

**BRECKSVILLE UNITED CHURCH OF  
CHRIST**

**ADVENT TO EPIPHANY DEVOTIONAL  
BOOK**

**2014**

***GOD IS STILL SPEAKING....***

# INTRODUCTION

## A Word of Introduction

Two of the marvelous insights of the early 16<sup>th</sup> Century Protestant Reformation, were the understanding that the Holy Scriptures belong in the hands of *all* believers, and that Scripture is most useful when it's translated into contemporary language and imagery. Thanks to Gutenberg's earlier invention of the movable-type printing press, biblical texts - and commentaries on those texts - were soon made available to many people. Finally, the Living Word of Scripture could spring-free from the old Hebrew, Greek or Latin texts, and spring-forth in German, English, and other modern languages.

Carrying forward this Reformation tradition, we are pleased once again to make available another Advent/Christmas Devotional Booklet written by members and friends of Brecksville United Church of Christ. Advent is the season in which the Church anticipates and celebrates the coming of Jesus Christ - the Divine Word made flesh. In these following pages, that Divine Word is brought to life by the inspired reflections of many different people. Our thanks to each of them for taking the time to reflect on these texts and to share their insights with us. Also, a big "Thanks" to Jeannette Kroeger for her work in gathering, editing and publishing their writings.

I hope you will enjoy and be blessed by the following compositions. And I pray that by reading and reflecting on these shared thoughts, we will all be inspired to draw closer to God and to one another in this Holy Season.

Peace and Joy!  
Pastor Dave

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**November 30, 2014**

Isaiah 64: 1-3

*O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence, as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down; the mountains quaked at your presence.*

Quaking mountains, brushwood fire so intense it brings water to a boil - all "to make your name known to your adversaries."

But instead, God sends Jesus to accomplish this task. Not with earthquakes and boiling water, but with extraordinary compassion, wisdom, patience, courage, humility.

Seismic activity happens all the time. Jesus comes to shake our hearts to the core.

**Prayer: O God of the universe, as our Advent journey begins once again, open our hearts to your presence. Dispel our fear and blindness. Shower us with grace, especially when your love feels like a smoldering fire throwing off faint heat. Amen.**

**Dave Debick**

**Monday, December 1, 2014**

Isaiah 64:4-6

*From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*

From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned, because you hid yourself we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

My first impression on reading this passage was of a people looking for God in their lives after returning from the exile. The prophet goes on in later verses to ask God to remember God's people. How often do we look for God around us? Can we see God in the smile of another person, the greetings exchanged at Sunday worship, and hear God speaking to us through others? Can we take a moment and reflect on God coming into our lives through Jesus Christ, the teacher and "role model".

**Prayer: Dear Lord, Prepare us for the coming of Jesus, your son, into our lives. Help us to sense His presence in our lives and the lives of those around us. Help us feel the peace of your presence in and around us. Amen.**

**Bob Chandler**

**Tuesday, December 2, 2014**

Isaiah 64: 7-9

*There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. Yet, O Lord, you are our Heavenly Parent; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.*

There are a number of mentions of the word potter or pottery in the passages Isaiah, and this is no exception. It was good to think about this concept as a verb and a noun, and just think of the ancientness of his form of artistry. Pottery has a place in biblical history and still remains a subject to explore today. And, it also relates to people if one stops to think that people are born as infants with no concept of anything except hopefulness of being taken care of. In time we evolve just as clay (of the earth!) on a pottery wheel into a final shape to age and leather. We are not still the same form of the clay as when we began, flexible and shaped by someone else's hands. Yet we are better once we have been completely through the process, turned into what vessel we were meant to be by our maker. Dried by sun or fire with possible decorative elements added. But even if not added, the distinct characteristics of each individual pot, just like humans.

Hopefully each of us keeps our naturalness in that we are clay, but our personal expression in that of our 'finishing elements'.

Many of God's children go on to raise children or influence others in some way. This is similar to being a potter, in that we are helping to shape someone. This could be a child or young adult who is still able to accept shaping and impression of the mind. We need to be aware of that, just as someone who may have helped shape our views and ways was, including Jesus.

**Tia Began**

**Wednesday, December 3, 2014**

Isaiah 54: 1-10

*...For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer...*

Toward the end of a particularly difficult time in one of our kids' lives, our then young adult said "Mom and Dad, thank you for standing by me through this. I know kids in similar situations whose parents have given up on them." I was touched by this loving and insightful statement.

Today's scripture from Isaiah speaks of a God who surrounds God's children with love and compassion. Even when we reject God or turn away for a time, God is always waiting to gather us in when we return. God's love is everlasting and compassionate, even when we are undeserving.

**Prayer: Loving God, help us to be as loving, forgiving and compassionate to others as you are to us. Amen.**

**Jan Wardlaw**



**Thursday, December 4, 2014**

Mark 13:24-27

*But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened. And the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.*

But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened. and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

In this chapter, Jesus is talking to the disciples about all the terrible things that are going to happen to Christians before their generation passes away. He assures them that there would be a happy ending. But I'm pretty sure his disciples were listening to his words and wondering what they had let themselves in for. The message that can be taken away is that there are rewards for those who hang in there, who persevere to the end of whatever it is that might be happening. There have been periods in my life when I had to see something through, as much as I didn't want to. I'm thinking about my brother's illness and death, the ending of the relationship that brought me to the Cleveland area, and the times that a job ended and I was left to figure out what came next.

There are rewards in situations such as these. As difficult as it may seem, as exhausting as it can be, as much as one might hate every minute of it, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. There is a victory to be won. It might be simplistic to say the victory is found in the person of Jesus Christ – or perhaps not. We might be fighting our battle without even thinking about Jesus, but if we are a follower of his, we can be assured he is right there fighting beside us.

**Prayer: Thank you, God, for the gift of your son. We are strengthened because he is present in our lives. In his holy name we pray, Amen.**

**Jon K. Thompson**

**Friday, December 5, 2014**

Mark 13: 28-31

*“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he[a] is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”*

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that (s)he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

When I was little, I would often worry about everything (okay...I'm not kidding anyone reading this—y'all know I still worry about everything)! One night, I was sobbing—as I was wont to do—and my mom, always a concerned parent, was like, “What is it now? Seriously...” And I said something to the effect of “I'm worried about what will happen at the end of the world! Will it hurt? Will I lose all my friends and family? What will happen to my goldfish? My SHOES?!?” These were serious concerns. So, my mom, being a good and holy woman, held me in her arms and paraphrased this very verse. “We don't know when the end of the world will be, honey. But it will never be when we think it is.” So I thought about it...and then my kid brain figured that if I ALWAYS thought the world was going to end, that it never would! This got exhausting after a while, and I started to cry again. How my mother didn't send me out the window is beyond me. “What is it NOW, honey?” I collected myself the best I could and blurted out between sobs, “I'm so tired of thinking about the end of the world not happening. But if I stop, it's going to sneak up on me and I'll kill everyone!” Kid guilt. It's intense. Mom sighed a little prayer to herself and read me the verse above. After a while, I started to see what Jesus meant (at least a little). Frankly, I'm still trying to figure it out, but I'd like to think he was trying to tell us to always be ready (but not in a scared, freaked out

kinda way). There are always signs of things to come, but that doesn't mean that we throw our hands up and walk away. We can't simply accept that the world as we know it will end eventually and that we can just stop preparing the way. This was Jesus telling us to keep his words alive...no matter what happens. Some days are awesome, other days are awful, but at the end of every day, God is with us. So, as we prepare for the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus, we are reminded to "get busy" with the work of spreading the good news and stop dwelling on the things we can't control.

**Prayer: God, you know we are a worried people. Help us to get busy with being the kind of people we need to be to fully realize your awesome glory. We trust that all things eventually come to an end, but it is with a joyful heart that we can be renewed and brought closer to realizing the world we should strive to become. Amen.**

**Kate Klonowski**

**Saturday, December 6, 2014**

Mark 13:32-37

*“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware; keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”*

A few months ago, my daughter Livy held an intervention with me. She told me she doesn't like it when I work night shifts because I am not there to tuck her in to bed, and I don't spend enough time with her. I had become so immersed in my own routine and worries that I wasn't cognizant of how my work schedule was affecting my family. “About that day or hour no one knows, so keep awake”, Jesus reminds us. To me, the message is to be mindful of our choices. It is easy to be pulled into long hours at work... but be mindful that this is time not being spent with family and friends. It is easy to think we must have the latest gadget or phone... but be mindful that the resources spent on these things are resources not being used to aid those in need. This is not an admonishment of making such choices. After all, we have to provide for ourselves and our families. Simply, understand the choices that you make and the ripples those choices send forth into the lives of others. This scripture quote is often turned into a message about death, but to me it is a message about living a full and fulfilling life. Sometimes it takes an open and honest message from a five year old to remind us to “keep awake”.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to keep awake to the choices I make; and to choose a path that makes my life and the lives of those around me hopeful and joyous. May I follow your example as a source of the uplifting good news to those around me. Amen.

**Matt Wolbert**

**Sunday, December 7, 2014**

Isaiah 40: 3-5

*A voice cries out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

I often think of this scripture passage as I drive east on the Pennsylvania Turnpike to visit family and friends for Christmas. In my mind's ear, I hear Handel's musical setting of an older translation of these verses, part of his musical composition "The Messiah." Some Biblical metaphors can be confusing for us today, but this one has, if anything, become more clear. Although the Pennsylvania Turnpike mostly goes through forests and farmland rather than a desert, the imagery of lifting up valleys, lowering (or tunneling through) mountains, and leveling uneven ground is vivid to Pennsylvania Turnpike travelers. While traveling both the Pennsylvania Turnpike and the metaphorical highway, I anticipate seeing "the glory of the Lord" in the love of family and friends.

**Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for revealing Your glory to us. Please help us to lift up the valleys and lower the hills on our journey to see Your glory in Your love for us and our love for other people. Amen.**

**Susan Snyder**

**Monday, December 8, 2014**

Isaiah 40:6-8

*A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.*

A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it, surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

This scripture begins by reminding us that we are mortal, and like the grass and flowers we will wither and fade. But --- the word of God stands firm. We know God has sent Jesus with his words of hope and encouragement.

We see renewal all around us as we enjoy the young children of this congregation. Their parents and families cherish and nurture them. This is a joy to watch and support.

**Prayer: Be with all parents and their children May all children feel loved and wanted.**

**Caroline Chandler**

**Tuesday, December 9, 2014**

Isaiah 40: 9-11

*Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength. O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. God will feed his flock like a shepherd, God will gather the lambs in his arms, God will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young*

Get up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength. O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift up, fear not, say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. God will feed his flock like a shepherd, God will gather the lambs in his arms, God will carry him in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

This passage brings the good news that God is still the God of his people. Even though they were in exile God was still with them, protecting them. God is referred to as the good shepherd which is a common description of God emphasizing his compassion, loyalty and care for us. I like this description of God. It gives me peace of mind knowing God is watching over me and my family, keeping us safe. He is gathering me in his arms when I need him the most carrying me when I need his help to get me through a stressful day or a troubling time in my life. I do believe God is with me when I need him, talking to me, guiding me and giving me strength to make good decisions. Below is one of my favorite poems which helps reflect this.

**Dan Stewart**



## **Footprints in the Sand**

One night I dreamed I was walking  
along the beach with the Lord.  
Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.  
In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.  
Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,  
other times there were one set of footprints.  
This bothered me because I noticed that  
during the low periods of my life, when I was  
suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat,  
I could see only one set of footprints.  
So I said to the Lord, "You promised me  
Lord, that if I followed you,  
you would walk with me always.  
But I have noticed that during the most trying periods  
of my life there have only been  
one set of footprints in the sand.  
Why, when I needed you most,  
you have not been there for me?"  
The Lord replied,  
"The times when you have  
seen only one set of footprints,  
is when I carried you."

**Mary Stevenson**

**Wednesday, December 10, 2014**

2 Peter 3:8-10

*But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.*

Armageddon, annihilation, devastation, decimation, holocaust, the end of the world as we know it! Wow, what a subject! Many “experts” in history have predicted the exact date of “the day of the Lord”. Many of those dates have past and surprise, surprise, we are still here.

Instead of worrying about when it will happen, let us get prepared and be prepared, not only for the day of the Lord, but for our own judgment day.

**Prayer: Psalm 33:22 Let your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in you.**

**David Pastor**

**Thursday, December 11, 2014**

2 Peter 3: 11-13

*Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.*

These verses are part of a letter that Peter wrote to stimulate wholesome thinking and inspire preparedness for the day the Lord will come. Peter wants us to evaluate what sort of person we will be as we await that day. Because we do not know whether that day will be tomorrow or in a hundred years, we must ensure that we are ready at any moment. While most of us want to be good and honest people who are generous and helpful to others, it might not come easy to everyone.

While I was thinking about these verses, a child at Christmastime came to my mind. Beginning about the first Friday after Thanksgiving, many children are told that they must be good if they want Santa to bring them toys on Christmas day. The song, Santa Claus Is Coming to Town, was even written about this to help parents bribe their little devils into good behavior. I imagine that month seems very long for some children, just as a lifetime of good behavior might be for some adults.

Fortunately, our God is a loving and forgiving God. We know that if we make mistakes but repent, we will be forgiven. The good news is that if we go forward leading lives of holiness and godliness, we will realize God's promise, just as the good little children might realize Santa's toys.

**Prayer: God of Goodness, help us to live our lives in a way that is pleasing to you. Remind us when we are feeling and acting selfish and inspire us to share your Glory with those around us. Amen.**

**Evie Novak**

**Friday, December 12, 2014**

Mark 1: 1-5

*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.*

We Americans are certainly good at getting ready for Christmas. This booklet, the stores, the media, decorations and lights, the music, cookies-- we are bombarded with Christmas preparations. I enjoy all these and the joyfulness; yet there is a feeling I get when I consider purchasing another lovely Christmas item. I suddenly begin to think, "What else could I do with the \$24.98 I'm thinking of spending for a lovely set of decorations?"

This passage resonated these pre-Christmas spending qualms into my thinking about how I am spending the resources of living. There are so many choices, responsibilities, requests, demands, and desires. On a recent Sunday, we were asked to review all of the idols from which we make our choices, not the least of which was the idol like ourselves with our same likes and dislikes.

Consequently, I am trying to focus on preparations for the reason God sent Jesus, not the holiday itself. Focusing on sharing, kindness, and love should dominate my daily living, but I will enjoy the season!

**Prayer: Dear God, amid all our Christmas preparations, help us to maintain our focus on your goals for our lives. Let us always focus on you as our true God.**

**Dot Bailey**

**Saturday, December 13, 2014**

Mark 1: 6-8

*Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

If you're going to wear camel's hair, are sticky with errant drops of honey and perhaps have a bit of locust leg stuck in your beard, you're going to stick out.

John's looks, his message and its delivery certainly did, among the normal folks of his day. He lived outside the societal flow. But he didn't care, or at least there are no indications that he did. His focus was on his message and what he needed (and didn't need) in order to point toward the truth and light that was his life's purpose.

In a book I'm reading, the author talks about the need for college students to break from the crowd around them and exercise their "moral imagination." He speaks of the need for "moral courage, the bravery to act on your imagination in the face of what your family and friends are going to say to try to stop you" when you or the stand you are taking don't "fit with their ideas about the way the world is supposed to work...." Sometimes this resistance from others is overt and active, sometimes it is felt more in an absence of company along the path you choose to walk.

Whether it is a "small," everyday act of moral courage, or as big as a way of life, John the Baptist is a model for each of us who would choose to flex our moral imagination and stick out from the crowd. We each have our own message and our own oddities - our own locust leg

stuck in our heads, so to speak. The main point is that like John, there are times when we are called to listen to God's voice, and to the voice of our hearts, then speak that truth and purpose

with a willingness to be different and to stand on our own when necessary for a greater and deeper cause.

**Prayer: During this Christmas season and in the days that follow, may we find inspiration in John the Baptist to break from the comfortable and expected flow and speak out with courage**

**Annie Demko**

**Sunday, December 14, 2014**

John 1: 19-23

*And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" And he answered, "No." They said to him then, "Who are you?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."*

In this scripture, John the Baptist denies being the Christ. He makes reference to Isaiah (40:3) by saying, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord". Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3 and Luke 3:4 also make reference to Isaiah 40:3. In this powerful scripture, John reminds us that although he is not the Christ, the Messiah is coming and it is time to repent of our sins and walk in the way of the Lord.

**Prayer: During Advent as we anticipate the coming of Christ, let us open our hearts to be ready for his arrival.**

**Vicki Szabo**



**Monday, December 15, 2014**

Psalm 126

*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy, and it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb. May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.*

What does it mean to "sow in tears?" To "go out weeping and bearing seed"? My family and I grow a garden each year though (unlike most of humankind throughout history) we don't have to grow our own food to survive. Generally we are so eager for spring after a long winter, it is a joy to sow seeds and welcome the promise of new, green growth. However, we all do have those actions that sustain us which must be attended to, no matter the circumstances of our lives. When tragedy draws near and we are reminded of our human fragility, we must carry on, dreaming of a better time. The psalmist encourages us that the Lord restores God's people, and the harvest, which comes just a few months after planting, is brought in with shouts of joy.

**Prayer: Lord, you know how fragile and broken I am. Help me to hope and persevere in times of despair, and in faith believe that you will restore me to shouts of joy.**

**Jim Demko**

**Tuesday, December 16, 2014**

Jude: 18-21

*For they said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, indulging their own ungodly lusts." It is these worldly people, devoid of the Spirit, who are causing divisions. But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*

Jude is considered the "neglected" book of the Bible by some scholars. Jude is only 25 verses long and its length prevents the book from revealing significant new insights to biblical scholars. Yet, the verses we're reading for today seem relevant to our lives.

Consider the verses dealing with worldly people, devoid of the Spirit, who are causing divisions.

We can certainly point our fingers at various tribes (or groups) in the mid-east who seem devoid of spirit and are causing divisions. Or, look a bit closer at our own country and our law makers for those who are causing divisions. Or, what do we see in our own community or family?

Jude gives us solutions to these issues— pray in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

I confess, I have trouble with "scoffers." I'm so uncomfortable around scoffers that I avoid them. Did Jesus eat with scoffers? Probably.

How can we go about our daily lives – working, shopping, visiting with friends and not be involved with "scoffers" or those "devoid of the Spirit" or those who are such malcontents that they "are causing divisions" in the workplace, in family or, perhaps, in a relationship or marriage.

One personal way of approaching a Bible verse(s) or a sermon is to answer the question we were posed in philosophy class: If this is true what will it mean to me, my daily life and my relationships? Think on it as you read the Bible verses in this book or listen to a sermon. Make it personal—if this is true what could this mean to my life?

**Prayer: I pray to be kept in the Holy Spirit and that I will build myself in the most holy faith. I seek to avoid being devoid of spirit and to work to keep myself in the love of God. Amen.**

**David Ritchey**

**Wednesday, December 17, 2014**

Psalm 42:4-5

*These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival. Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.*

These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with Glad shouts and songs of Thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival. Why are you cast down, oh my soul, and why are you disquieted with in me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

As I reflected on this passage I was reminded that so many of us go through turmoil, pain, anguish and troubles even at the holidays. The Psalmist expresses a lot of pain and confusion within his soul. He yearns and longs for an answer that will quiet his soul. In the season of Advent we are reminded of the answer that God gave us. We wait with anticipation to see what God does reveal to us. The Psalmist did not know about Jesus but we do. The Psalmist urges us to search our souls and to place our hope in God. We indeed can praise God when we see the wonderful gift of his son.

The words from this beautiful hymn reflect both anguish and quiet meditation. I encourage all of us to take a few moments this busy holiday season and use these words of quiet reflection and understand and truly know that our hope is in God and all that God gives us.

**Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side.  
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.  
Leave to thy God to order and provide;  
In every change, He faithful will remain.  
Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heav'nly Friend  
Through thorny ways lead to a joyful end.**

**Be still, my soul: thy God doth undertake  
To guide the future, as He has the past.  
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;  
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.  
Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know  
His voice Who ruled them while He dwelt below.**

**Be still, my soul: begin the song of praise  
On earth, believing, to Thy Lord on high;  
Acknowledge Him in all thy words and ways,  
So shall He view thee with a well-pleased eye.  
Be still, my soul: the Sun of life divine  
Through passing clouds shall but more brightly shine.**

**Diane Gressley**

**Thursday, December 18, 2014**

Galatians 3:27-29

*As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.*

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew, or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

As I have said many times before, I was not fortunate enough to have been raised with religion in my life. Church was a place that I attended on Christmas and Easter with my Mother and Grandmother. I would be wearing my best dress, patent leather shoes and a hat that my grandmother purchased for me to wear that day. Twice a year for several years followed by the traditional visit to the cemetery. This too was an unsettling place. Another place where I was feeling a different sense of emotion that I did not understand inside of me.

Church was a foreign and somewhat scary place for me as a young child. I would cling to my Grandmother and feel safe between both her and my Mother. This feeling of Family comforted me as I did not understand why we were there. I do remember feeling overwhelmed by the haunting music of the pipe organ and the invisible voices of the choir, making me feel some other kind of emotion, an emotion I now feel blessed to understand.

These emotional, spiritual, faithful feelings have now become welcome in my life. I now feel like I am true child of God, safe and accepted as I sit with my Church Family. Like with my own Family, I can sit next to anyone in my Church home and feel a comforting sense of acceptance, love and the understanding that we are all one in Faith.

**Dear Lord Please give me the strength to become more open to the pain and fear of others. Bless those in need of your loving and caring touch. Amen**

**Lynne Struck**

**Friday, December 19, 2014**

Psalm 80:17-19

*But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself. Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name. Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved!*

O Lord of Hosts – though we all look for restoration at this wonderful time of year, many of us, including myself, have a hard time handling the pomp and circumstance that precedes this Heavenly event. May the following “Christmas Psalm” from “Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim” by Edward Hayes, give us a more gracious view.

O Blessed One,  
It is said that Christmas is for children.  
Indeed, I agree:  
It's only a feast for the young of heart,  
A feast for finding beneath the tree  
Gifts of surprise and delight to eternal child.

Peel back the scabs of cynicism from my eyes  
so that this calloused and aging child,  
may see holiness blazing at the tip of every branch,  
may see every tree as a Christmas tree.

Let me not be ashamed to dance with delight  
At hidden gifts wrapped in shimmering paper  
With bows of rainbow-colored ribbon.  
But also grant me the youthful and wide eyed wonder  
to recognize, and even expect,  
life giving miracles on every street corner,  
Miracles of kindness and generosity and care.

Gift my all-too-calculating heart  
With the excitement of anticipation



To truly receive the gifts of life,  
The capacity to feast and rejoice.  
Give birth within me to a spaciousness of heart  
That can celebrate this feast  
Of the birth of Christ, the Child,  
As a Child.

**Prayer: Dear Lord – May we celebrate the birth of Christ with  
sparkling eyes and joy in our hearts, that we too may be restored  
and saved. Amen**

**Dorie Gabor**

**Saturday, December 20, 2014**

2 Samuel 7:23-24

*Who is like your people, like Israel? Is there another nation on earth whose God went to redeem it as a people, and to make a name for himself, doing great and awesome things for them, by driving out before his people nations and their gods? And you established your people Israel for yourself to be your people forever; and you, O Lord, became their God.*

Who is like your people, like Israel? Is there another nation on earth whose God went to redeem it as a people?" When I hear this phrase it sounds like the author is asking what nation could possibly be greater than Israel. It has God redeeming and helping its people. I mean c'mon, that sounds great! Israel has God's undeniable love and protection. But then what about the US? Or England? Or China? Or India? Or Iraq? What about Christians? Muslims? Buddhists? Shouldn't others, not in Israel "get" protection too? Isn't the US the great world superpower? How come Israel gets all the protection? I mean, they weren't even a country for hundreds of years until after World War II, when the US made sure it existed. But then I realized that is not the point of the passage. The point is that God will do great things for all his people, not just his favorite country. God is not some fan at the World Cup rooting for one country or people against another. No. God didn't root for the Christians during the Crusades. God does not take sides. The passage makes it sound like only Israel, this great nation, can "receive" God's love and protection. But this is not true. God loves all His people. God wants us to be good, not perfect, but good. God loves us and willingly protects ALL OF US. This passage is not meant to be taken literally as, "and you, O Lord, became THEIR God." He became OUR God. God does not discriminate, does not hate; he loves, he is inclusive. It feels good to know that God is looking down on all of us.

**Have a Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year!**

**Spencer Whyte**

**Sunday, December 21, 2014**

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.*

Prayer and Thanksgiving are closely related to joy, and are responses to God's Blessings. Trust in God is manifest in joy, prayer and thanksgiving. The recipe - is to rejoice and let our requests be made known to God in Prayer and Thanksgiving. The peace will then keep us in Christ Jesus!

I love this Scripture! It has a special place in my heart from my childhood. My Grandmother, who also was my Best Friend, would often talk about prayer, and the importance of constant prayer, even in difficult times! We would often sing our prayers in the Kitchen while we were making my Grandfather his Dinner. Her daily reminders were often hard to hear as a child, but now play a huge part in my everyday life!

I sometimes get so caught up in the busyness of my life (i.e. remembering the grocery list) that it overshadows my thoughts of prayer. I have several wall hangings (and daily spoken reminders!) at home that I pass to myself and my Adult Children to *"Pray without Ceasing"*

**Prayer: Jesus, thank you for the Blessings you have given us, Bring us Peace as we await your Joyous Birth. Help us to keep you in our busy lives through Prayer and Thanksgiving.**

**Jeannette Kroeger**

**Monday, December 22, 2014**

Luke 1:46-49

*And Mary said, "My soul magnified the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on, all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.*

And Mary said, "My soul magnified the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on, all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

BUCC has just completed its focus on stewardship over the past month. The theme, "Blessed to be a Blessing", rings loudly to me as I read this passage from Luke. Mary is pondering the fact that God has chosen her, a lowly young woman, to bear Christ into the world of man. She realizes that because of this all generations will call her blessed. During Advent every year as we prepare for the birth of Christ, we sing Christmas carols about her. There is a good reason for this. Because Christ is born of Mary, he is made man. He then brings God's message to us and is our Savior. Even at her young age, Mary is wise enough to understand the importance of her responsibility to deliver and raise Jesus. Because God is granting her this most personal relationship with Jesus, she knows that she is truly blessed. When we receive blessings from God, we see that God is holy. Our souls can magnify the Lord, and our spirits can rejoice in God. When we stop to count our blessings and be thankful, we can then become blessings to others. Now that Stewardship Season has given way to Advent and the Christmas Season, let us continue to be the blessings that the Holy One asks of us.

In closing, I offer the prayer I was taught as a child:

**Hail Mary, full of grace.**

**Our Lord is with thee.**

**Blessed art thou among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb,  
Jesus.**

**Holy Mary, Mother of God,**

**pray for us sinners,**

**now and at the hour of our death.**

**Amen.**

**Bridget Sproul**

**Tuesday, December 23, 2014**

Luke 1:50-55

*"His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors to Abraham and to his descendants forever."*

(This is the last part of my Stewardship talk – I've been encouraged to "repurpose" it for the Advent book, so here it is!)

"Finally, if you feel that you've got nothing to give, you are wrong. A very dear friend of mine demonstrated this valuable truth to me. She had always been an active member of her church, St. Gregory's Roman Catholic Church, in South Euclid. Towards the end she was homebound, and during one of our conversations I asked her what had been her favorite service she had provided for her church. She told me that it was her current one, and then she told me about her 'schedule'. She had a daily prayer schedule that started when she woke in the morning, and continued on and off all day. Most of her prayers were for her church pastor, other leaders of her church, her family, friends and neighbors in need. She showed me that there are acts of service that can be seen, and there are the ones that can't be. So when you feel like you have nothing to offer, remember that in the end it's the invisible things – oxygen, music, God, love – that sustain us. And please, every day, pray for our pastor and pray for our church."

**Prayer: That we fully realize that every single person has a purpose, and that God can use us for good, regardless of our circumstances. Also, I pray for Pastor Dave's continued health and strength – spiritually, emotionally and physically – and I thank God for him and all of you! (and my dear friend, Maria Asunta Bernardo.) Anne Melfo**

**Wednesday, December 24, 2014**

Matthew 1:18-20

*When Jesus' mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.*

It seems to me that Joseph is one of the unsung heroes of the Christmas Story. He was a kind, capable, righteous man who loved and protected Mary as long as her lived.

He cared for her on the long census journey to Jerusalem. He cared for her in the stable as their first son was born.

Then in a few days, instead of returning to Jerusalem, Joseph took Mary and the Baby Jesus to Egypt to escape the Roman slaughter of all baby boys.

After 2 years, Joseph brought Mary and Joseph home to Nazareth where their family continued to grow. They were devout members of the Synagogue and faithful to the teachings and traditions of the Jewish faith.

**Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for the Coming of Jesus. Helps us, we pray, to put into words of understanding and conviction, the deep meanings of the myths, legends, stories and historical accounts of our Christian beliefs. Amen**

**Betty Gifford**

**Thursday, December 25, 2014**

Luke 2:4-7

*Joseph went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

Merry Christmas! As we enjoy the festivities that accompany this celebration, these verses remind us of the simplicity and modesty that framed Jesus' life from day one.

Humble people. Humble circumstances.  
Struggle, hardship, joy, peace.  
Pain, suffering, love, kindness.

We do not understand why life has to be the way it is. It certainly is deep with valleys and high with mountains. Christ's birth is a mountaintop! To me, it is the promise that God is with us in every experience. It is the beginning of God's reconciliation to humankind through Jesus. It is the promise of eternal life!

Jesus!  
Jesus!  
Jesus!

Rejoice in all that this name and this birth represent.

**Prayer: Lord, guide us through the valleys and allow us to enjoy some beautiful mountain views. Increase our trust in you. Help us to follow the example of Jesus, so that we can help each other through this life and enter together into eternal life with you.**  
**Humbly Yours, Kathy Pastor**



**Friday, December 26, 2014**

Luke 2:8-14

*In that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom is he is pleased!"*

And in that region there were shepherds out in field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not Afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will come to all people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. " And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased! "

I just have such great memories of learning these words when I was very young. Every year at my church In Pennsylvania, our Sunday school would hold a Christmas program. One of the most special parts of the program was watching the little children say specific passages from the Bible. This passage was top on the list of the ones that I loved. Our program was held on Christmas Eve and it actually was filled with a lot of excited children who forgot what they were supposed to say

but somehow each year we were able to be entertaining and reverent at the same time.

Even though I did grow up in rural Pennsylvania, I really didn't see too many shepherds but I did see lots of sheep. I often looked up at the sky on Christmas Eve but not to see Santa Claus like most everyone else. Instead I wanted to be like the shepherd who looked at the sky not just seeing stars, but seeing angels. I really wanted an angel to come talk to me and sing praises. Of course I never really got to see that angel in the sky when I was a child. But as I grew up I did see Angels among friends and family and even strangers. The miracle in these words from Luke resonate even more so today. I continue to look for the Angels everywhere. I know that they sing and praise God. Those who pray for peace are truly the Angels among us.

**Diane Gressley**

**Saturday, December 27, 2014**

Luke 2: 15-20

*When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

A baby is born. Mothers worldwide, feel this child is special and share the news with family and friends. Who does the baby look like? Who will the baby take after? What will the baby be when he/she grows up?

A savior is born! The shepherds hear this good news, go to see the child and share this news with everyone. Mary, first time mother, is filled with joy. She tries to grasp that the sleeping child in her arms, this tender child just born, will be the savior of the world.

**Prayer: Thank you, Mary, for your strength and love in bringing Jesus into life.**

**Jan Renovetz**

**Sunday, December 28, 2014**

Isaiah 9:v. 6

*For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

This amazing prophecy, some 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, was fulfilled in the birth of our savior some 2000 years ago. We celebrate his birth every year about this time. Can we celebrate his life by living as he taught us? Can we treat other people as we would like to be treated? Can we live his teaching by providing food, clothing and shelter to other persons without those things? Can we experience his peace and grace in our lives?

**Prayer: Dear Lord, Help us celebrate the birth of Jesus by living his teachings in our lives. Help us feel the peace and grace of your son. Amen.**

**Bob Chandler**

**Monday, December 29, 2014**

Psalm 97: 10-12

*The Lord loves those who hate evil; he preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!*

My father was born on December 29, 1917. He died the 30th of March 2008. I miss him all the time. He taught me so much about life, love, nature, and what it means to be a good person. After my mother passed in 2011, I discovered a box with my dad's papers, most of which I had never seen before. I knew my Dad was an intelligent man; that's a large part of what attracted my mother to him! I knew he graduated with honors from Case but I knew next to nothing about his high school career at Garfield Heights High. I was shocked to find a stack of letters from his high school teachers and principal, all telling my grandparents what an outstanding student my Dad was, in all his subjects. He was also an outstanding athlete on both the football and basketball teams and lettered in both. Beyond the high praise heaped on him for his academic and athletic career, and to me, even more important, were the letters written by teachers, next door neighbors, employers, and complete strangers, he had touched with his honesty and sincere belief in helping others first. The fact that he had never showed me these documents was completely like him. The ONLY thing he ever bragged about was his ability to do crossword puzzles in pencil! He was a humble man who loved my Mother, brother, and me more than anything. He was the Dad who built me tree house, helped me raise rabbits for 4H and taught me the importance of family. I knew all along what a good man he was. What was so wonderful for me was to learn other people knew it too!

**Prayer: Dear God, our Father and Mother, we come to you as children. Be with us as we learn to see one another with new eyes, hear one another with new hearts, and treat one another in a new way. --Corrymeela Community**

**Tina Ortiz**

**Tuesday, December 30, 2014**

Isaiah 52:v. 7

*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."*

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

I truly believe in the Heavenly Father with all my heart and soul. I know He is there. I can feel Him there especially after an experience I had a few years ago, while living in North Carolina.

I have had many bumps in my road of life, but this was an especially large and hard one I was trying to work on. It was a Fall day and I was walking around outside, looking up above to the heavens and talking to the Heavenly Father, which I often did. I was telling Him of my problems, and then I said, "I know that you know about them, as you are with me always, but I just don't know where to turn."

With that, I suddenly felt something on my shoulder, leading me back along the path towards my home. It may have been a strong breeze, but I sure felt it was the Heavenly Father, again, letting me know He was there. I felt no bumps under my feet. I was at peace.

**Prayer: "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow" – Job 19:35**

**Jill Black**

**Wednesday, December 31, 2014**

Hebrews 1:1-3

*In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power.*

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power.

This last day of the year is a fitting time to review the year. Sometimes, I even go so far as pulling out my planner to review each month for key events and milestones. I like to see where I was going, what I was doing, and then think about how I was feeling at the time. I also think about what my family was doing throughout that year.

To take it the next step, we can look at how God has spoken to us this year.

- How has He intervened in our life?
- What gifts has He bestowed on us?
- What did we learn from being connected to Him?

**Prayer: Heavenly Creator and Parent, I thank you for this year: another year when I have had the opportunity to be a partner, parent, friend and member of a community of faith. I pray that I have been a good steward to the time you have given me. Let me continue to benefit from your blessings, insights and wisdom that you offer to me each day... if I only listen. Jim Duffy**



**Thursday, January 1, 2015**

John 1:1-5

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

In the beginning....words ripe with expectation, and scripturally speaking ,with promise of life and light. Are we not blessed to experience a new start each day? It is our gift. We choose, as Christians, to daily move forward, fresh.... towards light and life, stronger, yet uninhibited by the trials of the days before. We are blessed 365 times over on *this* holy day.

It has long been a ritual in the Duffy family to start the New Year with a blessing of our timekeepers. Over the years onto the ottoman we put our alarm clocks, watches, school schedules, assignment notebooks, wall calendars, whiteboard schedulers, day timers, planners, cellphones, client Schedules, I pads, and fitbits. With hands raised in blessing, mom or dad reads the prayer.

### ***NEW YEAR'S BLESSING OF CLOCKS AND CALENDARS***

**Lord, You who live outside of time, and reside in the  
imperishable moment,  
we ask Your blessing this New Year's Day upon Your gift  
to us of time.**

**Bless our timekeepers,  
You who kindly direct us to observe the passing of  
minutes and hours.**

**May they make us aware of the miracle of each  
second of life we experience.**

**May these our ticking (beeping) servants help us  
not to miss that which is important,  
while You keep us from machine like routine.**

**May we be ever free from being clock watchers  
and instead become time lovers**

**Bless our calendars,  
these lists of days, weeks and months, of  
holidays, holydays, fasts and feasts-  
all our special days of remembering.**

**May these servants, our calendars, once reserved  
for the royal few,  
for magi, and scribes, now grace our homes and  
our lives.**

**May they remind us of birthdays, anniversaries  
and other gift days,  
as they teach us the secret that all life is meant for  
celebration and contemplation.**

**Bless Lord this new year, each of its 365 days and  
nights.**

**Bless us with new moons and full moons.**

**Bless us with happy seasons and a long life.**

**Grant to us , Lord, the new year's gift of a year of  
love. AMEN.**

**PRAYERS FOR THE DOMESTIC CHURCH - A  
HANDBOOK FOR WORSHIP IN THE HOME**

**by Edward Hayes**

**Peg Duffy**

**Friday, January 2, 2015**

John 1: 6-9

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.*

I have, in the past, awakened in the dark of night from a dream or nightmare feeling uneasy and from that point onward my mind would become increasingly chaotic. I could take 1 or 2 simple problems that I garnered from the day before or even weeks or months before and turn them into an inescapable maze. I discovered that if I got up, turned on a light and walked around, the crazy downward spire of negativity gradually stopped and rational thinking would return.

I sometimes still experience "night crazies" but have found a few memorized psalms whispered in the dark to be quieting. I breathe deeply, count my blessings and give thanks.

This, to me, is what Jesus Christ in my life is all about. He is the light. Through His grace he brings calm and positive energy into my life. Any problems I may be working through don't disappear but I now know to ask for help and the support of others.

**Carole Snider**

**Saturday, January 3, 2015**

John 1: 10-14

*He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory as of the only Son from the Father.*

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As I read and reflected on this verse I thought, "Well, this is easier to understand than many things in the Bible". Jesus is the Word that God created to live among us. Jesus lived to show us the way to the Light-the way to live as God would have us live.

All we need do is accept Jesus as the Son of God and we will become the Children of God. We can receive God's Grace simply by asking to receive it. Awesome!

But hold on! We as humans tend to muddle things up and make them much more difficult than they need to be. We want things to be neat and tidy and logical. We want things to be literal. I have learned that that is not going to happen. So, I will continue to seek for the Grace that I know is here for me.

I love the Christmas season and all it means and the message that it brings. I am sure that part of that message is that as long as we are seeking we are getting closer to the Light and the peace it will bring us.

**Prayer: Dear Loving and Patient God, Please be with us as stumble along. Thank you for loving us and for sending Jesus as our "flashlight". Help us find our way. Amen**

**Jill Zedan**

**Sunday, January 4, 2015**

Isaiah 63:7-9

*I will recount the steadfast love of the Lord, the praises of the Lord, according to all the Lord has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel which he has granted them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. For he said, surely they are my people, who will not deal falsely; and he became their Savior. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old*

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There are many definitions of love. Webster's encompasses different types. Among them is, "God's tender regard and concern for all human beings."

Do you wake in the morning with a song of praise for being able to see the dawn? Do you thank God for the warm shower, the healthy food for meals, your mobility? Then at night as you lie down do you pray for all the people of the world who do not know the safety of home?

"Every moment a voice comes out of the sky, a verse, Creation is ample and full of grace...Those who hear this in

the soul respond, They turn to God. They praise. They bow down all the way with gratitude.” From *Alive with Scripture* by the Sufi poet Rumi.

Alfred Lord Tennyson write a poem which is Hymn 414 in our hymnals. “Incarnate God, immortal Love, whom we, that have not seen your face, by faith, and faith alone, embrace, believing where we cannot prove. You will not leave us in the dust; you gave us life, we know not why. We trust we were not made to die, for you have made us, you are just.....”

**Prayer: To our Heavenly Father: Every day we try to remember to thank you for all your love and blessings. Keep us mindful of others who are not as blessed as we are.**

**Joy Garapic**

**Monday, January 5, 2015**

Matthew 2:9-11

*When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

The story of the Wisemen is one that we are all familiar with. What nativity scene would be complete without the 3 Magis and their gifts for the baby Jesus. The only problem with this, is the fact that the bible does not support this traditional holiday scene. The bible never mentions how many Magi were actually involved in following the star. It also does not mention the Magi meeting Jesus at the manger where he was born, and it also never says how old Jesus was at the time of their meeting. Scripture says they met him at a house, and most bible scholars agree that he was probably near 2 years old based on the interaction between King Herod and the Magi. The Wise Men brought three gifts before Jesus -- gold, frankincense, and myrrh (the source of our holiday gift giving tradition) -- but that doesn't necessarily mean there were only three men. There may have been an entire caravan of Magi who came to worship the King.

On a side note: Isn't it ironic that a holiday honoring the birth of the most unmaterialistic man ever born has become the annual spending frenzy we celebrate today (I don't think the Magi shopped at Jareds).

Seriously, the Magi are an important part of the Christmas story. Their part of the story is to show that Jesus was not born as a Savior only for the Jews, instead he had come as the



Savior of the entire world. He was to be an international King, and he was already drawing an international following.

**Chad Sproul**

**Tuesday, January 6, 2015**

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

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Excerpts from “Ring Out Wild Bells” by Alfred Lord Tennyson. I know it only because I have sung musical settings of it. Well worth seeking out and reading in its entirety.

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,  
The flying cloud, the frosty light:  
The year is dying in the night;  
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,  
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:  
The year is going, let him go;  
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind  
For those that here we see no more;  
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,

Ring in redress to all mankind...

Ring in the valiant man and free,  
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;  
Ring out the darkness of the land,  
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

**Prayer: Dear Lord, may this New Year be a new beginning for us all. May we heed the words of Tennyson and “ring out the old, ring in the new.” May we daily renew our abiding relationship with your Son Jesus Christ, which is always new and fresh. Amen.**

**Jon K. Thompson**

## NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal black ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

**To our Writers we say THANK YOU!**