

**BRECKSVILLE UNITED
CHURCH OF CHRIST**

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOK

2019

Hope *"We must accept finite disappointment,
but never lose infinite hope"*
~ Martin Luther King Jr.

Peace *"Peace begins with a smile"*
~ Mother Teresa

Joy *"When the mind is pure, joy
follows like a shadow that
never leaves"* ~ Buddha

Love *"Love yourself. Then forget it.
Then, love the world"*
~ Mary Oliver



Spinted-Thinking

INTRODUCTION

The Advent readings in this book situate the story of Jesus' birth in the midst of a much larger story going back a thousand years before the angel first appeared to Mary. That larger story is one of a people moving through time, trusting in God and trying to live before God in song and in praise, in poetry and in prose. Sometimes they succeeded magnificently; sometimes they failed miserably. But all the while they were human, oh so very human.

In the midst of their hardscrabble lives they were looking for something better, for a world where more than might made right. Their experience of the world in general made it seem unlikely that things would ever change, but every so often, God had broken into their history to rescue them from slavery in Egypt or exile in Babylon or even just from themselves.

Over the years, they had heard whispers of something spectacular, of a great king who would free them, of a loving shepherd who would nurture them, of a suffering servant who would bear their transgressions. There were hints and promises and assurances of what was to come, of what God would do.

When Jesus did come, he answered their expectations in some ways, exceeded them in others, and upended them in still others. Some followers of Jesus wrote down their recollections and reflections as they tried to figure out what had happened in his life and death and resurrection, and what it all meant to them.

Our writers continue in that tradition as we reflect on what God has done in Christ, and what God is still doing today. We are part of that larger story of God which has Jesus at its center. My prayer is that as we speak to each other in these commentaries, we might just catch an echo of God's own voice resounding through the years with a message of grace and love.

Pastor Allan

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Sunday, December 1, 2019

Isaiah 2:1-2

In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

As I write this, I am looking out on the first major snow of the winter. While it is tranquil and beautiful, I am reminded of: the gutters I didn't clean, the leaves we didn't rake, all the Fall chores we didn't finish. I wish I had some warning that winter is coming. A stark reality indeed.

Christmas is the same way. Soon it will be upon us. I only hope that I won't be lamenting the unfinished plans, decorating, gift shopping when the day of celebration arrives. If only we had some warning time to remind us to prepare....

Oh wait, we do! Advent is that time of anticipation. We are given time each year to settle our minds and prepare our hearts. This time is set prominently at the beginning of our church year so that it is visible "on the highest of the mountains" so that "he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths".

Heavenly Parent, let us be mindful, this year as we prepare for the coming of Your Son.

Jim Duffy

Monday, December 2, 2019

Isaiah 2:4-5

He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. Oh, House of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

I try to imagine what our world would be like if nations would not lift up swords against nations and then I ask: What would our world be like if instead of verbal swords we heard only words of kindness? What would our world be like if there were no guns and only acts of kindness were legalized? What would our world be like if instead of learning about war we learned only how to love others, no matter what they looked like? And when I look for answers to these questions, I am reminded that walking in the light of the Lord means that I think, act, and say kindness whenever possible – and as the Dalai Lama says, “kindness is always possible.”

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me always think, act, and say only kindness and remember that it is always possible.

Carol Miller

Tuesday, December 3, 2019

Romans 13:11-12

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

This year, I asked Matt to pick out my passage for me. Interestingly enough, I picked these exact verses back in 2013. I wrote a charge for us to wake from our sleep so that we might see the grace and beauty surrounding us. While this still has merit, I believe being *woke* has a very different connotation these days. We have grown comfortable in our world, in our space, and in our reality. We have an understanding of what it means to live in community—but it's limited by our existence in one small aspect of it. We are all blinded by our own worldviews; making us forget that there are many other worldviews out there as real as our own. We push others (and ourselves) further into the darkness of sleep. And while sleep is a necessary part of life in order to recharge and regroup, we are also remiss if we choose to stay asleep and not engage the challenges of existing in this wild conflagration of human chaos. We are called to wake up. We don't have to do it alone. The light that is God protects us from the chaos and from our own fears.

God of light, please help us to see the world with newly awakened eyes every day.

Kate Klonowski

Wednesday, December 4, 2019

Matthew 24:36-39

But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

As our lives proceed, we encounter events that are shocking and profoundly disturbing, whether it is the death of a loved one or a historical event that we didn't see coming. The attack on Pearl Harbor was one such event in my parents' lives. The assassination of President John Kennedy was early in my life but was an event I'll never forget. The attacks on 9/11/2001 changed our country in ways none of us could have anticipated. It also changed many of our lives. I know that my decision to move to northeast Ohio from Phoenix was very much a 9/11 decision. 9/11 happened and I was out of Phoenix by the end of October. Those folks who perished on that date had no idea what was going to happen when they went to work or stepped on those airplanes that morning. My thinking was that if you're going to do something crazy (yet legal), you'd better get on with it because who knows what's going to happen next.

The folks who died in the great flood of Noah's time had even less warning that we did prior to 9/11. As described in this passage, they were happily living their lives, or perhaps unhappily, and here came this flood, completely unanticipated and from which there was no escape. The message is clear: only God knows when the Son of Man is returning - or when the next cataclysmic event is coming that will sweep us up either physically or in ways from which we cannot recover. We need to be on the lookout and to know that today is the day we should take action, to correct that which needs correcting and to help those around us to meet their needs. Time is wasting. ►

Dear Lord - we thank you for your many blessings of each day. Help us to know that time is fleeting and the opportunities to change our lives are slipping away. Help us to take advantage of the time we have to make our church, our community, and our world a better place. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Jon Thompson

Thursday, December 5, 2019

Matthew 24:40-42

Then two will be in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken, and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

I read this verse and think of the difficult and never-ending toils of those who lived before us. Before any mechanics or iron machinery could be relied on. Yet, there was still companionship among those who worked side by side. Someone who knows & shares in what is involved in completing 'the tasks'. And, sorrow to part - when one of their earthly lives is complete, no matter what the age.

Let us pray to appreciate companionship as we work in our earthly fields.

Tia Began

Friday, December 6, 2019

Matthew 24:43-44

But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

She had been in bed only a half an hour or less and she heard a noise. "Ah, nothing," she thought and closed her eyes a little tighter. Again, a noise, but this time a rattle at the window -- a knock on the glass. She opened her eyes and looked for something -- but, she saw nothing. She sat up, turned on the light and pulled her bath robe tightly about her body.

She was alone. Charles no longer lived with her and the children were away at school.

The wind made a mournful howl. She shivered -- not with cold.

She walked to the kitchen, opened the refrigerator and poured a glass of milk. She sat at the kitchen table, sipped her milk and opened her Bible. "I'll read some scripture and meditate. The sun will come up and everything will be fine."

She found a familiar verse: "You must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

Her neighbor found her at the kitchen table. She died in the middle of the night. The Son of Man came at an unexpected hour and took her home.

Prayer: Our Father and Mother, please help me to be ready when you come at an unexpected hour.

David Ritchey

Saturday, December 7, 2019

Isaiah 11:1-3

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD

When I read the Isaiah scriptures that foretell the coming of Jesus, I always think of Handel 's Messiah.

Here are a few interesting items I found on the Baltimore Symphony website

1. A lot of people thought it was blasphemous.
2. It is not a Christmas piece.
3. It was written incredibly fast.
4. There is no definitive version.
5. King George stood during the Hallelujah chorus.

But please don't just take my word. You can do a google search as well.

But do take my word on this. ...I am always thrilled beyond thrills whenever I hear or sing Handel 's glorious music. The Isaiah prophecy literally comes to life and my heart is filled with Joy!

Diane Gressley

Sunday, December 8, 2019

Isaiah 11:6-7

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

When I read this, I immediately think about the divisiveness in our culture today. You vs. Me seems to be more important than how we work together for a greater good.

Lord, I pray for the patience to stop and think before I react, and to take the time to try to understand where someone is coming from before I decide that they are stupid or wrong. Particularly now, please help us all learn to see truth over opinion and live the way Jesus would want us to -- all together as a people working together rather than fighting all the time. Amen

Sue Maier

Monday, December 9, 2019

Isaiah 11:8-10

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

⁸ *The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.*

⁹ *They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
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¹⁰ *On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples;
the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.*

The image Isaiah puts forth here is one of complete peace in nature and among peoples. The innocent and the defenseless will not be in danger from the natural world, even when they are acting in a way that would normally cause a disaster: children should not play around the dens of poisonous snakes! God has eliminated enmity between humans and the other parts of the creation, even snakes—our nemesis back to the image of the tempter in the Eden story.

Nor will anyone be in danger from others in the human world, for pain and destruction between humans has been eliminated by the full knowledge of God, which is as present as water is in the sea: it's everywhere!

Isaiah prophesies that once everyone knows God, peace will break out. Perhaps it is a knowledge of God's power, or justice, or will. Or perhaps it is instead a knowledge of what God has done in the Messiah. Jesse was King David's father, and the Messiah was supposed to come from David's line. This descendant of Jesse will show the peoples of the earth how to act as they imitate him and so live under his rule of peace. **Pastor Allan Lane**

Tuesday, December 10, 2019

Psalm 72:3-4

May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.

As I sit here waiting for inspiration, what stands out to me in this verse is the cause of the poor and the needy. Especially at this time of year there is so much need. The homeless need beds, warm clothes, a hot meal. So many homeless are mentally ill and will not come into shelters, preferring their tents and boxes. The City Mission, the Salvation Army, St. Malachi and other organizations here in Cleveland are trying to fill in the gaps, but there is an ongoing need. It is important to support these groups with volunteering and, of course, money.

Some of the ways our church helps is by serving meals at various churches and by supporting such causes as Neighbors in Need. Perhaps the people served have not had the opportunities you and I have had, or a medical emergency caused their situation. Whatever their story, they are God's children and deserve our support.

As far as crushing oppressors, because of the constant news around us, we hear of so much oppression. Proverbs 12:21 states that, "No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked have their fill of trouble." How can this be? Who decides who is righteous and who is wicked? There are no answers. In our country we are free to express our opinions and live in a democracy. We can only pray that others around the world will have chances such as ours.

Dear Father, Mother God: Please look after children who live in desperate situations dealing with hunger and fear every hour of the day. Give them hope and promise of better things to come. Thy will be done. Amen.

Joy Garapic

Wednesday, December 11, 2019

Psalm 72:5-7

*May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon,
throughout all generations. May he be like rain that falls on the mown
grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days may
righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.*

Upon selecting these verses for my contribution to the Advent Booklet I thought these verses were about ecology or the value of nature. It turns out that these verses are about an earthly ruler's behavior and how his moral values affected his regime.

The reading starts out as a customary toast to the king's health and longevity, Could this ruler be God or Jesus? His moral solidarity doesn't rest on destructive violence but on creative gentleness. What about the social program of a ruler who believes in an eternal moral order that is characterized by gentleness and caring for his people? Could this be the reason why Jesus was sent to be among us?

My prayer is an adaption from a quote from Gandhi: If you think the world is all wrong , remember that it contains people like you (or me).

Caroline Chandler

Thursday, December 12, 2019

Matthew 3:1-3

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

Think back to about three or four generations after Jesus was born, and the words of John are written down as best as they could be remembered. The writer remembered that John was functioning as a pathfinder to Jesus and was trying to tell people that a new way of life is about to begin as people hear the teaching of Jesus. Two thousand years have passed, and the message is still the same - maybe we could do things in a new way. Maybe we can change conditions a little to alleviate in some small way the problems of poverty, poor housing, the wealth gap and some other problems we could name. As we are anticipating the celebration of the birth of Jesus, maybe John's challenge will reach us and motivate us to change our ways to live our lives as Jesus would teach.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we are nearing the celebration of the coming of your son, Jesus, and we ask for your guidance in meeting John's challenge. Amen

Bob Chandler

Friday, December 13, 2019

Matthew 3:4-6

Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Mathew 3:4-5 reminds me to live simply and become unburdened through God/Jesus. The easy part is to live simply. I live simply through respecting the Earth and environment. The hard part is to become unburdened. I believe that through sharing our "sins", short comings, and problems we become unburdened. That is why many of us seek talking therapy or keep a journal. To become unburdened, we also need to trust

Story: I was teaching at a private girl's school in Memphis Tennessee many years ago. One December day I was confiding to the school secretary my short comings, concerns for teaching, and the pressures of getting ready for Christmas. The secretary's response was that we each have a basket in which to place our sins, short comings, and woes. If we give our filled basket to God/Jesus, we are relieved. Unfortunately, many of us as we hand our baskets over to God/Jesus we snatch them back. As the holidays approach and throughout the year I try to trust and leave my basket with God/Jesus rather than snatching it back.

Prayer: May we each take our basket of sins, shortcomings, woes and worries to God/Jesus and trust.

Pat Rehm

Saturday, December 14, 2019

Luke 3:7-8

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

These verses are difficult to understand without being placed within the context of John the Baptizer's larger message. Americans specifically, and Westerners in general, often have difficulty hearing such messages in a social milieu because we have been raised in such an individualistic culture. (Very rarely are statues commissioned to honor groups of people rather than individuals. How abiding is the image of the Lone Cowboy Hero riding off into the sunset?) But John is speaking to a group that is representative of issues he understands face his people as a whole. God's Chosen People are no longer faithful and this is evidenced by how they treat one another, and especially the poorest in their midst. It does not matter that they lay claim to their religious heritage as signs of their relationship to God... God isn't buying it! When questioned about what they should do as signs of repentance, John urges them to correct the injustices that plague their world. And he gives specific examples related to their positions within the community; things that tax collectors, soldiers, and the masses could do. John's admonitions and advice are still valid as the issues our world faces are predominately related to the ways we treat one another and the planet we share. Basically, John was saying, "The world is a mess and it's because people of faith are acting in faithless ways, so change your ways and start acting like God's people." Within this message is the affirmation that actions of love and justice will make a difference and they are noticed and blessed by God. So, John, The Old Grump in the Wilderness, still offers words of change, and HOPE, for us.

Leroy & Kathy Ford

Sunday, December 15, 2019

Matthew 3:10-11

"Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Acceptance of God kindles the fire of the soul.

**Oh God guide me and protect me, illumine the lamp of my heart
and make me a brilliant star.**

The Coyer-Westerberg Family

Monday, December 16, 2019

Isaiah 35:3-4

Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you."

It would probably be of value to get out your Bible and find out what the context of this passage might be. This brief passage could be taken to advise us to be as continually strong as we can be, physically and spiritually. If I am strong, I can present a solid defense against what may be happening, and I'm also in a position to encourage those around me. I am enough of a skeptic to believe I'm better off to depend on myself. God plus me can create an unbeatable force!

Dear Lord, as I get older, I observe my hands, my knees, my back, and so on getting weaker by the day. It will benefit me to take care of myself as best I can and to strengthen myself in every way possible. Then when crisis arises, I can ally myself with you and we can do battle together. I am so thankful that you have my back! In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Jon Thompson

Tuesday, December 17, 2019

Isaiah 35:5-6

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

Christ's healing miracles on the blind was an outward sign of our deeper spiritual connection with Him. As in the hymn "Amazing Grace," I once was blind but now I see; Christ is the true light of the world. He illuminates Christians (by grace) and inspires us not to hide that light (knowledge of him) under a bushel but share it with a world in desperate need.

As our spiritual eyes have been opened, we want to make Christ the center of our lives in all things. Because we celebrate Christ's victory over sin & death, we can have peace in our everyday life. By way of abiding in Christ we have abundant reasons to be joyful and sing his praises.

Maureen Stanley

I long for the day when this happens. To be able to see, hear & not only to sing for joy, but to jump for joy! Even though I can see, hear & get around easily, I often feel blind to many things. not always hearing the way I should, and I often speak in wrong ways. So, I long for the day when my own blindness and my "hard of hearing" & my wrong speech changes.

As I get older I long to move around better. So, this scripture encourages me to believe that God wants to give all of us a better life. I pray for Jesus to see us so that we can see him clearer & hear us so that we can hear him better. I pray for Jesus to sing to us helping us to sing to him. And I long for the day when all can experience healing as needed and the freedom of walking absolutely pain free, hand & hand with Jesus.

Terry Heiman

Wednesday, December 18, 2019

Isaiah 35:8

A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.

Traveling was no small feat in the time of the prophets. Roads were often little more than beaten paths. A shifting wind could easily cover the path with sand and lead a traveler astray. There were wild animals and brigands to deal with. In short, traveling was not for the faint of heart.

In modern times, the Holy Way strikes me as more an idea than an actual path. However, as in biblical times, it isn't a journey for the faint of heart. It can be a quixotic quest when pursuing the right and good isn't valued and is often scorned as foolhardy. But let us continue to follow Quixote's example and try to "reach the unreachable star"!

The prayer comes again from the words of Quixote: Take a deep breath of life and consider how it should be lived. Call nothing thy own, except thy soul. Love not what thou art, but only what thou may become. Do not pursue pleasure, for thou may have the misfortune to overtake it. Look always forward. Be just to all men. Be courteous to all women. Live in the vision of that One for Whom great deeds are done

Matt Wolbert

Thursday, December 19, 2019

Psalm 146:5-7

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.

This Bible verse speaks to me of FAITH. When I think of this word it appears in capital letters in my mind. Due to the Grace of God, I was blessed to be born to a woman of extraordinary faith. This is a priceless gift.

So, I will dedicate this writing to my amazing Mother. Bobby was warm & compassionate. She loved unconditionally. I never heard her say an unkind word about another person. She loved her fellow man & animals. She was a social worker, church schoolteacher & scout leader. She was an active participant in the Civil Rights movement. For several years she was Director of Christian Education at this church co-chairing with Betty Gifford & Kirk Sanderson.

My early childhood was, as I have said many times, a portrait of Norman Rockwell's view of life. I am grateful for this strong foundation and unconditional love from my mother. I witnessed her unquestioning faith that sustained her through my older sister's illness & death at age 15 and her own illness and death at age 48. I would not trade the 16 years she was in my life for anything! I love you, Mom! Merry Christmas!

Loving and nurturing God, please be with us all during this Christmas season. I pray for FAITH to strengthen all your children. Amen

Jill Zedan

Friday, December 20, 2019

Matthew 11:2-5

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them."

John was eager to hear if Jesus was the one for whom they were waiting. His ministry was being the herald, making straight the path, and all that. Hopefully, the words that came back to him eased his mind.

We are lucky that we have hindsight. We know the good news. During this holiday season, let us share the wonder of those who experience Him for the first time. Let us bring a little bit of that good news to those we meet, sharing a bit of Christ's peace everywhere we go.

Heavenly Creator, as we celebrate holidays this year, let us hear Your Voice in our hearts and be an instrument of Your Peace in this world. Amen.

Jim Duffy & Jill Black (birthday buddies)

Saturday, December 21, 2019

Matthew 1:18-19

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his 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.

This verse immediately made me focus on Joseph and his initial reaction to Mary's news, his emotional plans to dismiss her quietly, then his subsequent visit from the messenger, and the redirection of his entire life.

For help, I checked the internet and got so many views from Biblical scholars, ministers, and columnists that I am no longer sure what my original thoughts were, or which sources inserted the new ones. However, I am going to try to convey some of them.

Joseph's world probably fell apart for a while. "Talk about trouble," one minister challenged. Then he listed so many things that can occur in our lives, and especially in the Christmas season, that people often find the season unbearable. Joseph was able to redirect, even in face of public reaction, to love Mary and raise the son of God. His resilience, integrity, obedience and confidence in God may have been reasons he was chosen to be the earthly father of Jesus.

Dear God, help us to have the resilience, integrity, obedience, and confidence that Joseph had. May we always, not just in the Advent Season, keep our faith in guidance that comes from you and the example of the Christmas gift.

Dot Bailey

Sunday, December 22, 2019

Matthew 1:20-21

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. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

God chose Joseph to be Mary's husband because he was a good and righteous man. God also knew that Joseph would be an excellent earthly role model to young Jesus. The story of Joseph is incomplete. Joseph is not mentioned in the bible after Jesus went missing as a boy. He is not mentioned at the wedding feast in Cana or at the crucifixion. Biblical scholars can only assume that Joseph died before Jesus began his public ministry. Even though the biblical information about Joseph is limited, he played a significant role in the life of Jesus. Joseph's mission was clear, given to him in a dream. He was to become Mary's husband because she was bearing a son that would change the world.

Our life's mission is not so clear. It's been said to receive answers or instructions from God, read the bible. The book of missing information, farfetched stories, parables, and discrepancies dealing with today's world. All of that aside, in the bible we have the commandments, the golden rule and stories of men and women who lived their lives faithful to God. Even though we know very little about him, Joseph is certainly one of God's faithful servants.

Prayer Heavenly Father, help us to be like Joseph, a righteous and faithful servant and devoted husband and father. Amen

David Pastor

Monday, December 23, 2019

Matthew 1:22-23

All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel" which means, "God is with us."

This brief phrase, "God is with us" is the crux of our mission as witnesses to our Lord: each of us is commissioned to demonstrate that God is with each and every person NOW. This phrase is not past tense – it is present tense – it is NOW. Every day we have opportunities to SHOW that God is here through our acts of kindness. These acts can be little, medium, or big, but they must be frequent and happen with everyone we meet.

During my childhood, when our family packed our Christmas decorations, my parents kept one ornament out and hung it in the kitchen to remind us to live the spirit of Christmas every day. Now in our house we leave an ornament hanging on our china cabinet all year to remind us that we need to show that God is still here as we go about our daily lives.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me manifest your presence in our world today through my acts of kindness.

Peace, Carol Miller

Tuesday, December 24, 2019

Matthew 1:24-25

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Some of my clearest communications from God come during the small hours of the night, when my mind and body are at rest. During the day I've got my agenda, doggedly checking off to-do's, marching to the relentless beat of my own itinerary. There's always something to complete, purchase, plan-for or attend. The gentle voice of God can be hard to distinguish when it doesn't appear on "The List."

It's noteworthy that Joseph "awoke from sleep," hearing in his dream the Lord's clear, direct command while his mind was detached from the busyness of his daylight tasks. But Joseph, often unlike us, did as he was told. He didn't procrastinate, sulk or bargain; he simply complied. His reward? Nothing less than Jesus himself.

Perhaps if we open ourselves to the "still, small voice" in our hearts, we too will receive that most precious of gifts, Jesus the Christ. And if there was ever a night to listen, surely, it's tonight.

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of your Son this holy night. May we be opened to your call, and like the humble carpenter, bask in the joy that comes with obedience. Amen

Betsey Wilson

Wednesday, December 25, 2019

Luke 1:46-49

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies 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."

June and I were born in Pittsburgh and each Christmas we would travel there to celebrate Christ's birth with family. It was always a welcomed experience packing the van, traveling with two children and our four-legged family member, Fluffy. Weather was always a challenge along with the traffic volume. In spite of those mentioned trip happenings, all of us have memories that we still talk about today.

We pray that everyone traveling during the Christmas season has a safe, enjoyable trip and all will feel the spirit of Christmas and peace in their hearts this holiday season.

Ed & June Puwal

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey 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.

Graciously Proofread by Marge Culver. Thank You!