



ADVENT

A gift of daily devotions written by members and friends of Ocean View Presbyterian Church.



Introducing OVPC's 2024 Advent Devotional



Welcome, Friend! Welcome, whether you are a congregant, a seeker, a visitor, someone we have never met: you are all friends! Our Advent Devotional, which you hold, is our proffer of a still deeper friendship, as our members – and some friends! – share the solemnity, the awe, and the ongoing wonder of waiting for a future we are already familiar with; a future we know yet have not met; a joy we anticipate which is both real and, itself, waiting. Here we open our hearts more than we normally dare, to share how it is that our faith persists, returns and engages with the ever-new history of God-with-us. Day by day, celebrating each day (and its lections, from the Revised Common Lectionary, or with our year-long contemplation of a “Star” word), we offer you our hearts, hopes and prayers.

This is Eugene Peterson, from The Contemplative Pastor, quoted by Tyler Staton in Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools (p. 134): “Prayer and spirituality feature participation, the complex participation of God and the human, God’s will and our wills. We do not abandon ourselves to the stream of grace and drown in the sea of love, losing identity. We do not pull strings that activate God’s operations in our lives, subjecting God to our assertive identity. We neither manipulate God (active voice) nor are manipulated by God (passive voice). We are involved in the action and participate in its results – but do not control or define it (middle voice).” *

In short, we pray; seeking and responding. Gathered together in this booklet, like pages in a photo album, are moments in our lives of prayer: wonderings, hopes, aspirations, memories; the very beating hearts of this congregation, your sisters and brothers in this life of faith (or faith there may be faith). Linger over the face they offer you; seek God alongside them. Enter into these gates with thanksgiving, for the Lord is good. God works in, with and through the people who love, and serve, all God loves, and made.

In peace, and the hope of peace,

Pastor Terry

*The middle voice is a stream of verbal purpose and conjugation in Greek, necessary for Biblical interpreters to understand.





PLEASE JOIN US FOR ADVENT TIMES OF PRAYER

These times of prayer provide a unique opportunity to engage with the Advent season: to embrace the concerns of our church family while providing a space for each of to reach out to Christ.

Please join us in our Sanctuary on:

| | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Thursday, December 5</i> | <i>6:00pm – 6:20pm</i> |
| <i>Thursday, December 12</i> | <i>6:00pm – 6:20pm</i> |
| <i>Thursday, December 19</i> | <i>6:00pm - 6:20pm</i> |

Advent Services for December 2024

9:30am in our Sanctuary

(Unless otherwise noted)

December 1st

1st Sunday of Advent

Celebrating HOPE

Gospel Reading:

Luke 21:25-36

December 8th

2nd Sunday of Advent

Celebrating PEACE

Gospel Reading:

Luke 3:1-6

December 15th

3rd Sunday of Advent

Celebrating JOY

Gospel Reading:

Luke 3:7-18

December 22nd

4th Sunday of Advent

Celebrating LOVE

Gospel Reading:

Luke 1:39-45

December 24th

Christmas Eve

Candlelight Service

7:00pm

December 29th

1st Sunday after Christmas

Lessons & Carols Service

Hymn Sing

Gospel Reading:

Luke 2:41-52





"Darkness comes. In the middle of it, the future looks blank. The temptation to quit is huge. Don't. You are in good company... You will argue with yourself that there is no way forward. But with God, nothing is impossible. He has more ropes and ladders and tunnels out of pits than you can conceive. Wait. Pray without ceasing. Hope."

— John Piper

Sunday December 1, 2024

Morning: Pss. 24; 150

Isa. 1:1–9

2 Pet. 3:1–10

Matt. 25:1–13

Evening Psalms 25; 110

Worship Readings

Jer. 33:14–16

Ps. 25:1–10

1 Thess. 3:9–13

Luke: 21:25–36

The Star of Bethlehem

“When they saw the Star, they were overjoyed.”

(Matthew 2:10)

As a growing child, you can probably remember your parents teaching you to locate the North Star. Knowing this star’s location meant you could gain a sense of direction and guidance whenever needed.

The Bible tells us of another star of vital importance. Wise men from the east (the area around present-day Iran and Iraq), Magi, who were watching for signs in the sky of the birth of the ONE who was to be God’s king for His people. They came to Jerusalem asking “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star when it rose, and we have come to worship him.” (Matthew 2: 1-2)

God created the Star of Bethlehem to point the world to Jesus Christ who came to save us from our sins and to guide our daily living.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for providing us the LIGHT of the Bethlehem Star to guide our daily lives. Amen.

Charlotte Wheatley

Monday December 2, 2024

Morning Psalms 122; 145

Isa. 1:10–20

1 Thess. 1:1–10

Luke 20:1–8

Evening Psalms 40; 67

As referenced in the Scripture passage for today from Isaiah, God wants our sincere faith and reverence for Him, represented by our obedience, not our sacrifice as atonement for sin.

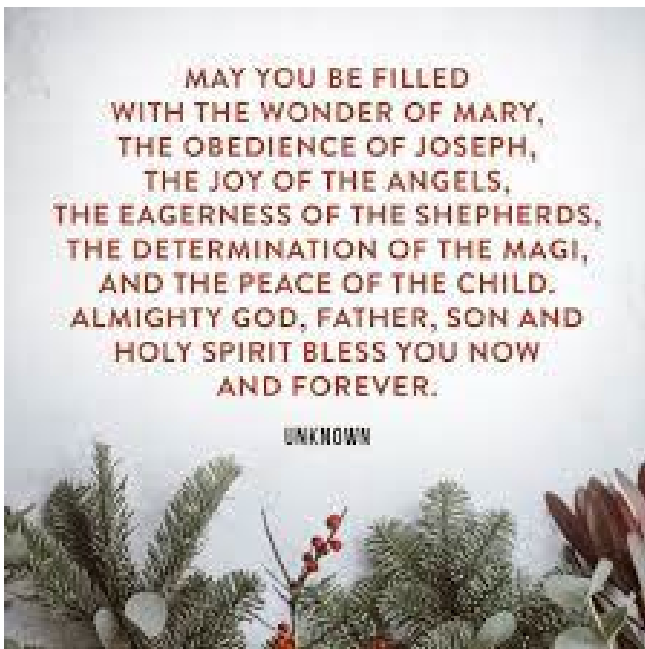
God does not want a transactional relationship with us. What can we give Him, as all of our blessings are from the Lord? In ancient Israel, there was a concept of “paying” for sins. This is what Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for in Matthew 23; that the oath on the altar is sanctified by the House of God, not by the gold or sacrifice on the altar.

The Lord desires us to honor Him and to seek His wisdom and guidance to do His will. Obedience represents trust and love for the Lord, with a firm foundation of faith.

Jesus was and is the perfect example of obedience to God. If we had not been disobedient to God, Jesus would not have had to be sacrificed. God wants us to follow the example of Jesus and to aspire to His ideal. God knows we will fall short sometimes. However, if we sincerely and earnestly seek with a pure heart to be obedient to the Lord, He will shepherd us onto the right path.

- ✦ Dietrich Bonhoeffer - "One act of obedience is better than 100 sermons."
- ✦ Christina Rossetti - "Obedience is the fruit of faith."
- ✦ David A. Bednar - "Obedience opens the door to the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. And the spiritual gifts and abilities activated by the power of the Holy Ghost enable us to avoid deception - and to see, to feel, to know, to understand, and to remember things as they really are."

Jim Dugan



Tuesday December 3, 2024

Morning Psalms 33; 146

Isa. 1:21–31

1 Thess. 2:1–12

Luke 20:9–18

Evening Psalms 85; 94

GIVING

I'm choosing to use my star word for these thoughts. GIVING. We start at the moment of birth by GIVING. We GIVE joy to our parents and other family members. It's something we do every day, like breathing. Subconsciously perhaps, but it is what we do. Shortly after birth we are introduced into Gods' GIVING to us through Baptism. We grow, flourish, and mature in his LOVE And we continue GIVING throughout our lives. We bring new life into the world GIVING our offspring our unconditional Love through Jesus Christ, our Savior. God GAVE us the Love of his only Son. He GAVE us all the wonders of our world unconditionally, forGIVING our sins and trespasses, as we forGIVE those who trespass against us.

But let's not get carried away in our self-righteousness of GIVING!!! We celebrate ThanksGIVING, and many other events throughout the year. But do not forget. GIVING is nothing without someone to accept our GIVING. Why bother to wrap and GIVE a gift if there is no one there to TAKE it? Why would God unconditionally GIVE us His only Son, if we don't accept and embrace Him? So, you see, GIVING is a two-way street. The words are forever linked in context and deed. GIVE and TAKE. We cannot have GIVE without TAKE. One cancels the other if not used properly. Like the phrase, "It TAKES two to tango!!"

So, as we approach the celebration of the season of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, let us keep in the forefront of our minds to TAKE into our hearts the wonderful gift God is GIVING us. Let us use that gift to not only enrich our own

lives, but pass that love around thousands and thousands of times as we grow in Gods love. Be THANKful. Be joyous and live in the shadow of Gods love as He intended for us to do. Let us be forGIVING. Let us be kind, and perhaps most importantly of all, faithful to our God and Savior Jesus Christ. The reason for the season.

Amen.

Ray Keller Sr.



Wednesday December 4, 2024

Morning Psalms 50; 147:1-11

Isa. 2:1-4

1 Thess. 2:13-20

Luke 20:19-26

Evening Psalms 53; 17



The dictionary defines a friend as one who's attached to another by affection or esteem.

Our relationships to Jesus and to our brothers and sisters in Christ are that of affection and esteem.

As we look forward to Jesus' coming again, we reflect and celebrate His coming to Earth in human form. During Advent we prepare to celebrate that event at Christmas.

In that same way, we prepare for His final coming, when we will gather together with our Lord into eternity.

All five of today's scripture readings show God's teachings of obedience, diligence, faith, hope, love, peace, affection, and esteem.

Lene Kuhblank



Prayer of Hope for Christmas

My God,
I ask you this Christmas for the
Gift of the Angel of Hope
To come into my life,
Into the lives of those I love
And into the lives of
Everyone in the world
In need of hope at this time.
Amen.

Lorna Byrne
"Prayers from the Heart"

Thursday, December 5, 2024

Morning Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12-20

Isa. 2:5-22

1 Thess. 3:1-13

Luke 20:27-40

Evening Psalms 126; 62

Excerpts from Isaiah 2:5-22:

“It’s God alone at front-and-center on the Day we’re talking about. The Day that God-of-the-Angel-Armies is matched against all big talking rivals, against all swaggering big names; Against all giant sequoias hugely towering, and against the expansive chestnut; Against Kilimanjaro and Annapurna, against the ranges of Alps and Andes...” (The Message)

“The haughtiness of people shall be humbled,
and the pride of everyone shall be brought low;
and the Lord alone will be exalted on that day.”
(NSRV)

One would say that I am up with the sun, whatever time that is each morning. I enjoy looking at the sky for color, haze, clouds and/or the rising sun. Phone (no fancy camera) in hand, I click on what God shows me. Some days the red sky calls me from indoors. Some mornings, like today, the sky is dark and brooding, no colors or sun visible. These shots I edit in black and white.

Bible verses and stories that express God’s Greatness through His Works of Creation speak to me. When Isaiah talks in terms of caves, highest peaks, and tallest of trees, I see them. Years ago we visited the Sequoia National Park and fit our bodies into the enormous space at the base of one of those giant trees. This summer our grandson Will hiked canyons and arches in five national parks visited with his parents.

God Almighty is greater than all He has created. Stand in the midst of this greatness; climb its peaks, hike its valleys, and yes, even stand in awe of its sun rising on another day, and be humbled.



Lorie Hartsig

Friday, December 6, 2024

Morning Psalms 102; 148

Isa. 3:1–4:1

1 Thess. 4:1–12

Luke 20:41–21:4

Evening Psalms 130; 16

Our Star words for this year are **remembrance and **provision**.**

During Advent, we reflect upon our challenges and blessings of the year. In 2024, we mourned for the loss of family and friends and worked through health concerns. We gathered with family and friends to celebrate life milestones and enjoy fellowship. We rejoiced in our son's marriage and the announcement of the upcoming births of two more grandchildren.

Erin Davis tells us that “when we take time to remember all that God has done, we set our hearts on gratitude, focus our lives on finding joy in the highs and lows and fill our homes with praise, even in grief. Do the hard work of remembering and don't stop until Christ comes.”

As we prepare for this Advent season and anticipate what God has prepared for us in the coming year, we know God will provide all we need. Our hope lies in our remembrance of all the good things God does for us and will continue to do.

“It is the beautiful task of Advent to awaken in all of us memories of goodness and thus, to open doors of hope.”

(Pope Benedict XVI)

Ellen and Eric Neumann

Christmas Word Search



AN
FR
YJWZ
KZIY
TWKPEY
KFUDCV
XJOLLYGJ
GMYSJVSL
GBUBLMJZSC
DHVSLPXVIG
TRQOPERHLHBA
TFINTBCWPJNL
RSYZOKIBMOSOIZ
ETYLPWOAEURUUT
CEJCYITTJLUHCLPP
NDCVDUGKAI VPFQBT
OSNYLEDMSQWGYVBPSA
PKIGFAIIWUSSQEHVVR
TREEXSYESWZTPOBJGSLP
LWVRELUCTELVESNDYUFC
IQPNLFEKELEGGNOGOFTMIX
AYGSRZDJLEQVNT OJGXSBBN
PPTBOCXRZETNBIMUIEPJDMDY
YYP SOHJBSBOMMPOBVCJNNHLH
UNRUALIVMFREQVMQIXTWDHWXGP
RFRMNBMSCHAXQSGNIKCOTSCTFE
MLPEPTQNI IHTNGTGCOEXARMAZAKW
CVXMQAYEOREERPRVNWXB DLCKOYXR
UGKFJZJHYNHTAERWXBHMTUOHOQPFWO
FWIVOGBINXKCOVXAYNOA IWZNPYOVL M

BELLS
STOCKINGS
WREATH
ELVES
SLED

CELEBRATE
EGGNOG
TREE
JOLLY
SANTA

MERRY
MISTLETOE
CHIMNEY
REINDEER

www.thetypicalmom.com

Saturday, December 7, 2024

Morning Psalms 90; 149

Isa. 4:2–6

1 Thess. 4:13–18

Luke 21:5–19

Evening Psalms 80; 72

Psalm 72 is referred to as a Solomon Psalm, because it is believed to be written by David praying for the reign of his son, Solomon. The prayers include ruling with justice, standing up for the poor and helping the children. But to me it goes beyond that; the psalmist praises God and declares:

“Let righteousness burst into blossom and peace
abound until the moon fades to nothing.

Rule from sea to sea,
from the River to the Rim.”

(Psalm 72, The Message)

This is an election year and I’m writing this before the election so here and now, I can confess that I am heartbroken at how far away we have strayed from David’s hopes. The rhetoric from both sides is so divisive, so full of fear, of separation. I so often come back to music and one lyric keeps ringing in my head...

“There's battle lines being drawn
And nobody's right if everybody's wrong”
(“For What It’s Worth” Stephen Stills)

I recently listened to an anthology of Grand Funk Railroad music and one of their songs is titled, “I Can Feel Him in the Morning.” The song starts out with children reciting their thoughts about God and people --- nice; right? Usually, and they are cute... until the last child says...

“I think ... um, um ... there are more people that are bad than there are good. And, um ... if you're good, you'll live forever. And, if you're bad, you'll die when you die ...”

(Don Brewer & Mark Farner)

You may think me naïve, but I have to admit that I truly believe the good outweigh the bad by a large margin and yes, if you are good you'll live forever. But if you are bad... well, we know where to turn; to the one who has beaten death and whose return we anticipate during this season of Advent.

The songs that I reference are not new; 1966 and 1971 respectively, so I'm not telling you anything that you already didn't know... we are human, we are flawed, and we were all given two great gifts before our birth -- Love and Hope.

I love that little boy whoever he was and the man he has become, whoever he is; and hope that his life has been touched by the Holy Spirit and he joins me and David in praising the Holy One; the one who

“... opens a place in his heart for the down-and-out, he restores the wretched of the earth. He frees them from tyranny and torture – when they bleed, he bleeds; when they die, he dies.”

(Psalm 72, The Message)

Bob Wolf



“If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character. If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home. If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nations. When there is order in the nations, there will be peace in the world.”

— Confucius

"Peace"

*I have come from so far away
Down the road of my own mistakes
In the hope you could hear me pray
Oh Lord, keep me in your reach
How I've longed through these wasted
years
To outrun all the pain and fear
Turned to stone from my uncried tears
And now it's Your grace I seek
Love won't compromise
It's a gift, it's a sacrifice
My soul renewed, and my heart released
In You I'll find my peace
Oh wondrous child of whom the angels
sing
Know my joy, feel my suffering
Shining star make this love you bring
So bright that I may believe
That my way will not be lost
From now on, 'til that river's crossed
My soul renewed, my spirit free
In You I'll find my peace*

*Kenny Rogers (as written by Beth Nielsen Chapman
& Micheal McDonald)*

Sunday, December 8, 2024

Morning Psalms 24; 150

Isa. 5:1-7

2 Pet. 3:11-18

Luke 7:28-35

Evening Psalms 25; 110

Worship Readings

Mal. 3:1-4

Luke 1:68-79

Phil. 1:3-11

Luke 3:1-6

Journey Together

When I'm not here at my Delaware home I live in northwestern PA. The area I live in is called "Pennsylvania Wilds"; I think for tourism's sake, but there are more forest areas than housing developments! I have been a lifelong member at a little country church. Several years ago, we started to get Star words. This year I received a bonus of two words -- "God's Word." When I first looked at it I thought, "I guess I need to read and study the Bible more." In the past few months, I think I have discovered why I received "God's Word" as my Star word and I would like to share that with you.

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you. Always to every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now."

(Philippians 1:3-5)

I have been on a ten-year journey of fellowship and faith with my seriously ill cousin. We have been through doctor's visits; hospital stays, and therapy of all kinds. We laughed and cried and through it all we prayed. In the last two months of her life, she asked me to read "God's Word." This was one of her favorites from Luke:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
'Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight. Every valley

shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways will be made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”
(Luke 3:4-6)

I would read every night, and she would say, “that makes me feel calm and peaceful.” She wrote letters to family and friends and in her letter to me she said she always admired my faith. I think my faith was made stronger by her and by reading “God’s Word” - my Star word.

On the day she died she Facetimed her sons and young grandsons. She shopped on Amazon, which she was famous for doing. She had the pastor there by her side to anoint her with oil and say prayers. We all prayed together. She had her sister, and I prepared a food table for anyone that came to see her. She was surrounded by family and friends when she left this world for the next peacefully.

“Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day spring from on high hath visited us. To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”
(Luke 1:78-79)

Peace to you ALL,

Sue Rizer

Monday, December 9, 2024

Morning Psalms 122; 145

Isa. 5:8–17

1 Thess. 5:1–11

Luke 21:20–28

Evening Psalms 40; 67

“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just in fact you are doing.”

(1 Thessalonians 5:9-11)

Our friend and Deacon Charlie O’Neill passed away on October 6th of this year. His presence is missed very much. Charlie told lots of stories about his favorite subjects, his wife and his children and grandchildren. He provided guidance and insight to the Deacons regarding certain missions and finance (which was his background). I picked the above verse from today’s scripture readings because Charlie was that quiet support for me and for the Deacons. In the lull of a discussion at a Deacon meeting or during the passing of the peace in the pew, he would add a thought of support and insight. We can encourage each other and offer that support we all need during our journey with Jesus Christ. During Advent take a moment to build someone up as we wait for the birth of our Lord and Savior.

Loving God, we wait, as our brothers and sisters waited all those years ago... for a light in the night... for a peace that passes all understanding... to arrive in our hearts and our homes. We can build each other up, we can give support where there is none, and we can wait for the joyous day when we see this in our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Prayerfully submitted,

Kristina (“Kris”) Taylor

**No matter how stressed
You are, remember how
blessed you are.**



**May the Lord keep you in His
perfect peace.**

“ 'T WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS
A LONG TIME AGO”

by Judy Harper

“ 'Twas the first night of Christmas a long time ago,
The hillside was peaceful, the moon was aglow.
The world couldn't know from what happened before,
That men would remember this night evermore.

The sheep on the hillside—their days journey over,
Were dreaming sweet dreams of a field full of clover.
The shepherds were watchful while guarding their flock,
The earth was their pillow, the stars were their clock.

Then all of a sudden, they jumped at the sight
Of the sky all a blaze with a heavenly light.
They huddled in fear, then they started to rise
As the lightening-like flash tore open the skies.

The heavens were split by the silvery ray,
The dark disappeared and the night became day.
And lo, at the end of the rainbow of light
Appeared then an angel to banish their fright.

The angel brought news of a birth in a manger
And bade them to hasten to welcome the stranger.
For Mary had just given birth to a boy
Whose coming would bring so much comfort and joy.

A choir of angels looked down from the sky
And heavenly voices were heard from on high:
Peace be on earth and good will to all men.
The Savior has come on this night, Amen.

The heavenly angels then faded from sight,
The sky once again turned from day to night.
The shepherds all quietly rose from the ground,
And hurried to go where the child would be found.

As they reached Bethlehem and the inn was in sight
From the barn came a trickle of half-hidden light.
It led like a path to a soft little bed
And shone very tenderly on a child's head.

The child in the manger was sleeping so sound,
His eyes were still closed, as the shepherds stood round.
From that instant of grace on that night long ago
Thousands of years would be warmed by the glow.

Guided by light from a bright shining star
Came a pilgrimage led of three kings from afar.
They were dressed in the finest of satins and lace,
Their complexions were that of an Orient race.

The three wealthy kings were wise men and proud,
But they went to the Christ child and solemnly bowed.
They came bearing treasures of incense and gold
To that sweet little child, still not very old.

The star in the sky twinkled down from above,
The world was awakened to kindness and love.
The past was forgotten, the future was bright,
And the spirit of Christmas was born on that night.”

<https://christmasstories.org/twas-the-night-before-christmas/>



Tuesday, December 10, 2024

Morning Psalms 33; 146

Isa. 5:18–25

1 Thess. 5:12–28

Luke 21:29–38

Evening Psalms 85; 94

REJOICE AND GIVE THANKS!

We chose the reading from Thessalonians because of Paul’s message to always rejoice, constantly pray, and give thanks in all things. Advent is a time to reflect and prepare for the celebration of the arrival of Jesus. What better way to honor Paul’s advice than to rejoice in the celebration of the birth of Jesus, pray for his return, and give thanks for all that GOD has blessed us with.

Our Star words are “Elevate” and “Community.” We have been particularly blessed to have found each other this past year, developed a loving relationship, relocated to Delaware, and welcomed into this congregation. We have begun to develop relationships in our new *community* of neighbors and friends. Through this process, we have been grateful and rejoiced in the welcome we have received from our new *community*. We expect the new relationships will give us the opportunity to *elevate* our integration into the community and our spirituality, and for that, we give thanks.

Julie Mignacca
Chas Ricciardi



REJOICE ALWAYS,
PRAY WITHOUT
CEASING, GIVE
THANKS IN ALL
CIRCUMSTANCES;
FOR THIS IS THE
WILL OF GOD IN
CHRIST JESUS
FOR YOU.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-17

Wednesday, December 11, 2024

Morning Psalms 50; 147:1-11

Isa. 6:1-13

2 Thess. 1:1-12

John 7:53-8:11

Evening Psalms 53; 17

In 2 Thessalonians Chapter 1, Paul pleads with the believers they must remember the grace that has rescued them. The divine grace provided by God in Christ Jesus allows us to have that peace that passes all understanding. Sometimes we get so caught up in the preparations for the holiday, we forget what Christmas is all about. The Prince of Peace has come to us! He came to rescue us from fear and anxiety and give us a peace that will make our heart sing.

“Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me.
Let there be peace on earth,
The peace that was meant to be.

With God as our father
Brothers all are we.
Let me walk with my brother
In perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me
Let this be the moment now.
With every step I take
Let this be my solemn vow.

To take each moment
And live each moment
In peace eternally,
Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me.”

(“Let There Be Peace on Earth” Gill J Miller
& Sy Miller)

Dear Jesus, thank you for being my prince of peace. Help me to decorate my life with the ornaments of prayer and praise so that I may be a light for those around me. Amen.

Alicia Tamilio



Thursday, December 12, 2024

Morning Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12-20

Isa. 7:1-9

2 Thess. 2:1-12

Luke 22:1-13

Evening Psalms 126; 62

My Star word, all year, has been *Relationship*. Not relationships, at which I acknowledge I have not, and do not, excel. Relationship -- a lovely, abstract word. And in our faith, strongly related to the very word, *Faith*. God, by nature as we understand God, a trinity, is foundationally a relationship; a *perichoresis*, to use a popular description. That is, a dance that is mutual, has no center, and varies all the time. The *personae* (in Greek masks = characters) are all God, undivided yet differently experienced. Which, for us, means two things: we may enter (and leave) the dance, and God is available to us where and how we are physically, emotionally, and psychically. Any barrier is one we have created, one we have put up, whether out of fear, out of experience (mostly of failure), out of prudence, or out of pride. God *longs* for us to enter; it is in relationship with God that we *become* who God meant when God knit us together. At the door, ask, seek, knock! – so the biblical wisdom goes. God is on the other side, waiting with love. Yet it is such a stretch for us, countless generations removed from this, our first and primary relationship. We may believe in it, but too often we act as if we don't, allowing all that is wrong – and it IS wrong! – to overwhelm our faith in this evergreen relationship.

Isaiah tells us, “*If you do not stand firm in the faith, you shall not stand at all.*” (7:9b) On my own worst days relationships can in fact stand in the way of this relationship. Yet only in this relationship, are all those relationships ever to be healed. As for our Lord, that healing can be a tough road, without obvious turns, climbs, and descents. I have learned – with help – to do as so many over the course of the centuries have done – to turn and return to the Psalms.

“Only in God is my being quiet; my rescue is from God.

Only God is my Rock and Rescue.

Only in God be quiet, my life,

My hope is only from God.” (Psalm 62:2-3)

Relationship implies deepening, over many roads, over many returns, over questions and answers, disputes and reconciliations. It is more real than the ones who enter into it, because it participates in the dancing, shifting, ever bright nature of God: love has no beginning or end. Love, simply, IS.

”The one who walks along and weeps – **who bears the seedbag** –

Will surely come in with sheaves, and glad song!”

(Ps. 126:6)

Blessed Advent to you, Terry

Friday, December 13, 2024

Morning Psalms 102; 148

Isa. 7:10–25

2 Thess. 2:13–3:5

Luke 22:14–30

Evening Psalms 130; 16

Psalm 16:5-8

“Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is my right hand, **I will not be shaken.**”

I have a happy heart, only through God’s grace and love for me. I am surrounded by the most humble and kind Christian women, who work with me, eat with me and laugh with me ... along with the gentlemen in their lives.

I am a lucky girl who has grown in faith with the help of the Lord and His earthly angels. The Christmas season lights up my world even more. This time of Advent and the coming of Jesus is precious and I am filled. I wish the same “fill” for you this Christmas and throughout the year.

My Star word is **PURPOSE**. I think of it every day. Seriously. I love my word. It helps me make decisions. It helps me feel good afterward. I discovered I have a very grand purpose in this life, and that makes all the difference.

Marjie Poffel

The Joy You Give - John Greenleaf Whittier

“Somehow, not only for Christmas
But all the long year through,
The joy that you give to others
Is the joy that comes back to you.
And the more you spend in blessing
The poor and lonely and sad,
The more of your heart’s possessing
Returns to you glad”



*L*oving Father, help us remember the birth of Jesus, that
we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the
shepherds, and the worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the
world.

Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with
every greeting.

Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and
teach us to be merry with clear hearts.

May the Christmas morning make us happy to be your
children, and the Christmas evening bring us to our beds
with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus’
sake.

Amen.

(Robert Louis Stevenson)

Saturday, December 14, 2024

Morning Psalms 90; 149

Isa. 8:1–15

2 Thess. 3:6–18

Luke 22:31–38

Evening Psalms 80; 72

My Star word for the year is “lightheartedness” – sometimes easier said than done. I followed the instructions by placing it in a conspicuous location. I chose to put it right in front of my monitors at my workstation, where I spend 9-10 hours of each workday. It’s the first thing I see when I join my first meeting at 7am and it always asks me a question, “Did you spend time and talk with God this morning?” My answer is sometimes “yes:” at least my first thought upon waking every day is being thankful for another day. But there is so much more to that question and unfortunately, my answer is often “not enough.” You see, I have found out that when I take time in the morning to be quiet, to meditate, and to allow that conversation to happen, it is easy for me to be lighthearted. But when I don’t take that time and just charge into my day, my heart is anything but light. But at least I have that little star to remind me during the day...

The funny thing about that little Star is that it is relentless! The air conditioner kicks on and blows it out of place, so I need to chase it and return it to its proper position on my desk... “OK!” I say, and take a few moments to take a deep breath, shut my eyes and listen. Finally, I decided that it was time to stop chasing this little guy around the office, so I decided to weigh it down – but with what? Looking around I found the perfect thing – a small glass stone given to me by a dear friend inscribed with the word “Gratitude.” But now I have TWO reminders staring at me all day long ---- “be happy and be grateful.” What a gift! And oddly enough, my plan is far from foolproof – the vibrations from my keyboard and speaker phone move the stone around and it slides off my Star and now I’m chasing them both around --- and every time I reach out to put each where they belong, I smile; and I am so

grateful for where I am at that very moment. And all of the sudden I realize that I feel LIGHTHEARTED without even trying!

I usually have a hard time looking at the scriptures for the day and coming up with something to write that somewhat reflects the context of the text. Imagine my surprise when I turned to Psalm 149 and all I found was lightheartedness! What does it ask us to do?

“... Sing to God a brand-new song,
praise him in the company of all who love him.
Let all Israel celebrate their Sovereign Creator,
Zion’s children exult in their King.
Let them praise his name in dance;
strike up the band and make great music!
And why? Because God delights in his people,
adorns plain folk with salvation garlands!”
(Psalm 149:1-4, The Message)

Bob Wolf



Advent Reflection on “Incarnation”

As Christians we admonish the society to acknowledge the “reason for the season.” This is not just the celebration of a birth, but the birth of *this* person, the Christ. But who is this Christ whose birth we celebrate?

One year, as Christmas drew nigh (sounds Biblical) and along with it the necessity of preparing another Christmas sermon, I looked for inspiration from an ancient writing and a Christian classic, the first text on the Incarnation. Athanasius, the newly consecrated bishop (June 8, 328) of Alexandria, Egypt, wrote this work probably to establish his *bona fides* as bishop. Perhaps I could glean from it a fresh perspective on the text, “And the Word became flesh” (John 1:14), the very definition of “incarnation.”

What I discovered however, was that Athanasius refers to Jesus’ birth only in passing.

“But he takes that which is ours, and that not simply, but from a spotless and stainless virgin, ignorant of man, pure and unmixed from intercourse with men. . . he prepared for himself in the Virgin the body as a temple, and made it his own, as an instrument, making himself known and dwelling in it.” (Athanasius On the Incarnation, section 8, see sections 18, 20, 33, 37, John Behr’s translation)

How can Athanasius write a book on the incarnation if he does not talk about the incarnation?

What I failed to take into account was Athanasius’ introduction.

“Come now, blessed one and true lover of Christ, let us, with the faith of our religion, relate also the things concerning the Incarnation of the Word and expound his divine manifestation to us,

which the Jews slander and the Greeks mock, but we ourselves venerate, so that, all the more from his apparent degradation, you may have an even greater and fuller piety towards him, for the more he is mocked by unbelievers by so much he provides a greater witness of his divinity, because what human beings cannot understand as impossible, these he shows to be possible (cf. Matt. 19:26), and what human beings mock as unseemly, these he renders fitting by his own goodness, and what human beings through sophistry laugh at as merely human, these by his power he shows to be divine, overturning the illusion of idols by his own apparent degradation through the cross, invisibly persuading those who mock and disbelieve to recognize his dignity and his power.” (ibid. section 1)

What is it “which the Jews slander and the Greeks mock”? It is not Jesus’ birth. It is his crucifixion, as Paul told the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). The entire work is a reflection on the cross. There is something about the crucifixion and resurrection (a single event) that Athanasius identifies as Jesus’ incarnation.

So, in the New Testament, when is it that Jesus’ takes on flesh? And what is “flesh”? Is it simply his own human flesh received from Mary? Athanasius is going to reveal to us what incarnation meant to the early church. Jesus’ incarnation cannot simply be about him, but must necessarily include us. This is not going to be some deep theological analysis. Rather it is of the greatest value to us, because the flesh that Jesus bore on the cross is our flesh and the life that he brings is not just his own death and resurrection but our death and resurrection in Christ. Christ is incarnate in us. “The body in which the Word dwells as in a temple cannot be separated from the body in which he now dwells” (John Behr The Nicene Faith, part 1, pg 187); and we are his body, as we are alive in him.

The most detailed resurrection story is that of the two disciples leaving Jerusalem on their way to Emmaus following Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection (Luke 24:13-35). A "stranger" joins them and confesses his ignorance about "the things that have taken place there in these days." The two then give him the *Reader's Digest* version of those events. The stranger then upbraids them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:25-27). As it was near evening, the two persuade Jesus to join them for supper. We are then told, "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight" (Luke 24:30-31). There are two wonders here: one, the resurrection of Jesus—his transformation from death to life—and then second the "resurrection" of the disciples as they finally recognize the crucified Jesus as the risen one; it is their transformation from those ignorant of Christ to those who came to life in him. The moment of recognition comes as Jesus opens the scriptures and breaks the bread, the very actions that are (or should be) the heart of our worship. Why does Jesus then "vanish?" It is because once they recognize the risen Jesus, they become his body! Jesus is incarnate in our flesh, when our blindness is healed (Luke 18:35-43), when the veil is lifted from our eyes (2 Corinthians 3:13-16), and we "see" Jesus as he truly is through the Scriptures. Jesus' resurrection is not complete until we are raised to new life in him. That is when we become his body. The earliest icon of the "Resurrection" does not depict Jesus arising from the tomb; rather we are given to see the risen Jesus raising Adam and Eve! As the risen one raises them, we are raised, being transformed from an animated body to a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:44). One person wrote, "by sharing a body with us, he enables those who share in his body to partake also of his life and resurrection" (ibid. The Nicene Faith, page 197). And

so, incarnation occurs when the incarnate one takes flesh in us.

“For being above all, the Word of God consequently, by offering his own temple and his bodily instrument as a substitute for all, fulfilled in death that which was required; and, being with all through the like [body], the incorruptible Son of God consequently clothed all with incorruptibility in the promise concerning the resurrection. And now the very corruption of death no longer holds ground against human beings because of the indwelling Word, in them through the one body.” (ibid. Incarnation, section 9)

Our tendency is to see the birth of Jesus as merely a historical event, as something that happened in the lives of a family of long ago. And while Jesus' birth was an event in history, it has no import unless and until Jesus, in taking up our flesh, also raises us from death to life as we dwell in him and he in us. Jesus' birth must also lead to our birth, our new birth, our birth from above (John 3:1-10). Jesus' incarnation must be an event in our lives. We, who share in the flesh that Jesus assumed, have been crucified with him—dying to ourselves, dying to our passions and self-will; we anticipate being raised with him to a life that death cannot touch (Romans 6:1-11). In order to prove that Jesus was resurrected, Athanasius did not refer to the empty tomb or the witnesses of the disciples. Rather, he pointed to all the believers who, alive in Christ, live without the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15).

“That death has been dissolved, and the cross has become victory over it, and it is no longer strong but is itself truly dead, no mean proof but an evident surety is that it is despised by all Christ's disciples, and everyone tramples on it, and no longer fears it, but with the sign

of the cross and faith in Christ tread it under foot as something dead. ... For they really know that when they die they are not destroyed, but both live and become incorruptible through the resurrection. ... But when they come to faith in him and to his teaching, they so despise death that they eagerly rush to it and become witnesses to the resurrection over it effected by the Savior.”

(ibid. Incarnation, section 27)

(That is, while they do not seek out martyrdom, they do embrace it when it is thrust upon them.) We are the proof of Jesus’ resurrection. Consequently, we are the living proof of Jesus’ incarnation.

Christmas is, certainly, about Jesus, but it is also about us. Jesus, whose flesh he assumed and whose birth we celebrate, is the one crucified in the flesh and raised in the flesh, the one who conquers death, allowing us to live in the expectation of becoming human beings in him, reflecting his likeness. As Jesus was born in our flesh, may we be raised to share in his flesh as we become his living body.

We celebrate the birth of Jesus, Jesus who is always, even at his birth, the crucified one. And so, in Jesus we celebrate also our birth in Jesus in whom we are reconciled to God and become human beings. It is this Jesus who is “the reason for the season.”

Rev. Kerry Shull





I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.

- Rabindranath Tagore

Sunday, December 15, 2024

Morning Psalms 24; 150

Isa. 13:1–13

Heb. 12:18–29

John 3:22–30

Evening Psalms 25; 110

Worship Readings

Zeph. 3:14–20

Isa. 12:2–6

Phil. 4:4–7

Luke 3:7–18

When I read Psalm 150, I knew right away this was the one to write about. There are a lot of musical instruments listed and lots of “praise the Lord” verses.

Please know that all the musical ability in the family went down my brother’s (John’s) side of the family. Of course, he sang in High School chorus and taught himself to play drums. Many were the days I’d hear him pounding out “Wipe Out” (The Sufaris) or he’d be playing some of his huge collection of 45’s and albums. (I listened outside his door.) Me? I barely made it thru High School music class. All I know is that when the music notes go up, I sing higher/down and I sing lower.

Then along comes my Star word – melody. The dictionary was no help. Shannon Flynn tried to explain it to me, but I don’t speak that language. Tom Bentz said it could be my voice – right. Then I remembered what a Gospel Choir Director once said, “Every voice raised in praise of the Lord is welcome.”

So, if you see me “singing,” know that there are great voices nearby. If you see me swaying, it is because the song reminds me of something. And if you see me clapping, I’ll probably be “off beat” (whatever that is). So, I’ve got the spirit and that is enough for me.

Gloria Bartholomew

Monday, December 16, 2024

Morning Psalms 122; 145

Isa. 8:16–9:1

2 Pet. 1:1–11

Luke 22:39–53

Evening Psalms 40; 67

Joy Ride

Maybe a Mighty Identity
made Isaiah or Elijah
ride a chariot
like Santa Claus
before our foggy eyes
to show us like Peter
the unpacked gifts
and potential in us.

Pray told,
we too may
peter out,
deny knowing
or defy following
Jesus or allowing
the divinity
in him and us,

Nevertheless,
the cock crows,
the bell tolls,
the stone rolls,
wombs and tombs open,
sorrow turns to joy
with a girl or boy
born to rewind the world.

Thomas Bentz

Tuesday, December 17, 2024

Morning Psalms 33; 146

Isa. 9:2–7

2 Pet. 1:12–21

Luke 22:54–69

Evening Psalms 85; 94

The reading the Isaiah scripture for today made me recall the first (and only) time I went to see the Radio City Christmas Spectacular in New York City. For anyone who has not been seen it, there is a living nativity at the end. But what brought me to tears was the “poem” “One Solitary Life” that leads into the nativity:

“He was born in an obscure village
The child of a peasant woman
He grew up in another obscure village
Where he worked in a carpenter shop
Until he was thirty when public opinion
turned against him...”

... centuries have come and gone

“And today Jesus is the central figure of the
human race
And the leader of mankind’s progress
All the armies that have ever marched
All the navies that have ever sailed
All the parliaments that have ever sat
All the kings that ever reigned put together
Have not affected the life of mankind on
earth
As powerfully as that one solitary life.”

(James Allen Francis)

As the words slowly scrolled across the screen, I couldn’t help but stand in awe of what God had done for us – he sent His son, a baby, to save us! Heaven came down. Love came down.

I hope that everyone can feel that love at Christmas and try to live it every day.

“Emmanuel, Emmanuel
Wonderful, counselor
Lord of life, lord of all
He's the prince of peace, mighty God, holy one
Emmanuel, Emmanuel”

(written by Michael W Smith)

Lord Jesus,

We thank you for being our Wonderful Counselor, Might God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. As we enter the Christmas season, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness. As You sent Your messengers the prophets to prepare the way of salvation, may we prepare our traditions that nurture our spiritual lives and celebrate the dawning of your everlasting light. In your name we pray, Amen.

Alicia Tamilio

Jesus
Prince of Peace
Isaiah 9:6

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

Morning Psalms 50; 147:1-11

Isa. 11:1-9

Eph. 6:10-20

John 3:16-21

Evening Psalms 53; 17

Pray in the Spirit

“Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer
and supplication.” (Ephesians 6:18)

This past year, I can't begin to count the number of mornings that I've settled into my prayer chair to pray for my people and I start wandering all over the place, rambling on and on for what I believe my people need – not THY will, but MINE. I pray for loved ones and loved ones of loved ones, for friends and their families and friends, some with life-threatening illnesses, and for our southern neighbors experiencing devastation from back-to-back hurricanes, and for the loss of so many innocent lives in the too numerous wars around our troubled world. Fortunately, I am often drawn up short by the Powers to Whom I pray. I stop in my tracks, lay hands on my prayer journal and say, “Come Holy Spirit.”

In Roman's 8:26 we read that “...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”

I then rest in the arms of Spirit and delegate, asking Him to take to the Father my petitions for those for whom specific prayers are lacking.

It brings me comfort and release, trusting in the Word that tells me that this is one of the Holy Spirit's jobs. Sometimes I softly chant one of my favorite simple choruses:

“Spirit of the Living God
Fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the Living God
Fall afresh on me.
Break me, melt me, mold me, fill me.
Spirit of the Living God, Fall afresh on me.”
(“Spirit of the Living God,” Daniel Iverson)

Marie Cook Wachler



Thursday, December 19, 2024

Morning Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12; 20

Isa. 11:10-16

Rev. 20:1-10

John 5:30-47

Evening Psalms 126; 62



Since Pastor Terry has been using the First Nations Version for our Gospel readings, I thought that a Native American prayer might be appropriate.

I have kept this prayer next to my bed for close to 30 years. I don't read it every day, but pull it out from time to time to give me a lift.

American Prayer

O great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the winds, and whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me! I am small and weak; I need your strength and wisdom. Let me walk in beauty, and make my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset. Make my hands respect the things you have made and my ears sharp to hear your voice. Make me wise so that I may understand the things you have taught my people. Let me learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock. I seek strength, not to be greater than my friend, but to fight my greatest enemy – myself. Make me always ready to come to you with clean hands and straight eyes. So when life fades, as the fading sunset, my spirit may come to you without shame.

Ollie Robling

Friday, December 20, 2024

Morning Psalms 102; 148

Isa. 28:9–22

Rev. 20:11—21:8

Luke 1:5–25

Evening Psalms 130; 16

For 45 years, God blessed me with the job of directing children's church choirs, for children in pre-k to sixth grade. One of the greatest joys was the Christmas season: pageants and Christmas Eve family services with happy, fidgety children awaiting Christmas morning.

I could tell many stories of past Christmases with children singing, but today I am thinking of a boy named Adrian. Long after Christmas season was over, Adrian requested at every practice that we sing "Emmanuel," a song we learned for a cantata with the adult choir that year. All throughout the school year, Adrian requested we sing "Emmanuel," and he always had such joy on his face!

There is a lesson for all of us that I learned from Adrian this year: the birth of Jesus was a miracle to embrace all year long, not just on December 25th. Emmanuel! God is with us all year!

Peggy Manion

Saturday, December 21, 2024

Morning Psalms 90; 149

Isa. 29:9–24

Rev. 21:9–21

Luke 1:26–38

Evening Psalms 80; 72

Hope and Joy for the Future

Just think of it:

- ✝ The deaf shall hear!
- ✝ The blind shall see!
- ✝ The meek shall obtain fresh joy!

- ✝ The tyrant will be no more.
- ✝ The scoffer will cease to be.
- ✝ The evil doers will be cut off.

Then when we see the children, we will know the work of His hands.

*Continue to HOPE, so
everlasting Joy will be ours.*

Our GOD is

Awesome

Gloria Bartholomew



Man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Camel Had Wandered

by Janet Eyestone Buck

“Our family has always enjoyed a Christmas tradition of setting out a ceramic nativity scene--complete with wise men, camels, shepherds, sheep, and of course, Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus. Each season the nativity scene was the same.

One year when my children were young, I carefully unwrapped each piece and set up an artistic display representing the first Christmas. The children gathered around to watch. We talked about the birth of Jesus and the visit of the shepherds and Magi. I then cautioned the children, as always, not to touch the pieces, explaining that they were fragile and easily broken.

This year, however, the temptation was too great for my two-year old daughter, Elizabeth. The day we set up the nativity scene, I noticed several times, with some irritation, that a camel had wandered from its appointed place or a sheep had strayed from the watchful care of the shepherd. Each time, I returned the piece to its rightful place, and then tracked down the culprit and admonished her to leave things alone.

The next morning, Elizabeth awoke and went downstairs before I did. When I walked into the living room, I noticed right away that the manger scene had been disturbed again. All the pieces were clumped together in a mass, as tightly as they could be fitted together.

Impatiently, I stepped forward to put things right; but I stopped short as I realized that some thought had gone into this new arrangement. All twenty-three figures were grouped in a circle, facing inward, pushed together as if to get the best view possible of the figure resting in the center of them all—the Baby Jesus.

The spirit touched my soul as I pondered the insight of a two-year old. Certainly, Christ should be the center of our holiday celebrations. If we all could draw in' around our Savior—not only during the Christmas season but during each day—what a better perspective we would have. The love He offers to each of us would be easily shared with others who have not ventured so close.

I left the nativity arranged according to Elizabeth's design that year. It served as a poignant reminder during the rest of the season of what Christmas is all about."



Sunday, December 22, 2024

Morning Psalms 24; 150

Isa. 31:1–9

Rev. 21:22—22:5

Luke 1:39–48a (48b–56)

Evening Psalms 25; 110

Worship Readings

Mic. 5:2–5a

Luke 1:46b–55 or Ps. 80:1–7

Heb. 10:5–10

Luke 1:39–45 (46–55)

Mic. 5:2–5a

My father was a stern, harsh, no-nonsense sort of person, whose word was law. Where there were no rules, he made them up. We three kids were punished on a whim - no excuses, and very little reasoning. I suppose the fact that he was the youngest of seven and the only boy was a factor in always wanting his own way. My brothers and I were quite afraid of him.

But a few days before Christmas, his personality changed; he became jolly and teddy-bearish. As soon as he heard Bing Crosby's smooth baritone singing, "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas" on the radio, he would start to dance. Thanks to all those sisters, he was an excellent dancer. He would grab my mother's hands and twirl her around our small living room, singing every word of the happy little song. We loved it.

Christmas was very simple in our house. One or two gifts appeared under the tree on Christmas morning, and we were giddy with gratitude. It was a wonderful time. We milked the good feeling until New Years' Day. After the tree was taken down, my father slid back into his old regal, entitled self. We waited impatiently for another year to go by.

June Goldman

Monday, December 23, 2024

Morning Psalms 122; 145

Isa. 33:17–22

Rev. 22:6–11, 18–20

Luke 1:57–66

Evening Psalms 40; 67

I hadn't read the story of the birth of John the Baptist in a long time. I remembered that Zechariah was rendered mute by the angel Gabriel when he was told his wife was going to have baby. I remembered that the baby in her womb leaped when Mary came to visit them with her great news. But I didn't remember the beautiful poem that Zechariah spoke after the birth of his boy. Such beautiful words for us to read to prepare for the birth of another gift to the world, Jesus Christ. It reminds us of God's good gifts to us and his desire that we live in God's love always. Zechariah says in the Gospel of John:

Through the heartfelt mercies of our God
God's Sunrise will break in upon us,
Shining on those in the darkness,
those sitting in the shadow of death,
Then showing us the way, one foot at a time,
down the path of peace. (1:78-79 The Message)

I highly recommend that you read the entire first chapter of the Gospel of John, as we think about and prepare for the birth of Jesus. It is a wonderful story of the faith of those mothers and fathers, Zechariah and Elizabeth and Mary and Joseph-- of those who believed in the glory and wonder of their God.

Have a blessed Christmas Eve and a joyous Christmas day!!

Bev Bailey

WARNING.....WARNING: ADVENT VIRUS

Be on the alert for symptoms of inner Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. The hearts of a great many have already been exposed to this virus and it is possible that people everywhere could come down with it in epidemic proportions. This could pose a serious threat to what has, up to now, been a fairly stable condition of conflict in the world. Some signs and symptoms of The Advent Virus:

- ✦ A tendency to think and act spontaneously rather than on fears based on past experiences.
- ✦ An unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment.
- ✦ A loss of interest in judging other people.
- ✦ A loss of interest in interpreting the actions of others.
- ✦ A loss of interest in conflict.
- ✦ A loss of the ability to worry. (This is a very serious symptom.)
- ✦ Frequent, overwhelming episodes of appreciation.
- ✦ Contented feelings of connectedness with others and nature.
- ✦ Frequent attacks of smiling.
- ✦ An increasing tendency to let things happen rather than make them happen.
- ✦ An increased susceptibility to the love extended by others as well as the uncontrollable urge to extend it.



The Nativity of the Lord



CHRISTMAS EVE

Morning Psalms 33; 146

Isa. 35:1–10

Rev. 22:12–17, 21

Luke 1:67–80

Evening Psalms 132; 114

“And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:6-7)

As a woman, I know a thing or two about a birth story. My three children’s births were nothing alike, but each was beautiful, terrifying, exhausting, and thrilling in its own way. Women share their birth stories and spend time listening to the details of their friends’ and relatives’ birth stories as well. It is a way of honoring the incredible act of bringing a child into the world.

The beautiful passage we read each year in Luke 2 tells just a few details about the birth we celebrate tonight. Away from home, alone in a strange place, this baby is coming. No rooms available. Was it just Mary and Joseph in that stable? If she had delivered at home, she surely would have been attended by a midwife, plus her mother and sisters - older women who could help her and calm her. But the text says this in the King James Version: “And she brought forth her firstborn son... .” Incredible! This young woman, chosen by God to be the mother of our Lord, was given everything she needed to accomplish this extraordinary task.

We join the world tonight in celebrating, retelling, and reenacting this beautiful birth story. The rest of the cast of characters are added – the shepherds, a bright star, a host of angels, the animals in the manger, and later, the wise men, and the story comes to life yet again. This birth, unlike any other

before or since, changed everything. As we worship the birth of Jesus together tonight, let us experience anew the gift of His coming to us and remember the words Isaiah gave to us almost 600 years before the birth:

“For unto us a child is born
Unto us a son is given,
And the government will be upon his shoulders.
And his name shall be called
Wonderful, Counsellor,
The mighty God,
The everlasting Father,
The Prince of Peace.”

(Isaiah 9:6)

Shannon Flynn



THE GRACEFUL CHAPTER

CHRISTMAS DAY

Morning Psalms 2; 149

Micah 4:1-5; 5:2-4

1 John 4:7-16

John 3:31-36

Evening Psalms 98; 96

“While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:6)

There is not one person reading this that does not understand the joy and celebration of a new life. Whether a son or daughter, grandchild, niece or nephew, or friend, this child is a gift from God. Each year on December 25th, we celebrate “The ultimate Gift”. Our God gave His son to work among us and beside us.

This baby will grow to be a man who is the example of whom we should be. This man will give up his life as a sacrifice for our salvation. This man gives us the pathway to God and eternal life - Jesus, the son of God.

Since God sacrificed his son for us, what is our responsibility, our response to this gift? We live in a small corner of God’s creation, but we must strive to be Christ-like. Be examples. Love those who Christ would love but society would exclude. Help those less fortunate. Comfort those in need. No matter how hard it may seem, joyfully celebrate our Savior walking and supporting us each day of our lives.

May each morning we awake be Christmas Day and may we spread the love God gave us through Jesus.

Marti Sommer

ADDITIONAL READINGS

NATIVITY OF THE LORD I

| | |
|----------------|---------------------|
| First Reading | Isaiah 9:2–7 |
| Psalm | Psalms 96 |
| Second Reading | Titus 2:11–14 |
| Gospel | Luke 2:1–14 [15–20] |

NATIVITY OF THE LORD II

| | |
|----------------|-------------------|
| First Reading | Isaiah 62:6–12 |
| Psalm | Psalms 97 |
| Second Reading | Titus 3:4–7 |
| Gospel | Luke 2:[1–7] 8–20 |

NATIVITY OF THE LORD III

| | |
|----------------|----------------------|
| First Reading | Isaiah 52:7–10 |
| Psalm | Psalms 98 |
| Second Reading | Hebrews 1:1–4 [5–12] |
| Gospel | John 1:1–14 |

To all of those who participated in the production of this Devotional Booklet – Thank You!. 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.”

** cover artwork for this devotional has been provided by Elaine Wolf*

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