, or printing and assembling the finished product.*

“We are strengthened by these experiences to continue to live as God’s people”.

**Original artwork in this devotional has been provided by Elaine Wolf*

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