

St. John's Christian Church

2020 Advent Devotional



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I pray that your spiritual health will be blessed during this year's Advent Season.

One avenue of blessing is this Advent Devotional. The devotions have been written by current leaders and staff of St. John's and provide a variety of devotional thought and perspective during this Advent season as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas!

The word "Advent" is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "coming," which is a translation of the Greek word *parousia*. Scholars believe that during the 4th and 5th centuries in Spain and Gaul, Advent was a season of preparation for the baptism of new Christians at the January feast of Epiphany, the celebration of God's incarnation represented by the visit of the Magi to the baby Jesus, his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, and his first miracle at Cana. During this season of preparation, Christians would spend 40 days in penance, prayer, and fasting to prepare for this celebration; originally, there was little connection between Advent and Christmas.

By the 6th century, however, Roman Christians had tied Advent to the coming of Christ. But the "coming" they had in mind was not Christ's first coming in the manger in Bethlehem, but his second coming in the clouds as the judge of the world. It was not until the Middle Ages that the Advent season was explicitly linked to Christ's first coming at Christmas.

Today, the season of Advent lasts for four Sundays leading up to Christmas. The church, during Advent, looks back upon Christ's coming in celebration while at the same time looking forward in eager anticipation to the coming of Christ's kingdom when he returns for his people.

Sunday, November 29th...
First Sunday of Advent - Hope

Recall the long-ago word of Prophecy from Micah 5:2-5: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

Maybe you’ll recall this sermon illustration I shared not too long ago: “Two frogs fell into a tub of cream. One looked at the high sides of the tub which were too difficult to crawl over and said, “It is hopeless.” So, he resigned himself to death, relaxed, and sank to the bottom. The other one determined to keep swimming as long as he could. “Something might happen,” he said. He kept kicking and churning, and finally he found himself on a solid platform of butter and jumped to safety.”

I wonder what length of time is meant by the word “finally?” How long did that determined frog kick and churn? How long? I wonder how many times that simple question has been asked throughout the eons of time – how long? In the “lengthy” time of my requested adherence to a time of isolation and quarantine, it took me a while to stop moaning and complaining. Then I determined that I needed to make the most of this unique period. The blessing of hope was instilled within me, that this was a time I could put to use an open myself to God’s lead and instruction.

That long-ago word from Micah took 700 years to fulfill until Jesus was born. Those years were filled with watching and waiting, filled with hope as they awaited the promise to be fulfilled. Hope – expectant anticipation. The Advent season only lasts four weeks so we need to invest ourselves in this time, expectantly anticipating the second coming of the Lord. Open your heart and mind, move beyond the trying times we are living through, allow the hope of Christ to fill you with his hope.

Dear Lord, thank you for the hope I have in Christ, an eternal hope that keeps me steadfast in my devotion and trust in you. Amen.

Pastor Erich

Monday, November 30th...

The Incorporeal God

Lately I have been doing a lot of reading of and listening to the work of Dr. William Lane Craig, an excellent Christian Apologist. Most recently, I have been going through a series of his teachings on the attributes of God and was struck by the practical applications Dr. Craig drew out of God's incorporeality, which is the fact that God is a spiritual being and not a physical one, as simply stated in John 4:24, "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

I had always accepted this attribute of God, but never thought much about it. Dr. Craig astutely points out though that if God, as the ultimate meaning of life, is spirit then the ultimate meaning of life is spiritual, not physical. Specifically, God is a personal spiritual being which makes ultimate meaning personal and spiritual, implying that ultimate value is found in persons, who are created in God's image, and not material things.

This has great application for our busy Christmas season, where so much time and effort are spent on material things such as gifts, decorations, and big meals. Instead, do as Jesus reminded the expert in the law, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

This does not exclude the trappings of the Christmas season, but our focus should be on the people around us, and ultimately Christ.

Submitted by Ryan Christman

Tuesday, December 1st...

Change

Hebrews 13:8 – “Jesus Christ the same yesterday,
and today and forever.”

This song has been running through my mind these days.

“Yesterday, today, forever, Jesus is the same.

All may change but Jesus never, glory to His name.

Glory to His Name, Glory to His Name.

All may change but Jesus never, Glory to His name.”

As we've moved through 2020, I've seen so much change. As a healthcare provider, the standards for Covid-19 are changing almost daily. Procedures of: how to wash hands, clean surfaces, wear a mask, how I even speak to my patients with the very first questions out of my mouth. “Are you experiencing any symptoms of Covid-19?” And as time progressed, that list of symptoms kept changing....Change can be good, but it can be so stressful.

And then I got to thinking about “How the Grinch Stole Christmas.” The Whos in Whoville experienced Christmas differently, but the basic joy of their holiday was the same. Christmas still came. Christmas came without packages; it came without bows. And WHY? Because Jesus is the same yesterday, today, forever. All may change but Jesus never, glory to his name.

As we do Christmas differently this year, distancing from the ones who mean the most to us, take courage because Jesus never changes, His love for us will always and forever be the same.

Thank you, Lord, for your steadfast love that does not change.

Submitted by Crissi Stuckey

Wednesday, December 2nd...

The Gift of **Christmastime**

This year as we journey through Advent and the Christmas season, our time and traditions may look different than in past years. We have had a year that has caused us to pause, slow down and think about simple gifts and things that matter most to us.

Amidst many unexpected challenges and difficulties this year, we have remained safe and secure that our earthly days are preparing us for much greater days of glory and completeness in the Heavenly Realm.

How will each of us find **Christ** in our Christmastime and spend our **time** to worship the Christ child and rest in the quiet peace and stillness of complete wonder at His simple, perfect birth? The best gift for baby Jesus and his parents was the **time** offering that people gave to "**Come and Worship, worship Christ the newborn King.**" Although we may not be able to come together this year with our families or church family, we can all take the time we have been given to quiet the world around us and be still.

The words of the first verse of this old Austrian lullaby are very fitting for us as 2020 comes to a peaceful end.

*Still, still, still,
One can hear the falling snow.
For all is hushed,
The world is sleeping,
Holy Star its vigil keeping... Still, Still, Still.*

May each of you and your loved ones find the stillness and peace that comes from the humble birth of our Christ child as we long for this peace on earth as it is in Heaven. Enjoy your quiet time for the Christ child this Christmas season. Take your gift of time and offer the Advent season promises of hope, joy, peace and love to those around you. May you feel Christmas blessings all around you in the stillness and quiet of your home.

Submitted by Jan Lindsay

Thursday, December 3rd...

Trees

I live in a woods and am surrounded by trees and therefore have come to have an appreciation for them. Trees of course, are of many different varieties. Since each variety is different by the shape of the leaf, the bark stature, or the shape of the crown they can be told apart from each other. Although they are all different each and every tree is shaped by the forces nature sends its way. They occasionally are bent over by too much snow on them. Once in a while a tree is broken by a heavy wind.

I look at a human life in the same way. Each of us are affected by a variety of influences in our lives. Those influences can be someone we work with, music we listen to, or maybe television shows we watch. Some of our lives can become bent and twisted by those influences much as a tree is influenced by the forces of nature.

Fortunately our lives can be made "straight" again through our Savior Jesus Christ who was sent to us on Christmas Day! May each of us become "straight" again and be influenced by the Son of God.

Submitted by Jim Grieser



Friday, December 4th...

Let It Begin With Me

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” – Luke 2:11-14

2020 has been filled with coronavirus concerns including health and economic fears, mask or no mask, to hold events or not, to close or open the church’s doors, and so on. Add in political and election turbulence with racial tensions and some will not define 2020 as peaceful.

Chaos and unrest breeds chaos and unrest until people bring peace into their own lives and share it with those around them. Peace is promised to believers of Christ if we have faith and then live out that faith.

The Peace Candle will be lit during worship on December 6th. My daughter, Molly, will also sing, “Let There Be Peace On Earth (Let it Begin With Me).” I reflect on the lyrics in that song and the opportunities Christians have to bring peace to this world.

*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.*

Submitted by Jeff Rutledge

Saturday, December 5th...



Let's talk politics... now that I have everyone's pulse and blood pressure up, let me explain.

You are probably thinking, "what is a political topic doing in an advent devotional?" Right? Well in this turbulent time of political environment one word comes to mind and that is PEACE! As my "level headed" husband often reminds his "hot headed" wife... it's our job as Christians to keep peace and stay peaceful.

I am reminded of the verse from Romans 12:18: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

So as we go through this advent season and the political environment still unstable try to be as peaceful as possible. We often see the words PEACE, LOVE and JOY during Christmastime. Let's all focus on PEACE this year.

One of my favorite songs says it best... "let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me".

Wishing you a peaceful holiday season!

Submitted by Karen Walker

Sunday, December 6th...
Second Sunday of Advent - Peace

There's a fence at Grant's Farm, near St. Louis, MO, made of over 2,500 Civil War rifle barrels. The fence symbolizes the permanence of peace, as these rifles have been permanently repurposed. The rifle-barrel-fence now helps house a collection of local and exotic animals, as an attraction for families to come together and enjoy God's creativity in the animal kingdom.

“They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (Isaiah 2:4b).

“Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be fuel for the fire. For to 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. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:5-7a).

When our Lord Jesus comes again, the peace we long for will become reality. Every military uniform will be burned up and every weapon will be repurposed for constructive purposes. No weapons will be reserved in case of future fights, because there will be no future fights. Moreover, the root of all our fighting (James 4:1) will finally be dealt with as Jesus repurposes the most dangerous weapon of all into the most productive tool of all: the human heart (Ezekiel 36:26).

Pastor Alex



Monday, December 7th...

As a kid, the Christmas season involved hours of pouring through the Sears and JC Penney catalogues that arrived in the mail each year. I assembled a Christmas list by writing on a piece of notebook paper each item I hoped to receive along with the page number where it could be found (in case mom and dad had any questions). Admittedly, I have not entirely outgrown the desire to have more stuff, even though I am blessed with more than I need. A newer car, house remodels and upgrades, and vacations have replaced the ball glove and football on my wish list.

The November 15 church service and Sunday school lesson both spoke of contentment. Paul wrote the following (Philippians 4:12-13) – while being in prison! “. . . for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or living in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”

Modern day contemporaries echo those words:

“Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never, ever have enough.”
– Oprah Winfrey

“Many Christians are discontented, not because they aren't doing well but because others are doing better.”

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/get-help/learning-contentment>
(via Sarah Nafziger)

“Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, It is well, it is well, with my soul”

Hymn, “It is Well With My Soul” by Horatio Spafford

Wishing you peace and contentment.

Submitted by Brad Roth

Tuesday, December 8th...

One of my favorite songs is titled “One Of These Days” by FFH. I share these lyrics with you:

One of these days I’m going to fly over the mountain
One of these days I’m going to ride on the silver lining
One of these days I’m going to witness all I’ve been missing,
One of these days

One of these days I’m going to do all the things that I’ve never done
I’m going to finish all the races that I’ve run but I’ve never won
And I’m going to see a million faces and recognize everyone,
One of these days

One of these days, I’m going to see the hand that took the nails for me
One of these days, I’m going to hold the key to the mansion built for me
One of these days, I’m going to walk the streets of gold that were paved
for me
One of these days, I’m going see my Savior face to face,
One of these days

One of these days I’m going to see just what became of me
On the day that I believed when you took myself from me
And I believe I will see what I would have been if you didn’t save me,
One of these days

And one of these days I’m going to talk
With all the saints that have gone before
And in their sandals I will walk and we will sit along the shore
And I will learn all the things that I never knew before, All this and more

One of these days, I’m going to see the hand that took the nails for me
One of these days, I’m going to hold the key to the mansion built for me
One of these days I’m going to walk the streets of gold that were paved
for me
One of these days I’m going to see my Savior face to face,
One of these days

One of these days I'll finally be, In a place where there's not more need
No more pain and no more grief, no more foolish disbelief
And all the joy there will be when at last we finally see,
One of these days

One of these days, I'm going to see the hand that took the nails for me
One of these days, I'm going to hold the keys to the mansion built for me
One of these days, I'm going to walk the streets of gold that were paved
for me
One of these days, I'm going to see my Jesus face to face
One of these days, One of these days

You may ask, "what does this have to do with Christmas?" Well, it reminds me of the real meaning of Christmas and the promise that was given. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." One of these days we will be able to meet the Greatest Christmas gift of all, Jesus!

Submitted by Todd Nafziger



Wednesday, December 9th...

One of my fondest memories of Christmas is setting in my parents' small living room on Christmas Eve. My mother and father there with Sandy and me, my sister and her husband. Someone would read the Christmas story from the Bible, Luke 2:1-20. Then we would sing Christmas carols, some of us off key.

This was all a reminder that God sent His son to live among humans and to bring a new covenant that would show how God wished humans to interact with one another and offer salvation.

Jesus met people where they were spiritually and emotionally. He lived and acted as an example to those who questioned him without anger or recrimination. He did not judge them, but challenged them.

We must ask ourselves: Who are those we find most difficult to accept and understand? How can we serve and support these people in Christian love?

Pray to God that we be made examples and proof of God's love for all people. Help us to spread the love of God, and be an example of that love throughout the world by living in the world, but not of the world. In Christ's name let us do these things.

Submitted by Gary Frazier



Thursday, December 10th...

As Advent continues, we look for God in our lives. Over the last few years, I have seen God's hand in my life year around.

I went through a period of time when I would get dizzy and would lose my balance. There were two times I recall very well. I had a Thursday morning routine. I would make Carol's coffee, help with the laundry in the basement and after that I would take the trash out to the street. I came back from the street to get into my car. I felt very light-headed and dizzy. I blacked out and I fell onto the front of the car and then on to the cement driveway. I woke up laying on the driveway. I looked around and decided to crawl to the car door and pull myself up in the car. When I got to the door, I realized I did not have my keys. Then remembered the keys were in my hand when I fell. I wondered where or what happened to the keys? I crawled back to the area where I fell wondering how I would find the keys in the dark and 3 inches of thick grass. Then I placed my hand down and felt something, it was the keys. I knew God had place my hand in the right spot. I was then able crawl back and get up into the car.

The second fall was about the same situation but this time I was unable to crawl to the car, and laying there, I wondered how I was going to get up. My neighbor happened to look out his window and saw me laying in the yard, I was relieved when he called my name. I knew it was God that told him to look out the window.

Psalm 46: 1 – "God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble."

Submitted by Robert DeVries

Friday, December 11th...

It is Better to Give Than Receive

John 3:16 reads: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son.” We can never receive a better gift than this, the Gift of Eternal Life.

Christmastime is a busy time. We plan church activities, shopping trips to the store or online, family gatherings, baking, decorating, and parties. This year will be very different from years past.

When I was young I remember getting a flannel night gown and matching bonnet. Homemade by my grandmother. When my boys were young, they always wanted to open gifts before Christmas. We would open Christmas gifts at midnight after 11 pm candlelight church services. They convinced us that it was ok because it was Christmas Day after midnight. Now the kids have grown up and grandchildren have joined the family, it is fun buying gifts for children again. These are some of my memories of giving and receiving gifts.

Gift giving may change a lot this year, there may be more cash gifts, gift cards, and online shopping. Retailers started Black Friday sales early in November this year. This year there were not one or two days of special Black Friday prices but weeks of Black Friday pricing before Thanksgiving.

I enjoy giving much more than receiving a gift. Maybe that is because of my age, maybe because I don’t want to admit I need or want something.

In 2 Corinthians 9:7, Paul says: “Each man should GIVE what he has decided in his heart to GIVE, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God LOVES a cheerful GIVER.”

Would you rather Give or Receive?

In Acts 20:35 Jesus says “It is more blessed to GIVE than to receive.”

Submitted by Darlene Steiner

Saturday, December 12th...

“The Lord is my strength and my shield: my heart trusts in Him, and He helps me; my heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise Him.”

Psalm 28:7

Life as we know it has been - well, let's face it - a mess this year. I'm sure many of us are eager to feel that childhood sense of joy as we dive further into this season. However, it may be difficult to find that joy at times after such a difficult year. And in some cases, our faith in God may be shaken.

2020 brought pain and loss to our little family early in the year. Then the pandemic hit, our house sale fell through, and my heart became angry at God. I turned away from my faith. A month later, the pandemic's impact called me to the church for live streaming. Despite my shaken faith, I felt the words, “Trust me.” And I felt moved in my heart to trust.

In mid-2020, I felt the pressure of the pandemic and my career crushing down on me. Our family continued to grieve, and things only felt like they were spiraling out of control. I once again felt the words, “Trust me.” And I felt moved in my heart to trust.

I heard of the opening in the church office. Suddenly, that unknown voice yelled loudly: “Trust me.” And I felt moved in my heart to trust.

God placed me in the throes of the church at the moment I needed Him most. At a time when I lost faith in Him, He gave me no other option but to trust in Him. And by doing so, I began to feel a sense of calm I never thought possible.

As Psalm 28:7 says, “...my heart trusts in him.” My heart trusted in Him in a time when I humanly couldn't. Yet now, “my heart leaps for joy” during this Christmas season. As I look to this season of Christ's birth, I feel a sense of rebirth in my own faith. Even in pain, trust. *And you will feel joy to praise Him.*

Submitted by Jocelyn Walker

Sunday, December 13th...
Third Sunday of Advent - Joy

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.”
Matthew 2:10 (KJV)

“And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice cold in the snow,
stood puzzling and puzzling, how could it be so? It came without
ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes or bags.
And he puzzled and puzzled 'till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch
thought of something he hadn't before. What if Christmas, he thought,
doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit
more.” (Dr. Seuss, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*)

In this scene, the Grinch thinks he's won; he's stolen all the Whos' presents and decorations – even their Christmas food! But here's the point: the Whos' down in Whoville are having Christmas, presents or not. When the Grinch sees that, he has an epiphany. Maybe the Christmas spirit really can conquer all.

The Christmas spirit – the joy of the Messiah's birth – in a simple, humble setting, in a stable with shepherds serving as messengers of the joyous news!

Today, let's focus on Jesus and remember who we're celebrating! Let's experience the true exceedingly great joy!

Prayer – It is with great joy O Lord, that I thank you for the love and grace of Jesus Christ. O the joy his birth brings, and O the joy his return will bring. In this Advent season, I pray for the people of your creation, that they will know your joy. Amen.

Pastor Erich

Monday, December 14th...

One Day

Words sung by Christie Lane:

“One day at a time, sweet Jesus,
That’s all I’m asking from you.
Just give me the strength to do every day what I have to do.”

Life is easier when we focus on one day at a time.

When asked to submit a devotion for our booklet, the song “One Day” from the hymnal started running through my head. So I’ve been thinking about the words from that song.

“Living He loved me, dying He saved me,
buried He carried my sins far away.
Rising He justified freely forever, one day He’s coming.
Oh, Glorious Day!”

As we look toward the Advent season, we remember the baby coming in the manger. Are we excitedly waiting and looking for the day our glorious Lord will one day return for us?

Titus 2:11-13 – “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.”

It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

While we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Submitted by Crissi Stuckey

Tuesday, December 15th...

Traditions and Christmas go hand in hand. Every family has them, some good and some great. Those traditions and memories made, especially as kids, are priceless. Some of my best memories are the traditions I remember as a child.

Christmas Eve as a child, really started the day off. The many hours of practicing the Christmas Pageant and program finally paid off as it was time to present the exciting news of the Birth of Christ to the Church on Christmas Eve. The day was spent making sure I knew my lines for the pageant and Christmas Peace while also trying to figure out which presents were mine and what was in them. The time would come to put on our Sunday best and head out to the church and put on the pageant. The program and pageant would usually go off without a hitch, other than some unscripted shenanigans here and there such as the random child shouting into the mic and blowing out everyone's ear drums and the occasional child who would experience stage fight and forget every one of their lines. To top the service off, Silent Night would be sung with some verses in English and some in German, and we kids would have fun exaggerating the German lines with extra emphasis on the "Nacht" portion of the song. I felt bad for the kids in front of me and some of the others....lol. Once the lights came back on it was time to receive our gift from the Pastor and then shuttle out to receive the traditional bag of candy with an orange, peanuts and a candy cane before heading home.

That was just the start of the night, as after church, we would stop at home quick and then head over to my Great Grandma's house to spend some time with the extended family. It was a houseful of people but there was always plenty of food and laughter for a few hours and of course a present handed out to each great grandchild by Great Grandma Shibler herself. Once Mom and Dad were ready to call it a night, we would head home and proceed to open up our presents from Mom and Dad but not before taking our pictures by the Christmas tree which we all loved to do (not so much). The night would usually wrap up close to midnight and then it was off to bed as there was Church the next morning.

Christmas day itself was another adventure as it usually meant heading to Mom's side of the family to stuff ourselves full of food again, hit up the gift exchange and receive our present from Grandma and Grandpa Hogrefe. We'd hangout there for a few hours, then pack up and head to over to the Hurst side and start the cycle over again with Grandpa and Grandma Hurst. As a kid, I loved it as we would get to see all of our cousins and spend hours together basking in the glow of Christmas, not to mention school was on Christmas break so bed times were irrelevant

for a few weeks.

The time spent with family are the things I remember the most about our Christmas traditions as a child. Sure a few presents received might have stuck out, but never as much as two straight days of celebrating Jesus' birth and spending time with all of our family.

Submitted by Jeremy Hurst



Wednesday, December 16th...

Be Still

Christmas is a season that is often filled with the greatest activities and traditions. As Christmas time approaches, we often find ourselves getting lost in the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season. Business begins as we decorate the house, put up the tree, shop for Christmas presents, bake, visit family, and prepare for the many activities that accompany Christmas. We love these traditions, and it is one of our favorite times of the year! It is easy to become entwined in the many activities of the season, and we often find the Christmas season over before we know it. We are reminded this year more than ever to stop and remember the true meaning of Christmas.

The Lord tells us to be still and know that he is God. What better time to be still in the presence of God, as we soak in the peace and joy that comes from Jesus. As we go about our Christmas traditions, we are reminded to take time to slow down and be still as we rejoice in the gift of Jesus Christ – the true meaning of Christmas.

Psalm 46:10 He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

Submitted by Collin and Miranda Bzovi

Thursday, December 17th...

Christmas is a holiday that brings joy to many people, but will it this year? How can we celebrate the birth of our Savior without all of our loved ones around or to continue our typical holiday traditions? Christmas is about the memories and remembering how much we are loved by God.

“But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.” Luke 2:10

To me, Christmas brings me joy just thinking about all of those memories this holiday holds. Growing up we would literally spend all day putting up my mom’s twenty-six Christmas trees, and going outside to string lights on our two HUGE evergreen trees. Then going to Christmas Eve service with my whole family, and watching everyone cry as we sing the final song of Silent Night. Then finally, waking up to a huge breakfast that mom prepared for thirty people when there is only five of us.

Looking back, I am so fond of all of those memories and I hope to not only continue those holiday traditions with my own family, but to also share the love that God has sent us in his only son with my two children.

Christmas may look differently this year, but the memories with loved ones are still alive within us. And the hope that God brings us this holiday season will continue on.

**“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”
Romans 15:13**

Submitted by Mindy Gruenhagen



Friday, December 18th...

As we enter into holiday season 2020 with plenty of uncertainty in our schedules and plans, let this be a way to show certainty of who we are. With so many people hurting, whether it be unhappiness with a job or no job at all, relationships with friends or family, feeling lonely or being alone, may we find it in our hearts to be extra willing this season to reach out and help someone. Make time to sit down and write out a list of kind gestures, or people you have been thinking of that may need a phone call, a letter sent, or just something small you could do to put a smile on someone else's face.

Hebrews 6:10 says "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them."

Always remember, you do not have to be financially wealthy to give and make a difference. Sometimes the gift that costs no money at all can be the difference a person needs to turn their life around. The feeling of giving that gift just may be the feeling inside that you may need to change YOU.

Proverbs 11:25 says "A generous person will prosper, whoever refreshes others will be refreshed."

Sit down with your family, your friends or your co-workers this holiday season and seek out someone who may be in need of some help or someone who just has been starving for someone to care about them and be shown some love. Pick up the phone, call that person you have been meaning to call.....but just haven't yet. These kind acts just might make the difference in their lives. Don't forget to pay close attention to what else might happen, you might just discover that you needed this just as much.

2 Corinthians 9:6 – "Remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows generously will also reap generously"

Submitted by Craig Grieser

Saturday, December 19th...

It's been a year we will remember. A year that's been different. A year that's been hard. A year that's been scary. Life's been different. Churches, schools, restaurants, gyms, and businesses have been closed. Sports, graduations, weddings - even elective surgeries have been canceled or postponed. We've had to social distance, wear masks and avoid large gatherings, even with family. Families have not been able to see loved ones. Yes, it has been a hard, scary year.

It's been a year to trust God.

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Isaiah 41:10

I'm sure 2000 years ago Mary and Joseph had many of these same feelings of being scared and being isolated from family and unsure of the future. I'm sure they did not want to travel to Bethlehem on a donkey, with Mary being 9 months pregnant, but they trusted God, maybe even remembering Isaiah 41:10.

As this Christmas season approaches things will be different. There won't be big Christmas parties, malls won't be crowded, and families may not be able to gather. It may be a quieter Christmas, a time to reflect, and still be thankful for our many blessings. It may be different, but we have no less reason to celebrate and be joyful for the birth of our savior.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." Luke 2:14

Submitted by Betsy Ducey

Sunday, December 20th...
Fourth Sunday of Advent - Love

Recently, Jenny had me watch *The Notebook* with her. It tells the story of Noah's devoted love for Allie. For him, it's love at first sight. She, however, needs more convincing. From the beginning, Noah fights for her attention. When Allie avoids him, he enlists the help of a mutual friend to set them up on date. Finally, she falls for him too.

But it isn't "happily ever after." As soon as their young love begins to bloom, Allie's parents intentionally pull them apart, uprooting their family, and moving away. Although Noah writes her 365 letters, her mother intercepts and withholds every letter he sends, so that Allie concludes he doesn't care, and she tries to move on. Noah, however, scraps and saves, and works hard to buy, remodel, and furnish the house of Allie's dreams, exactly as she had described it to him.

After seven years, they are reunited, and she sees all he has done for her. The spark is rekindled and they grow old together. But it isn't "happily ever after." Eventually Alzheimer's gets the best of Allie's mind, so that she forgets her devoted husband. But he spends hour after hour, day after day, telling her the story of their love. Occasionally, she remembers everything, and Noah gets to enjoy being with his wife again...for about five minutes, until her Alzheimer's clouds her mind again.

This story makes me think of our Savior's undying love for us. He works to woo us, while we spurn his advances (Romans 5:8). After we are won over, circumstances threaten to pull us apart, but he remains devoted. Sometimes we try to move on, but even while we are apart, he keeps making preparations for our future life together (John 14:1-3). He actively and attentively cares for us 24/7, yet we sometimes only recognize him for 5 minutes, once or twice a week. The good news of the gospel, however, is that there is a "happily ever after" for those of us who put our trust in Christ. One day he will return for us, and when he does, we shall see him face to face, and our God-amnesia will be banished from us forever, and we will live with him, in love, for all eternity (Rev. 21:2-3). If this truly is our glorious destiny, and if this truly is the love with which our God loves us even now, then our lives and our joy are all wrapped up in this: "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment'" (Matthew 22:37-38).

Monday, December 21st...

As a kid growing up, I could hardly wait for the television Christmas special, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. It would remind me that school break was almost here and of all the presents under the tree that were there for me to open. I saw Christmas from an immature and shallow point of view. Now, being a ‘seasoned’ husband, father, and grandfather, thankfully I am able to see Christmas differently.

The *Charlie Brown Christmas* special is still a family tradition I look forward to watching. My family does get rather annoyed as I quote all the lines as it is playing. In case you haven’t seen the show in a long time, Charlie Brown is searching for the true meaning of Christmas. He just cannot help but feel there is more to it than the tinsel, the perfect tree, and all the decorations inside and outside. He couldn’t be more correct and discovered exactly that when Linus quotes Luke 2:8-14;

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,
“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

“That’s what Christmas is all about *Charlie Brown*,”

So in a world that is now so up-side-down, seeming to change at a frightening pace, and trying ever more to silence the Word of God, let’s find peace and comfort in our Savior and this Christmas message that has NEVER changed! Pray that light continues to shine on the true message of Christmas that we as Christians never hesitate to share it with others.

Submitted by Scott Short

Tuesday, December 22nd...

What does Christmas mean to me.....Traditions, Family, Food, Vacation, Busy, Celebrations, Giving, Receiving, Relaxing, Church Service, Get-togethers.....well all of these things are fine, but I am going to tell you what Christmas means in my life.

On Christmas Eve, for the past several years, we have established a tradition of having a meal at our home with various friends and family members. We eat an early meal so that we can all head to church for the traditional Christmas Eve candlelight service. We enjoy seeing all of the luminaries that line the sidewalks up and down Defiance St. The music and message are always exceptional and to see extended families filling the sanctuary to celebrate together the birth of Jesus always fills my heart with joy. Lights turned down, candles lit, what a beautiful scene.

After the service we then go to a friend's or a family's home for snacks and fellowship. We then head home to fill the kids' stockings and get ready for Christmas day.

Fun traditions, but something I try to do each year is to stop and remember that all the things we do are wonderful, but we need to remember the reason for the season. Jesus' Birthday!!!

Phil. 2:8-10 "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth."

Let's all humble ourselves this Christmas season and become obedient to our Lord.

Submitted by Greg Walker

Wednesday, December 23rd...

Seek Christ like the Wise Men
Matthew 2:1-2/Matthew 2:9-10

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the East came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?” We saw his star in the East and have come to worship him.”

“⁹After they had heard the king they went on their way and the star they had seen in the East went ahead of them until it was stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star they were overjoyed.”

Could you imagine the trials and defeat the wise men had on their journey to and from Bethlehem? What was their ultimate response? What is your ultimate response during trials in your life?

The continual action of the wise men and their pursuit is how we should as well pursue Jesus in the midst of the holiday season. Go to the Bible during all of the hustle and bustle around you.

May this be something we can continue not just in December, but also all year round. I encourage you to dive into scriptures to see Christ’s glory. Witness to others along the way just as the wise men did on their journey to Bethlehem.

After the wise men’s long journey and many trials their ultimate response was JOY and REJOICING. May this be your response in your daily search in His word. Rejoice amidst the journey or during trials because God gives us eternal love and hope.

Submitted by Devin Bernath

Thursday, December 24th...

We all have our favorite parts of Christmas...some love decorating, others enjoy baking, and of course children love the presents. One of my favorite parts of Christmas has always been that moment right before bed on Christmas Eve. The baking is done, the tree is glowing, and the wrapped gifts are perfectly placed under the evergreen. It's in that moment that I finally am able to slow down. The busy part is over, and it's time to embrace all that Christmas is.

I love the sight of the presents under the tree, each carefully selected. The anticipation and joy, hoping that I've chosen the perfect gift for each person. It's in that dark room, looking at the glistening tree, that I am finally able to take it all in...THE PERFECT GIFT.

Has there ever been a more perfect gift to our world than Jesus? Can you imagine in the still of the night, there in that stable, Mary and Joseph taking it all in? God could have chosen any way to give this most perfect gift to the world. Yet, He chose that moment, in the humble quiet of the night, to bring forth the most perfect gift our world will ever know; his son, Jesus Christ. The baby that would live his life to save ours.

I wonder if Mary looked down at her sweet babe and had any idea that she was staring into the face of the most perfect gift we would ever know. Was she filled with anticipation and joy, hoping the world too would accept and acknowledge this perfect gift God had given us?

This Christmas season, I pray that we are all able to slow down and take in the quiet and the calm. There's so much to appreciate and enjoy. But don't forget to treasure the most perfect gift any of us has ever received, JESUS Christ.

Submitted by Jen Hurst

Friday, December 25th...

“Pitch a Tent”



John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”

John 1:14 “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The word dwelt can also mean “set up a tent” in Greek. Knowing that God Himself became man and dwelt among us speaks volumes of who He really is. The Word became flesh in a humble stable, a dirty, animal filled stable. Now imagine that little baby (who became Man) setting up a tent in our backyard. When He pitched that tent in our backyard, it meant He desires to be near to us. I don’t know about you, but I love the visual of God hanging out in my backyard. His constant presence brings me great Peace knowing He is protecting me, and my family, always. God wants us to get to know Him better. He desires His people to be near to Him always, so he dwelt among us, He pitched that tent. You don’t have to go far to find Him, He’s always there. Look not for the seen, but the unseen. He has made His dwelling among us. And finally, receive His Grace. It is a gift, let us allow God’s Grace to fill our hearts with everlasting JOY! Joy to the World!

May God be ever present, not only in our backyard, but everywhere among us this Christmas Season! Draw near to Him, my Friends.

Submitted by Sarah Nafziger





Merry Christmas!