

2021

Advent Devotional

"Names of Jesus"

First United Presbyterian Church
Of Dale City



First United Presbyterian Church of Dale City (PCUSA)

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FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN,
UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN:
AND THE GOVERNMENT SHALL
BE UPON HIS SHOULDER:
AND HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED

*Wonderful, Counsellor,
The mighty God,
The everlasting Father,
The Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah 9:6

First Sunday of Advent

November 28, 2021

King of Kings

³⁰ *The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."* - Luke 1:30-33

¹⁶ *On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, "King of kings and Lord of lords."* - Revelation 19:16

King of kings is not a term that typically resonates with Americans. The closest we get to royalty these days is watching Queen Elizabeth's family fight on TV or reading about their exploits in the tabloids. For all the interest some people have in them, they don't appear to be that royal in their behaviors.

Not having an earthly king of our own in nearly 250 years (other than Elvis or Michael) has left us without a good frame reference to completely understand what it means for Jesus to be a king of a king, much less, of all kings. The closest thing I can equate to a king in our modern vernacular is the recently coined and oft overused term, GOAT, the Greatest of All Time. This is a designation that is often used to describe sports stars like Brady (Sorry, Peyton. Even I have to confess it.), Ali, Serena, Tiger, Babe (Ruth and Zaharious), and, depending on who you ask, LeBron, Shaq, Kareem, Wilt, Larry, Kobe, or Magic.

To be recognized as the GOAT in anything, you must have first accomplished something or performed in such a way, or to such a degree, that all previous efforts will have been eclipsed by your achievements. Most GOAT designations are highly desirable, at least by the people performing similar feats, while there are some that no one wants to own, such as Kniewel's GOAT designation for having the most broken bones (433) in recorded history.

The one thing you need to know about GOATs, besides apparently being commonly identifiable by only one name, is the ephemeral nature of greatness. Before Brady, there was Peyton, and before him, Dan Marino. Before Ali, there was Joe Lewis. Before Serena, Billie Jean. Before Tiger, Jack Nicholas. And before LeBron, who knows? The point is, no matter how great something or someone is today, we are but dust and someone else will be tomorrow's GOAT and our greatness will be consigned to the history books.

The night Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he came into the world as a baby, born with a questionable heritage and in less than regal accommodations, yet at one second old, his accomplishments had far exceeded everyone that had come before him or after him. Even at birth, he was already recognized by some as the Greatest Of All Time. Sought by wisemen, worshiped by shepherds, heralded by angels, and possibly coveted by actual goats, Jesus came into the world, not as an earthly king of temporary and transient greatness, but as an eternal King, our God made flesh, our creator, our sustainer, and inevitably, our redeemer.

In the roughly 2050 years since reclaiming his heavenly throne and for the rest of time, no feat, no act, no accomplishment by anyone that has ever, or will ever, walk this earth will eclipse his greatness. While not everyone today recognizes Jesus as the Greatest of All Time, one day, maybe one day soon, all flesh, from the lowliest shepherd to the highest king, will see his greatness, and every knee will bend and every tongue confess Jesus as their King.

Father, at this time of Advent, prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus, his first and the next. Give us the wisdom to seek Him in our weary land. Set our hearts on fire to herald His coming to a waiting world. Humble our pride to recognize him, to bow down before him, to worship him as the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus, the Greatest of All Time. Amen.

– Martin Andrews

Monday

November 29, 2021

The Savior

²¹ *She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” - Matthew 1:21*

¹¹ *to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. - Luke 2:11*

What does "to save" mean in the Bible? To save is to rescue. And in Hebrew, the word for "Jesus" is "Yeshua", which means salvation, deliverance. This explains the words of Matthew in the Matthew 1:21 verse.

There are a few things I find special about Jesus, the Savior. His birth and death were predicted long before he was born. His coming brought about change in the lives of people of his time and for all generations after them. He also belongs to the trinity as He is God the Son, and at the same time he is a True Man, who came humbly to our world because He loves us, though he hates our sins. His death on the cross and resurrection three days later afforded us God's forgiveness and life eternal, as John 3: 16 describes: **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."**

In order to save us the way he did, Jesus had to be full of love for us. An incredible, limitless, self-sacrificing, privilege foregoing and unconditional love. He loved us so much he set us free, for free! What a precious gift!

Almighty God, we thank you for your love and gift of salvation. Please show us how to be witnesses of this love and teach us to extend it to others as well. May we never stop praising You and living for You. In the name of Jesus, our Savior we pray. Amen.

– Agnes Fokwa

Tuesday

November 30, 2021

Emmanuel

²² *All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:* ²³ *“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” - Matthew 1:22-23*

What would you give up or sacrifice to help someone else? Would you go out of your way to give someone a ride to a doctor’s appointment? Would you give a cashier \$10 to help someone cover their groceries if they were short of money? Would you take a relative into your home and care for them in the case of a major illness? Many people have responded to these and other situations of need to care for others. As great as these gifts or sacrifices may be, they pale in comparison to Jesus’s decision to come to earth as fully human in order to bring us into relationship with God the Father.

An old hymn tells us that Jesus left his throne and kingly crown when he came to earth. He arrived as a human baby, helpless and probably hungry. He enjoyed being swaddled and held close by his mother, and had the same needs as any other baby.

As he grew up, he probably had times of being hungry and thirsty, of being tired, of having scraped knees or elbows, or being disappointed by friends –what child doesn’t! And he surely had times of enjoying his favorite food provided by his mother, of learning skills from Joseph, of learning about the natural world around him, and of learning about his heavenly father from his parents and the local rabbi. He learned what human beings experience here on earth.

These experiences enabled Jesus to first be “God with us” as he lived among the people of the first century in Palestine. After his baptism by John the Baptist, he went into the desert to meditate on his calling and wrestled with the three temptations presented by Satan. Would he turn stones into bread to address his human hunger? Would he test God’s protection by leaping from the temple’s highest point? Would he worship Satan in order to rule all the kingdoms of the world? Jesus rejected Satan’s temptations to his humanity, and chose to follow God’s plan for him.

When he saw a widow mourning for her only son as the funeral procession passed by, he likely could remember the loss of Joseph and have pity, and then raise the son from the dead. When he spoke of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, he could remember his thirst for the knowledge of God that he demonstrated when he stayed at the temple in Jerusalem when he was twelve years old, talking with the priests and scribes. He spent much of his time on earth healing those with both physical diseases and those possessed by demons (mental or emotional diseases). And, of course, he taught the people that God the Father is a God of love.

Through his death on the cross and his resurrection, he has brought us the opportunity to become children of God, joint heirs of the kingdom with Jesus. Jesus walks beside us every day, as we invite him into our lives, and guides us as we experience joys and sorrows, the routine and the unexpected. Christ was fully God and fully human at the same time. His experience here on earth allows him to be fully with us as we allow him into our daily lives.

Lord Jesus, you have become flesh and now dwell among us, to show us God's love for us and to extend the invitation to become children of God. Help us to be ever mindful of your presence and follow your guidance in our living. Amen.

– Sara Porter

Wednesday

December 1, 2021

The Light of the World

¹² *Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." - John 8:12*

Nyctophobia is the fear of the dark. Many people, especially small children, suffer from this fear. While I don't have nyctophobia, I do feel uncomfortable driving at night or walking by myself when it is dark outside. I don't fear the dark as much as I miss the light.

Life depends on light. Plants, the basis of all terrestrial and most aquatic food chains, depend on light to produce food. Organisms that live deep in the oceans, below the level of light penetration, produce their own light through a process called bioluminescence.

After God created the heavens and the earth His first command was "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). Light was a necessary first step before the creation of living things. Light sustains us, and it also guides us. Exodus 13:21 describes God leading His people in a pillar of clouds during the day and a pillar of fire, to give them light, at night. Psalm 119:105 declares, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path". God's light guides us and keeps us safe. When mankind continued to stumble and go astray God sent His son, Jesus, to be our light. A brilliant star appeared in the heavens when He was born, pointing the way to His birthplace. Jesus' life and words enlighten us, helping us understand His father's majesty, nature and will. Our job is simply to open our eyes, our hearts, and our minds to that light – to Jesus – and to believe in Him and follow Him.

Christmas is coming. Let us celebrate Jesus' birth the same way the wisemen did so many years ago. Let us watch for His arrival, follow His light, and celebrate His presence.

Father God, thank You for light. Thank You for the sustenance, guidance, understanding and hope that it provides. Thank You, most of all, for the gift of Your son, Jesus Christ, the light of the world, who is all these things and so much more. Help us to look to Him, learn from Him, follow Him and worship Him. Let Him be, for each of us, a beacon in our darkness, lighting our way to You. Amen.

– Linda Wolstenholme

Thursday

December 2, 2021

The Bread of Life

³² *Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. . .*

³⁵ *Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. - John 6:32,35*

For as long as I can remember, my dad has gone out to dinner almost every Saturday night, leaving my sister and me at home. I sometimes get upset because I do not understand why he doesn't want to stay home with us, or why he doesn't take us with him. After he leaves, I usually go to my room and sulk until I hear his car pull into the driveway. Suddenly, no matter how upset I was when he left, my sister and I excitedly run to the door to greet him. We are glad he is home again, but we are really excited because we both know he will be bringing a little white bag for us from the restaurant.

As soon as Dad comes in the door, we all go upstairs and sit in the kitchen to enjoy the bag's contents; bread from the restaurant. Sometimes it is a loaf of the Italian bread from Carrabba's. Other times, it's the cornmeal-encrusted loaf from Firebirds, or sometimes, it's just the bun from his Filet-o-Fish or cheeseburger from McDonald's. A lot of the time, it is still warm from the oven when we begin to share it. We enjoy every bite, as if it was the first time we ever had bread. It is important to understand that it does not matter where my dad gets the bread, or what kind of bread he brings home, all we feel is love for him because we know that he was thinking only about us when he asked for the bread to go.

Sometimes I wonder why my dad is so good to me, especially when he gets upset at me for doing things like not eating all my food, ruining something that is his or my sister's, or embarrassing him in front of his friends and coworkers. But when he brings home that treat, no matter how upset he might be with me, I understand that my dad's love for me transcends any bad thing I have done or ever will do.

I have never experienced anything better than the bread my dad gives to me, or the feeling I have as we share it, but I have heard him talk about a bread that is better than anything I have ever tasted. A bread that cannot be bought or baked. A bread that is so good, so rare, so special that once you taste it, you will be so satisfied that you won't need a second bite. I find this hard to imagine, probably because my dad has said this bread is not "bread" at all but the Bread of Life, the God-made-flesh (Emmanuel).

Dad explained that God was once very upset at people for the bad things that they did, called sin, and they were upset with Him because they felt He abandoned them and that He did not love them anymore. However, God desperately wanted people to know of His unconditional love for them, like the love my dad has for me. So one night, He showed up at the home of people at a place called Bethlehem with a little white bag of his own, not containing bread from Macaroni Grill, like my dad, but the Bread of Life. God gave the people the Bread of Life, His son, Jesus,

so that they would not only know the extent of His love for them but also, in receiving the Bread of Life, they would be able to receive His forgiveness for their sin. Jesus would fill the emptiness of the chasm between God and people caused by their disobedience and forever satisfy their hungry souls, so they would never feel hunger again for God's love. Dad says that the Bread of Life's sweet taste comes from the freedom from the bitterness of condemnation for their sin, condemnation that Jesus took on Himself at Calvary, letting all people experience the depths of God's goodness and grace.

Dad told me that Maggie and I will never experience the bitterness of condemnation from him or God, so the taste of forgiveness will never be as sweet for us as it is for him. But if we did, I am certain that the love my father has for me, like the love my dad's father, God, has for him, would spare nothing to ensure we received it. Until then, we will understand our dad's love for us with the next best thing, cheese biscuits from Red Lobster. That Bread of Life must really be something amazing!



Andy Andrews with his Dad

Thank you God for the bread that fills a hungry stomach and the Bread of Life that fills a hungry soul. As people await the coming of your Bread in their homes and their lives, help them to prepare their hearts and souls to receive its grace, to savor the sweet taste of freedom, and appreciate the price you paid to show your love by giving them your son to be consumed for their sins. Amen.
— Andy Andrews

Friday December 3, 2021

The Lamb of God

²⁹ ***The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" - John 1:29***

¹⁸ ***You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. - 1 Peter 1:18-19***

I was so blessed to grow up in a family where I was taught about God and Jesus. I was taught how to pray at an early age and how to thank God for everything. My mother was my best role model. She was a very religious woman. Not only did she pray often, but she also meditated with the Lord. She had a chair next to the window in her bedroom. When we saw her sitting in that chair, we all knew she had something on her mind. She may have been contemplating a problem with one of us kids, or any issue she may have been facing. She took all her troubles to God. She might visit that chair for days or weeks before she had direction from God. Eventually God would guide her, or as she'd say, "He showed me the way." Watching my mom made me long for her patience. She took every problem to

God and patiently waited. My mom had great faith. I would question as a child, and often ask why don't I hear God talk to me. She'd just say, "Be still and listen."

As an adult living in this busy, demanding world, I strive to emulate my mother. I try to take time to talk to God. I want to have a relationship with God like she did; to be quiet and listen, to live by faith and to knowingly accept His will be done.

Dear Lord, please help me to be still and listen. Help me to be patient in all do. I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen. – Debbie Cornelius

Saturday

December 4, 2021

The Constant

⁸ *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* - Hebrews 13:8

Throughout the centuries, Jesus Christ's character has remained consistent. Jesus lived a life which was faithful to the message he preached. He lived his faith and therefore provided a positive model for all to try to emulate. His followers have always been able to trust Jesus to guide them on their paths in life.

Because Jesus remained true to his beliefs, and always preached messages which were rooted in these beliefs, his lessons were easier to follow than the words of many other leaders. Jesus did not tailor his message for the audience whom he addressed; Jesus simply shared God's Word and His expectations for us, as Christians.

Jesus did not vacillate in his beliefs, to comfortably blend in with the political climate of the day, or the current trends of the population. Jesus only listened to, and answered to, God. As earthly situations changed, Christians knew they simply had to follow the teachings of Jesus to stay true to God.

Jesus Christ is also consistent in his love for us. What a blessing it is to know that Jesus will never give up on us, no matter how greatly we fail to live up to his expectations. With this realization comes the sweet comfort of knowing Christ will always be there for us, as our guide and as our Savior.

Jesus Christ will love us even when we fail to meet our spiritual goals. He will forgive us and continue to wrap us in his love. This should bring peace and comfort to all of Christ's flock.

Dear Heavenly Father, Please guide and strengthen me as I strive to follow your teachings and to spread your message. Open my ears and my mind, so that I may more clearly hear your Word and better understand your plan for me. Please help me live a life which will make the world a better place, give joy to those around me, and honor you, my Heavenly Father. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen. – Kathy McNeely

Second Sunday of Advent

December 5, 2021

The Suffering Servant

³ He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. ⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. - Isaiah 53:3,5

Like many prophets, Isaiah had a heart for God and a strong sense of calling. Isaiah 53 is viewed as one of the Old Testament's most remarkable prophecies concerning Jesus Christ. By his life and ministry, Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's words to the letter. In these verses Isaiah describes the servant as despised and rejected who would suffer and die for our transgressions.

Isaiah 53:5 - "upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed." As I read this verse it made me reflect on how this could possibly relate to the season of Christmas and Joy and the Glory of God. My initial reaction was one of sadness - to think about the suffering he went through for me (and you).

Where is the Joy, Peace, and Hope in that? Why did this happen?

Jesus was perfect in every sense. And yet, His perfect holiness and the sin of man cannot coexist. The Lord placed all sin upon Him – out of love for us. Without Jesus – we are separated from God. Without the cross and the suffering that Jesus endured – we would remain hopeless. All that was sinful was "imputed" to Christ and all that was lacking (the goodness – His righteousness) was given to us.

The second part of that verse, "and by his bruises, we are healed" means literally, it is healed to us; or healing has happened to us. This healing is a spiritual healing, or healing from sin. It is a pardon of sin, and restoration to the favor of God. So, through the cross came healing and redemption. This is our gift from God – not as a result of our endeavors or by observing the Law, but as a result of His suffering on the cross.

What does this mean for me during this Christmas Season?

By Faith we have been saved. We have a Savior in Jesus Christ – with whom you and I can have a personal relationship. The Christmas season can be very difficult for many. Christmas can bring back memories that invoke feelings of sadness because of estranged relationships, or the loss of a loved one who will not be present. Christ pierces into our darkness, offering us healing and peace. We all go through struggles and are broken in some way. Yet, it is through our brokenness that we can experience Christ and find our healing and redemption! We are never alone. May we be assured that the Spirit of Christ walks beside us - daily - offering healing, peace and new life.

I give thanks for "You, Lord Jesus, are my righteousness, but I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and have given to me what is yours. You have taken upon yourself what you were not and have given to me what I was not." All praise and all Glory be to God! Amen.
– Sam Parris

Monday

December 6, 2021

The Pioneer and Perfecter of Our Faith

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. - Hebrews 12:1-2

I am preparing to participate in a 5K race soon. Now, this will be mostly just for fun, not vying for any prizes, medals or trophies, but I want to finish, and I don't want to be last! When I set out on the course, I don't plan on taking anything with me that might weigh me down—no backpack or bags! I will wear my lightest clothing and my lightest shoes. I do not want to carry any unnecessary things that will slow me down.

We all seem to be running some sort of race. We may be carrying things that weigh us down spiritually—sin, guilt, regret and fear to name a few. There are some races that we run that are unique to us, but many we are on together. For the past 21 months, we have journeyed together on the path of the pandemic. Our paths have sometimes taken different turns, some expected and some not, yet we are enduring. How are we coping? Not by ourselves but with the help of others. We have surrounded each other and have done all we can to help lighten the weight (or burdens) of those around us, through Bible studies, prayer groups or just a quick phone call. We have been witnesses surrounding each other. We do not have to carry the things that weigh us down. We can lay aside every weight and run with perseverance.

We are equipped to care for each other because of the “cloud of witnesses” that have gone before us and have inspired us to run the race set before us with perseverance. In Hebrews, Chapter 11 we see the author is referring to witnesses such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses. They all had great faith but we as believers in Christ have Jesus who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. He is the source of our faith, and all that we have comes from Him. Jesus is also the only perfect human that has walked the earth, and modeled how we should treat others. He is working in and through us, to enable us to run the race that is set before us and he will not stop until His work in us is finished. Because he endured the cross and sits at the right hand of the throne of God, he takes the weights we carry, the sin we encounter and makes it possible for us to persevere through every circumstance.

***Dear Heavenly Father, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, we thank you for all that you endured in order for us to cast aside the weight of our cares, our troubles and our sins so that we can persevere. In your name we pray,
Amen.***

– Gaylene Guest

Tuesday

December 7, 2021

The Prince of Peace

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. - Isaiah 9:6

⁷ *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*
- Philippians 4:7

It seems ironic that the name for today's focus, Prince of Peace, falls on the day that President Roosevelt called a date (December 7, 1941) that would live in infamy. It was the end of peace for the United States and the beginning of our involvement in World War II. It must have been very frightening for Americans as they heard the news. Nearing Christmas, there was no peace on earth that year. . . "For hate is strong, and mocks the song O peace on earth, good-will to men." (I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day). I wonder how many must have prayed to the Prince of Peace for a return to peace.

Today, we find a new need for returning to peace. Knowing that Christ is our peace, we need to turn to Him. We need to take our worries and concerns to Him and seek the peace that only He can provide. "God is not dead: nor doth He sleep; The wrong shall fail, the right pre-vail With peace on earth, good-will to men." (I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day) At this time of year when we celebrate His birth, let us also be reminded of His sacrificial death that we may continually seek peace on earth and look forward to eternal peace.

I find when I am overcome with anxieties, doubts, and fears, it helps to find a place of quiet solitude and seek and trust Jesus and His special peace. The world is so demanding and moving so rapidly with activity addiction that I need to just stop and discover the peace Jesus lovingly gives. He is able to provide the true peace that nobody else can offer. In His perfect peace, we may continue to experience the love of God that casts away our burdens.

Lord, may I seek and find peace from the Prince of Peace that will strengthen my faith and guard my heart and mind. Amen.
– Charlotte Stultz

Wednesday

December 8, 2021

The Alpha and the Omega

⁸ *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*
- Revelation 1:8

Imagine for a moment that you opened a book and the first page was blank, as was the second, and the third, and so on. Some time around page 439, the words appear "and then she kissed her," and that's it. Another 300 blank pages and the book is done. So - what's the theme? What's the story about? What was the point?

We don't know, do we? We *can't* know, can we? Five words on one page in a 740-page novel is not even enough to figure out what is going on, on that *page*, let alone a scene, chapter, or novel. Then why is it, when presented with our handful of words in the great story God is telling of the world, that we think we have it all figured out, or that we even can? 13.7 billion years of blank pages, with 1-100 trillion pages to go and we are somehow flabbergasted that our century or less of living somehow does not contain a reasonable conception of God's majestic plan.

When we Reformed Theology folks say things like "God is in control," this is what we mean, and that phrase can be both comforting and immensely aggravating, because we cannot see the big picture, and so understanding why the things that happen to us happen is often an exercise in futility. But even if we cannot understand these events, we can decide how they shape us and whether we permit them to bring us closer to God or permit them to insert themselves between us and God. You have, at best, five to six words in God's book. If you want to make them the best words you can, you are advised to regularly and repeatedly turn to the author for advice.

Almighty God, Thank you for the opportunity to live a line in your grand story. Help us to make it one that makes the story a little brighter and a little better, and give us the humility to recognize our limits, and the courage to rely on you to go further. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

– Richard Bennett

Thursday

December 9, 2021

My Rock

⁴⁷ **The LORD lives! Blessed be my rock,
and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation... - 2 Samuel 22:47**

² **The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,
my God, my rock in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. - Psalm 18:2**

As a young lady of marital age, I was full of sweet dreams for my future. Knowing how unpredictable the future is, I surrendered myself to God's providence. I prioritized my prayers to God into good health, long life, wonderful marriage, good jobs and giving comfort and help to my parents and siblings. These dreams were sweet and attainable in Jesus' Name.

I got engaged to a man in the U.S. for four years. I got my dream job in the city. The horizon of my dream widened as life became good and my happiness knew no bound with the hope I am U.S. bound.

In 1999, I took the marriage vow. Soon after that, the man I married abandoned me in the village to take care of his aging mother. I was forced to stop my job in the city. My hopes, dreams, and happiness came crashing, I embraced the humdrum village life. I was almost everything to my mother-in-law, doing all the chores, the farm work, carrying firewood and water on my head. These took a toll on my health as I withered away and my smiling face faded away and my progress came to a standstill. With this life-changing event, my trust in God was never shaken. I was steadfast in prayers believing my God is alive. His plans for me were good and not evil. – Jeremiah 29:11.

The Lord lives, Blessed be my Rock and exalted be my God, The Rock of my Salvation, who has blessed me with a more beautiful, happy marital life for fourteen years now. So no matter the trial/test you are facing, remember that the Lord is your shield, a stronghold in whom you can take refuge, and He is faithful to perform that which concerns you.

Lord, thank you for the knowledge of You! Uphold us in your love and salvation unto the everlasting life. Amen.

- Nne Kalu

Friday

December 10, 2021

The Mediator

⁵ *For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all... - 1 Timothy 2:5*

Jesus is our mediator. He helps us get along. You know how brothers and sisters fight? Like a lot. God loves us, so he helps – brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons – people like us. We fight about the dumbest reasons ever. We fight about who gets the TV. We fight about who gets to pick the next movie or the next song, and we fight when we go into each other's rooms without knocking first. God always helps us!

Dear God, Thank you for loving us and helping us. God loves us. Amen.

– Clara and Oscar Anderson
(Grades 5 and 3)

Saturday

December 11, 2021

The Resurrection and the Life

²⁵ *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live... - John 11:25*

I have read these words of Jesus countless times before, but this year in particular this passage has been a source of strength and encouragement. Earlier this year, I lost twin siblings, my sister in January and my brother in August. Even though I was able to express my love for them and Jesus' love for them both shortly before passing, I was not able to be at their homecoming services due to the pandemic, which left a deep void and longing for them both.

Those who live in Jesus, although they die physically, live with Him for eternity because He conquered death by raising to life. Those who believe in Him are guaranteed life forever with Him. Not only that, but we shall receive a new body, free of pain, free of aging, and free of disease. Although I deeply miss daily talks with my sister and the warm voice and infectious laugh of my brother, my assurance is that they live in Christ's presence and one day, I will see them again. This is my blessed assurance and my hope because Jesus is "The Resurrection and the Life", for those who believe.

Dear believers, God wants you to receive and know His divine "Grace" – God's Riches At Christ's Expense through His Son's Resurrection. Freely He Gives – Freely We Receive. Amen. – Sue Johnson and Janice Warren (Sue's daughter)

Third Sunday in Advent

December 12, 2021

The Chief Cornerstone

⁶ *For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."* - 1 Peter 2:6

The team building exercise was fairly simple: build a gingerbread house with your coworkers. The problem was that each member of this team had different ideas about the specifics: where to use the gumdrops, whether the windows should be painted in icing or made of pretzel squares, and so on. Being an egalitarian bunch and not wanting anyone's feelings hurt, they decided to each do one wall in their own style. Each person set one wall flat before them and set to work. They wanted to show that teamwork could incorporate everyone's talents and personalities. Their message would be strength in diversity.

The resulting walls were beautiful and unique! One had pillars made of candy canes, another displayed delicate snowflakes in white icing. There was sugar crystal snow on the front wall and sour belt siding in rainbow colors on the back. Each personality shone through, and each member of the team was rightly proud of their efforts. They spent a few minutes admiring each others' edible art, then they carefully picked up their individual walls to set them together.

It was here that they encountered a problem. The candy cane pillars blocked the walls' intersection at one corner, leaving a gap. The sour belt siding kept another corner from meeting cleanly. They had started from their individuality instead of what their team underpinning was. While each wall was exquisite, they didn't stand together comfortably as a whole.

A cornerstone is a part of a building's foundation. Not only does it mark the starting point, it helps to orient the rest of the parts, giving the 90 degree angle for the first two walls, which in turn reference the orientation of the remaining walls. The walls themselves don't have to match each other, but the cornerstone was traditionally laid first to make sure that they all lined up, creating a whole building with walls that face the direction they need to. The cornerstone helps each wall complete the whole.

We are the church. Christ is the cornerstone. We each bring our own strengths and styles, but so long as we orient ourselves by Jesus' presence and example, we can make a harmonious whole, beautiful in the sight of God and the world.

Heavenly Father, Thank you for the guidance you sent to us in the form of your Son. As we each express the unique gifts and perspectives you have given us, help us to remember to orient ourselves to Him in order to make your church stronger through our complementary individual strengths. Amen. - Beth Bennett

Monday

December 13, 2021

The Last Adam

⁷ *then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, [a] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. - Genesis 2:7*

²² *for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. - I Corinthians 15:22*

⁴⁵ *Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. - I Corinthians 15:45*

We currently have two toddlers in our house, which means that we spend a lot of time sorting. As they are working to understand the world around them, toddlers love to put things into categories. Sometimes they sort items by color and sometimes by size. The other day, as I watched Lily Paige and Kerby sort their stuffed animals, I thought about how as adults we often separate people into different categories. We categorize people by gender, age, race, and creed. There are seemingly countless ways we have devised to group individuals.

However, when we stand before God, Paul tells of only two ways individuals will be categorized: people who are in Adam, and people who are in Christ.

Those who are in Adam are reckoned guilty of his sin. Moreover, they also receive a corrupted moral and spiritual nature that inclines them to hide from God and His ways, as Adam did after his fall. Those who are in Adam also receive a corrupted physical nature; their bodies decay and eventually die. "In Adam all die," Paul explains. All who are ordinary descendants of Adam are in Adam until by regeneration, faith, and repentance they move from being in Adam to being in Christ.

In Christ by faith alone, we receive forgiveness of sin and our Lord's perfect righteousness, and as such we are accepted by God. We also receive a new heart—our moral nature is being renewed such that we more and more die to sin and live to righteousness. But in Christ we will even receive a renewed physical nature. At the resurrection our bodies will be raised imperishable.

Those who are in Christ will get back what they lost in Adam, and more accurately, what is restored will be better than what was lost. Christ can do this because He is the last Adam, the federal head whom God appointed in His mercy to stand in for us so that we will become the glorified saints God intends us to be.

God, we come before you today grateful that Christ came not merely to restore us to what we were before Adam's fall, but to give us something better. As the last Adam, Christ restores what was lost and guarantees that we will never lose it again. He gives us His perfect righteousness and is now conforming us into His image. We are thankful for all that Christ has brought back to us as the last Adam. Amen.

– Erin Bowling

Tuesday

December 14, 2021

The Lord, Our Righteousness

⁵ The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

- Jeremiah 23:5-6

Jeremiah's book is full of angst and heartbreak as he relays the days leading up to the Babylonian exile of Israel and Judah. But even as the Weeping Prophet pours out the Lord's judgement on the kings and leaders that have "scattered [God's] flock, and have driven them away, and ... have not attended to them," (23:2) he looks to the future with hope. This is not the end of the relationship God began with God's people so many generations before. To use a 21st century term, it's a reboot. When this is over, Jeremiah conveys God's promise that God will personally see to the people and will return them home, led by a descendant of King David himself. As we journey through our Advent season, we prepare ourselves once again to celebrate the coming of Jesus, the Lord Our Righteousness. We think of all the ways Christ has attended to us throughout the year, we pray for wisdom, and we renew our hope to have a hand in the Almighty's work of bringing justice and righteousness to the land.

And now, Almighty God, we thank you for leading us with justice and righteousness. In this Advent season, grant us wisdom to see you in the people around us, to be a reflection of you, and to be your hands and feet and voice in spreading justice and righteousness in the land. In Christ's holy name, amen.

- Ginger Galaini

Wednesday

December 15, 2021

The Good Shepherd

¹¹ *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."*

¹⁴ *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,* ¹⁵ *just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. - John 10:11, 14-15*

¹ **The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. - Psalm 23:1**

We recently watched a documentary series set in Scotland called "This Farming Life." Sheep were a main feature of this heartwarming series about the rugged farming life in Scotland. What struck me was the lengths the farmers would go to care for their sheep. As the winds were howling in the Hebrides, or the rain pelting down in Fife, the farmers did whatever it took to make sure their animals were kept safe. They knew, and were devoted to, each of their animals. Of course, there was always the odd sheep who decided to stray from the pack and go off on its own.

It seems we are often like the sheep, determined to go our own way even if we are destined to, at times, fall into the crevasse. Just as those Scottish farmers, sometimes at their own peril, would have to get out their shepherd's crook and hook their sheep out from very precarious positions, so our good shepherd is always waiting to do the same for us.

Yet how hard it is to trust in the words "I shall not want." In us being given free will, we often neglect to truly trust that our master shepherd knows what is best for us. I think "shall not want" can be interpreted in separate ways. It can be the physical need for the necessities in life, or it can be the spiritual sustenance that our Lord can provide us.

Recently, Pastor Adam preached a sermon on scarcity versus abundance. It resonated with me because when I was growing up resources were tight and often there was a sense of scarcity. Yet as I have matured, I realize abundance is not really to do with how little or how much we have, it is more trusting in God that there will be enough and that our good shepherd will always provide for our needs, just as those Scottish farmers provided so lovingly for each of their sheep.

Dear heavenly father, help us to always trust that you are our good shepherd who willingly laid down your life for us. Even when we stray, help us return to your fold and trust that you are always there to help and guide us through all the seasons of our lives. Amen.

– Elizabeth Glycer

Thursday

December 16, 2021

The Lord, My Strength

The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. - Psalm 28:7

This is such a powerful verse. When we choose to use our Lord for our strength and our shield, He will always come through, but in His time, of course. I was a problem child, but luckily my mother is a woman of strong faith. I gave in to the disease of addiction very early and continued until age 40. When I finally turned my life over to God and began to actually let Him take over, my mother saw that I had finally committed to a life of sobriety. We are just not strong enough to do it on our own.

One day she shared with me that she prayed daily for God to break the chains of addiction that were holding me down. I know that she prays daily, so I estimate that's about 25 years of daily prayer. My mother used the Lord for strength and never gave up. She actually got to see her prayer answered. Not all of us get to see that, but I hear enough testimonies to know without a doubt that the Lord is my strength and my shield. When we share our stories it allows others to see how much our Lord wants us to lean on him.

Dear Lord, we ask that you give us the strength and patience we need while we wait for your answer. Often times we pray for what WE want. What WE want is not always what is good for us. Protect us from ourselves and teach us to pray only for Your will for us. Amen.

– Mike Gundel

Friday

December 17, 2021

Wonderful Counselor

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. - Isaiah 9:6*

³³ *O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! - Romans 11:33*

Living in this Information Age, some may think that we do not need a “Wonderful Counselor.” We have Google to answer any question we could possibly have, and navigation apps to get us places. We can turn to podcasts, online chats, and Facebook for advice. The internet is rife with algorithms to suggest just the right product that will fulfill our needs or wants, or to suggest just the right articles for our interests. Why do we need a wonderful counselor when we have all of this - literally - at our fingertips? With a smart phone, an internet connection, and the right apps for those who want them, the world should be humming along with no problems, right? Looking more closely at this name, Wonderful Counselor, provides a deeper meaning.

In the Bible, the word wonderful means beyond comprehension. Jesus is wonderful in such a way that it is mind-boggling. He’s that good! The title of counselor, in the Bible, points to Jesus as a king who determines and carries out a program of action. Looking at the name Wonderful Counselor through a Biblical lens indicates that, as was prophesied, God has a divine plan that he is carrying out, and each of us is part of it. In modern terms, the word wonderful is defined as inspiring delight, pleasure, and admiration, or extremely good. A counselor is one who provides advice or guidance. Looking through a modern lens, this moniker indicates that Jesus provides extremely good guidance.

Looking through both of these lenses can bring about a multitude of reactions. In Biblical terms, we each are worthy of being part of God’s plan - this big picture that is incomprehensible to us. It is humbling and empowering for me to know that I am part of his story. Also, when something happens that is unsettling in some way, knowing that it is part of God’s plan is comforting for me. My resolution for such conflict is - “It is beyond my understanding. I’m not supposed to know.”

Having the Wonderful Counselor, in modern terms, seems very personal. It is comforting and empowering to know that Jesus - Emmanuel - is with me to provide His perfect discernment. The Bible tells us that Jesus loves us, that we can trust Him, and that He wants us to ask for His guidance through prayer. He is the perfect counselor providing each of us with perfect guidance. He has no ulterior motive; He is not trying to affect our decision-making for personal gain. His counsel is pure.

Thinking of the Wonderful Counselor carrying out His grand divine plan and yet also standing beside each of us to provide His perfect guidance seems somewhat paradoxical. In this one name, we can find comfort, humility, empowerment, and a multitude of other reactions. Each of us needs His pure guidance, and each of us needs to know that we are worthy of being part of His larger plan. No person or app can understand the complexity of our lives in order to provide us with perfect discernment as well as make us feel the depth of belonging that being a part of God’s plan provides.

Thank you for being the Wonderful Counselor that provides me with your perfect guidance, and thank you for making me a part of your wonderful story.
– Amy Bean

Saturday

December 18, 2021

The Gift of God

¹⁶ *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. - John 3:16*

¹⁰ *Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” - John 4:10*

¹⁵ *Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! - 2 Corinthians 9:15*

It's October as I write this. I'll admit we've been thinking for weeks about how the supply chain and shortages of many products will affect us this Christmas. We wonder if we will be able to get that special gift for our family members in time. Gifts, gifts, gifts. We love to give them; we love to receive them.

But, the best gift ever was given to us from God the Father. Jesus Christ is the ultimate gift, the indescribable gift, and he keeps gifting us, over and over again. His love is unearned, unconditional, unfailing, unstoppable. His grace and mercy abound!

John 3:16 is one of the first verses I learned and as a child. It must have confused me, although I probably didn't admit that to anybody at the time! As the years went by, my faith continued to grow, and I became a parent who loved my children unconditionally! God loved the world so much that he gave us Jesus, his only Son! God IS love. He gave us his son to walk with us, to teach and instruct us, and ultimately die for our sins that we may be forgiven. He was resurrected which showed us that he is who he says he is, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and he sits at the right hand of God the Father.

In Romans 10:9 Paul offers these words of assurance: “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Eternal life! As we journey toward the celebration of Jesus' birth, let us be eternally grateful for the Father who has given us Jesus Christ, the ultimate gift!

Father, thank you for loving us so much that you gave us your one and only son, Jesus. Help us to live and love as he taught us. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, we pray. Amen.

– Betsy Gilbert

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 19, 2021

The Word of God

¹³ *He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. - Revelation 19:13*

¹ *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. - John 1:1*

*“Nails, spear, shall pierce Him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.”*

[What Child Is This?]

Our picture of Jesus at Christmastime is a far cry from the image rendered in today's *Revelation 19* text - no longer cooing in His cradle, no longer quiet as a lamb. John's vision propels us to a breathtaking future event. The Word of God, Jesus, sits upon a white horse, His eyes like a flame of fire, a jeweled crown upon His head, clad in a robe dipped in blood. From His mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations.

John Chapter 1 tells us more about who this Jesus, The Word of God, is:

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through Him all things were made ... ⁴In Him was life, and that life was the Light of all mankind. ⁵The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶There was a man sent from God whose name was John... ⁸He himself was not the Light; he came only as a witness to the Light. ⁹The true Light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him... ¹²Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God... ¹⁴The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, Who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We are in the midst of a spiritual battle between darkness and Light, and perilous days shall come – as Paul warns in *2 Timothy Chapter 3*:

¹³“...evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” - Hebrews 4:16

Father, We seek Your wisdom and guidance during these tumultuous times. Let us not be fooled by the liar and deceiver who wants to draw us into his false light. Give us Your strength to turn our eyes away from every outlet of distraction and keep us in Your Word. We pray for the lost who have not yet found You and for our leaders that You will grant them Your grace, courage, and wisdom. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

- Autumn & Karen Elliott

Monday December 20, 2021

Deliverer

**He said: The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation,
my stronghold and my refuge,
my savior; you save me from violence. - 2 Samuel 22:2-3**

When I think of deliverer, my first thought is a delivery driver- especially as we are in the holiday season. Whether it be from Amazon, FedEx, or UPS, we rely on these goods and services to get what we need when we need it. However, due to shortages or long distances, our deliveries may not always make it in time.

With the Lord as our Deliverer, He is always going to supply what we need when we need it. It may not always be what we want, but it is in God's time. In my house, I have a sign above my fireplace that says, "God's in Charge." My grandfather said that phrase a lot over the years and although he passed away, I still carry that message with me. As our scripture read for today, "God is our rock, our fortress, our deliverer." That wherever we are along our walk, God will deliver us and take care of us.

I'm reminded of a delivery from one of my uncles. I returned home after a very long school day last spring, and when I got home I saw a small package on the mat. I took it in and opened it to find that my uncle sent me a handwritten card, bacon band-aids, and a mug. That unexpected delivery, that gift, changed the trajectory of the rest of my day. By God sending his son Jesus to Earth, He delivered a gift and love that has no bounds.

When reflecting on these verses, I go back to Psalm 23. How the Lord is with us "in green pastures," "still waters" the peaceful times of our life, and also the challenging times of "darkest valleys" and even sometimes "in the presence of our enemies." The Lord knows what we need and when we need it. Just like a shepherd takes care of their flock, our Shepherd knows our hearts and souls and minds and will be there for us, always.

During this season of Advent, how can we show our love for our Deliverer? Perhaps it is noticing the gifts of God (large and small) around us. Maybe, it is delivering the good news to someone through a card, email, or conversation. It could be sharing your testimony with a Bible study (small group) or reflecting on God's promises to deliver and realizing that through Him, we want for nothing else.

Dear Lord, Thank you for sending your Deliverer, Jesus, to Earth to be born and deliver us from sin. Amen.

- Justin Streletz

Tuesday

December 21, 2021

Redeemer

²⁵ For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;

²⁶ and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God . . . - Job 19:25-26

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. - Galatians 4:4-5

As I began this meditation, I Googled “What does it mean to be redeemed by God?”. Here is what I found:

“In Christian theology, redemption (Greek: apolutrosis) refers **to the deliverance of Christians from sin**. It assumes an important position in salvation because the transgressions in question form part of a great system against which human power is helpless.”

Our deliverance from sin! We are human and we sin. And we humans are helpless! And our loving God delivers us from that sin. That is not only forgiveness, but deliverance!

When I was a very young teenager, I spent a few weeks with my aunt and uncle in a “strange to me” town where I met another teenage boy who lived in that town. We sort of took a liking to each other and had some very interesting conversations. I grew up in the Methodist church and he was a Roman Catholic. (Please understand, this is NOT a bashing of any other religion! I am simply sharing my story.) One of our many conversations turned to religion and he basically told me being Catholic meant he could do whatever he wanted, and then all he had to do was go to confession and do whatever the priest told him to do and it was forgiven. Hmmm. Even at 13, that seemed a bit uncomfortable. I don’t think that is repentance. I believe what is in our hearts is extremely important. What I am trying to share with this story is that we must be repentant in our hearts to receive redemption. There is no check list to receive God’s redemption.

So, let’s get back to the word REDEEM. We redeem coupons, we redeem rewards on our credit cards. . . you get the idea. Redemption in Jesus Christ gets us ETERNAL LIFE IN HEAVEN! And God does the redeeming! We MUST confess our sins and do our very best to repent (turn away from our sinful ways). But God!!!

Thank you for sending Jesus , who gives us our salvation. Jesus gave us more knowledge and tools and it is up to us individually to follow His ways. Thank you, God, thank you, Jesus, and thank you, Holy Spirit. Thank you for your redemption and thank you for guiding us each and every day. Amen. - Marti Hall

Wednesday

December 22, 2021

Intercessor

²⁵ **Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. - Hebrews 7:25**

We are all God's children. Sometimes I like to imagine our Parent God treating us the way we parent our own children. Parent God gives us instructions, watches proudly when we follow, and patiently intercedes as needed. I signed up my own children to write an Advent Devotional on "Jesus, the Mediator," expecting that I would be able to write my "Jesus the Intercessor" Devotional about how I had to intervene to mediate their writing process. My prediction was incorrect. Parent Intercession wasn't necessary. The kids worked together, problem-solved, and they finished with no problems.

With my original plans foiled, I sat down to write my own devotional: "Jesus, the Intercessor." And then it happened. Parent God showed up to make sure I remembered that I don't get to plan when to intervene as a parent. It was as if my Parent God was laughing and saying, "Expect the unexpected, Becca! Haven't you learned by now?" The children had been playing together outside. Suddenly, there was a commotion as the front door swung open:

Clara: MOM! OSCAR FELL DOWN! HE'S HURT!!!

Oscar: I FELL DOWN *SOB* BECAUSE *SOB* SHE PUSHED ME DOWN!!! *SOB*

But God, this isn't how I wanted my day to go. I was just about to sit down to write my Devotional. You need me to intervene NOW? *deep breath* And so I did. Patiently. With love. Just as my Parent God would have.

Sometimes parenting experiences make me wonder what we were doing when Parent God decided to send Jesus to be with us on earth. Did God watch us for a while, hoping we would all make good choices? Did Parent God have an exasperated moment, thinking, "DON'T MAKE ME COME DOWN THERE!" before taking a deep breath and deciding to parent us with grace. His only son Jesus, the Intercessor.

Dear Parent God, thank you for your mercy, grace, patience, and love. Thank you for sending your child, Jesus the Intercessor, exactly when we need him (and even sometimes when we think we don't). Please continue equipping us to expect the unexpected so that we can be the hands and feet of Jesus, in whose name we pray, Amen.

– Becca Anderson

Thursday

December 23, 2021

Our Blessed Hope

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope...
- 1 Timothy 1:1

¹² . . . live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ⁴ He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.
- Titus 2:12b-14

As we get closer and closer to Christmas , the true meaning of the season becomes readily apparent! Our blessed hope will soon be here! The glorious appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Titus 2:13-14 says, "While we wait for the blessed hope-the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Who gave himself to us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." What a gift to receive.

We are redeemed in Christ; we know that we will be with him in Paradise. When this world gets us down, as it often does, we have the blessed hope of Jesus Christ. As we trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Redeemer, we know that we always have hope in Jesus Christ.

Dear Lord, Prepare our hearts and home for the arrival of our blessed hope. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

- Curt Hoagland

Christmas Eve

Friday

December 24, 2021

Firstborn Over All Creation

¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;* ¹⁶ *for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.* - Colossians 1:15-16

I am amazed every day how faith touches my life. How God gives me strength to do my work, handle stress and overcome hurdles in life. He directs my life in coordinated fashion with whatever comes my way with ease. Also, he has blessed me with such a wonderful child, whom I'm thankful for. I'm glad for the opportunity to have her in my life.

Dear Lord, thank you for blessings of this wonderful life, filled with a loving child and family. I know you are an invisible God, who sees all things and hears all things, and I ask for continuous guidance and protection. I thank you and praise you for coming into this world to save us from our sins and making us one with God. In Jesus' name, I do pray with thanksgiving, Amen.

– Edna Addo

Christmas Day

Saturday

December 25, 2021

Messiah

¹ In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" ¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

– Luke 2:1-20

Today is the day when many families exchange Christmas gifts. Having four children in our house, this is always a wild and fun time. When given a gift, one of my children likes to take their time, carefully unwrapping the gift (to the point where you could reuse the wrapping paper the next year). Another child of ours likes to rip into the paper and it flies into the air when it's their turn. The toddlers always want to help everyone else open their gifts, because unwrapping a present is fun and exciting.

This day, we also celebrate the best gift ever given to anyone, and that is the gift of the **Messiah**, given to us from God, for ALL of humanity. Let us unwrap this gift together on this Christmas day.

Messiah comes from the Hebrew word, *Mashiach*, meaning "the anointed one," or "the chosen one." In Old Testament times, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed by oil when they were set apart for these positions of responsibility. The anointing was a sign that God had chosen them and consecrated them for the work God had given them to do.

Christos (Christ) is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term, **Messiah** (John 1:41). When Andrew, a disciple of John the Baptist, became acquainted with Jesus, the first thing he did was to find his brother, Simon Peter, and tell him about his exciting discovery. He told his brother, “We have found the **Messiah** (which is translated, the Christ). And he [Andrew] brought him [Peter] to Jesus” (John 1:41).

When Jesus came to earth to live with us and be our Savior, the Jewish people were looking for God to send a **Messiah**—an anointed, chosen one. They had read the Old Testament prophecies (Isaiah 42:1; 61:1-3; Psalm 16, 22, Daniel 9, etc.) that promised God would send a deliverer to save God’s people. Unfortunately, they misunderstood what this **Messiah** would do.

They read the prophecies of how the **Messiah** would overcome Israel’s enemies—and they understood this to mean that he would deliver them from their Roman oppressors. They expected the **Messiah** to set up a kingdom on earth—a kingdom in which they would be the rulers, not the ruled.

They overlooked the **Messiah**’s spiritual role as a deliverer from sin, darkness, evil, and death itself. They didn’t understand that Jesus’ kingdom was spiritual, not political.

The Gospels repeatedly declare that Jesus is the **Messiah**—the one chosen by God and anointed by God to save God’s people from their sins (Matthew 16:16; Luke 4:17-21; John 1:40-49; 4:25, 26). After Jesus’ resurrection, the apostle Peter reminded those listening to him “how God **anointed** Jesus of Nazareth with the **Holy Spirit** and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we,” Peter said, “are witnesses of all things which he did” (Acts 10:38, 39).

Jesus himself claimed to be the promised **Messiah**. When he talked with a woman at a well in Samaria, she said, “I know that **Messiah** is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will tell us all things.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am he’” (John 4:25, 26).

Today, Jesus is still the **Messiah**—God’s chosen, anointed one who came to deliver us from sin, brokenness, and death. As the **Messiah**, Jesus offers you forgiveness for your sins. Jesus promises you salvation and a place in his coming kingdom and reign. “Come to Me,” He urges, “. . . and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28, 29).

What an amazing gift! No matter how you unwrap it, know that Christ is the anointed one, who was set apart to save us from darkness, evil, and death. Treasure that in your heart this Christmas Day, and go and tell others this good news!

Dear Lord, thank you for sending Jesus Christ, our Messiah, the anointed one, to save us from sin, darkness, and death. Help us to recognize the kingdom and reign that Jesus is establishing on Earth—one of hope, peace, love, joy, righteousness, and justice. As we recognize Christ; help us to work each and every day to make Earth a little bit more like heaven. Set us apart for this important kingdom work. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

- Rev. Adam C. Bowling

CHRISTMAS EVENTS AND SERVICES

Please join us as we celebrate Christmas.

November 28: 1st Sunday of Advent

8:30 AM Traditional, 11AM Contemporary

December 5: 2nd Sunday of Advent

8:30 AM, Traditional, 11AM Contemporary

December 12: 3rd Sunday of Advent

8:30 AM, Traditional, 11AM Contemporary

December 19: 4th Sunday of Advent

Christmas Cantata, 10 AM one service

December 24: Christmas Eve Services

4:00 PM Christmas Eve Family Service

7:00 PM Special Christmas Music

7:30 PM Christmas Eve Candlelight

Communion Service

December 26: 1st Sunday of Christmas

Carol Sing, 10 AM one service

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Advent Devotional
Names of Jesus



Artwork by Maddy LeVasseur

Merry Christmas!