

Devotions – December 21-27, 2014
By Bishop Thomas Skrenes

Sunday, December 21

COMFORT

*“Comfort, comfort now my people; Tell of peace!” So says our God.
Comfort those who sit in darkness mourning under sorrow’s load.
To God’s people now proclaim that God’s pardon waits for them!
Tell them that their war is over; God will reign in peace forever.”*
- ELW #256

The best news of all is summed up in these three phrases, “Everybody is safe; the war is over and Christ is Risen.” That is pure comfort! The message of these last days of Advent is the same. Jesus reaches out to his people (that is us) and surrounds us with his comfort. You cannot manufacture this comfort. It comes from the God who was announced by the prophets, born in to a human family and lived amongst us. Comfort is a gift—an Advent gift that takes root in Christmas and lives in Easter!

When I was a boy, I would regularly fall asleep in my parent’s automobile as we drove home from many a trip. And if by magic, when I awoke, I was in my own bed. I do not remember being carried into my room but I was carefully brought to my own bed by my loving parents. I was safe and at peace.

In the midst of all that ails us as individuals and as a church may you find comfort today in the promise of the One who carries you and who is coming soon. Come Lord Jesus!

“Stir up thy power, O Lord, and with thy great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let thy bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honor and glory, world without end. Amen.”
- Episcopal Prayer Book - p. 160.



Monday, December 22

RENEW

*“Each winter as the year grows older, we each grow older, too.
The chill sets in a little colder; the verities we knew seem shaken and untrue.
O child of ecstasy and sorrows, O Prince of peace and pain,
brighten today’s world by tomorrow’s, renew our lives again;
Lord Jesus come and reign!”*
- ELW #252

The back yard of our house is a mess this time of year. An early snow fall without notice in mid-November caught us before we could put all the furniture away for winter. Now a month later, ice and rain have made the backyard seem dead. Yet...

We know that spring will come. It may take six months, Easter might come and go first, the world may be very different when it shows up---but spring will appear. And with spring will come green grass, song birds and flowers everywhere. God is in the renewal business and we can count on spring! Yes—Spring will come even in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

The promise of Advent is this. God is in charge. God makes promises and God delivers. As we get older, we must remind ourselves that “God will make all things new!” God will breathe new life into this old body, this old world and renewal will happen. Count on it!

“We beseech thee, Almighty God, to purify our consciences by thy daily visitation, that when thy Son our Lord cometh he may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.”
- Episcopal Prayer Book - p. 160.



Tuesday, December 23

PRAY

*“The King shall come when morning dawns and light triumphant breaks,
when beauty gilds the eastern hills and life to joy awakes.
The King shall come when morning dawns and light and beauty brings.
Hail, Christ the Lord! Your people pray: come quickly, King of kings.”*
- ELW # 260

Prayer is hard work. Prayer is easy to avoid. Life, after all, is so busy! We have spouses and children and grandchildren, sisters and cousins and then there is work and all the “stuff” we have to accomplish in any day. Life happens—and prayer is so often left for “later.” Prayer is left for when we have time!

So how is it going with your prayer life? What is happening in your relationship to the One who made you? In Advent we are talking about babies—but the promise of Advent is more than the Christ child. It is the coming of Christ as king! The promise of this season is that one day Jesus will come as triumphant Lord and the whole world will be immersed in His glory. So are you doing your part? Are you in prayer?

Your part is what? It is to pray. Are you praying that the Kingdom may come to you? Are you in prayer that the Christ will erupt into our world bringing hope and justice and peace?

Pray today that these last days of Advent might be a time of prayer for all of God’s people. Pray that the Holy Spirit will fill you with hope and joy and an expectation that he comes again!

“Stir up your power, Lord Jesus Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that hinders our faith, that eagerly we may receive your promises, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.”

- ELW p. 19



Wednesday, December 24

COME

*“O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.”*

-ELW 257

For the tenth time you look out the window, hoping and expecting to see that car pull up. The clock seems to run so slow. They are only minutes away now and you cannot stop yourself from peering out that window again and again. What will they be wearing? What will I say first to them? How will it be when they are all under this roof again? For years they have lived away. Indeed it seemed like almost a dream when the kids were all home. Now living away, with their

own children, so quickly growing up—but this is the Christmas Eve when they will be with us again. O come... O come... O come... home.

Then you see them. They are in the car in the driveway. The little ones jump out. The front seat empties and the trunk yields bags and gifts and packages. You rush to the door. Smiles and giggles and hugs all around. All the years between visits melt away and all are home again. There are tears and more smiles. And there is a sense of joy and homecoming.

We wait—but we are the ones who are welcomed by God home. Blessed Christmas Eve! Blessed Homecoming to you and to all you love.

*“Almighty God, you made this holy night shine with the brightness of the true Light.
Grant that here on earth we may walk in the light of Jesus’ presence
and in the last day wake to the brightness of his glory;
through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.”*
- ELW p.20.



Thursday, December 25

JOY

*“Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her king;
Let ev’ry heart prepare him room and heav’n and nature sing,
and heav’n and nature sing,
And heav’n and heav’n and nature sing.”*
- ELW #267

When you are seven, “joy” is a big package under the Christmas tree.
When you are seventeen, “joy” is the approval of all of your friends.
When you are thirty-seven, “joy” is the smiles of your spouse and children.
When you are sixty-seven, “joy” is receiving that monthly pension check and time for travel and visits to extended family and friends.

The definition of “Joy” changes over time for all of us.

Earlier in the month when I was in Tanzania I had a wonderful conversation with two young women about local Christmas customs. Like us, the Tanzanian Christians gather for worship on

Christmas Eve. And like us they surround themselves with family and friends. And like us during the Christmas season, they eat too much! But unlike us, they do not exchange gifts. Indeed the African girls I talked to did not see the need to bring gifts into Christmas. Christmas and its message was enough “joy.”

A year from now you will probably not remember the gifts you received this year on Christmas. A year from now you might not even remember much about the parties you attended in the days before Christmas.

But the “joy” will still be there! The “joy” is the fantastic, fabulous and powerful news that Jesus is born! He has come into our lives and the world is now different. Thanks be to God for this “joy.”

“All-powerful and unseen God, the coming of your light into our world has brightened weary hearts with peace. Call us out of darkness and empower us to proclaim the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

- ELW p.20



Friday, December 26

PRAISE

*“Your little ones, dear Lord, are we, and come your lowly bed to see;
enlighten ev’ry soul and mind, that we the way to you may find.
Until at least we too proclaim, with all your saints, your glorious name;
in paradise our songs renew, and praise you as the angels do.”*

- ELW #286

How do we praise God? How is it that we Christian people living in the end of the year 2014 find time and energy to praise God? Some of us will praise God with our voices and words. Some Christian people will praise God by serving in the Church community as teachers, as acolytes, as musicians, as ushers, as council presidents and some will serve God by pushing a broom in the church hallway or typing out a church bulletin on the computer. How is it that we praise God? Some will praise God by being a good Christian lawyer or Christian iron worker or Christian farmer or Christian secretary.

I want my praise of God to be clear. God creates. God builds. And God brings life and order out of nothingness and chaos. As we “wind down” from Christmas Day, as we think of putting the decorations away let us make one thing absolutely clear. God in Christ Jesus has made all the

difference in the world. God in Christ Jesus has provided hope, joy and peace! It is God alone who we praise.

I want you to praise God today! Say it, "Praise the Lord." Help another person. Provide a gift to a charity that makes a difference in your community or in your world. Build a bridge between people. Find a good thing to do and do it! And thus you will praise the One who gives you life!

It is a great day to praise the Lord!

*"Almighty God, who has poured upon us the new light of thine incarnate Word:
Grant that the same light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."*
-Episcopal Prayer Book - p. 161.



Saturday, December 27

GIVE

*"In the bleak mid-winter, frosty wind made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak mid-winter, long ago.
What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man I would do my part; yet what can I give him—give my heart."*
- ELW #294

The year races to its conclusion. In this Christmas season we are called and challenged to be a church of generosity. I want to be a generous person. Some years ago at a retreat, I was asked to create a phrase that we would like to have written on our tombstone. It had to be a summary of our life or a mission statement of what our existence has been about. After a long time of contemplation and even prayer on this, I suggested for myself this phrase, "He was generous." I knew then as I know today that generosity is about much more than money. Yes, I want to be a giving person with my dollars but I also am called by God to be a generous person with my talents, my time, and even my emotions. I want to put the best construction on my neighbor's actions, to speak well of people especially when I disagree with them and I want never to be ungenerous with my feelings. Such is a generous life to which I aspire.

Over and over again in any year I ask myself what am I giving to those who are in need? I ask, what portion of my income (10%, 15%, 20%) of my salary do I give to the Lord's work through His Church? We are all busy, so I challenge myself to volunteer my time to community groups and to those organizations that do God's work in this world.

God is at work in your generosity. You witness to the Lord of the universe when you give of your life, your heart, your Spirit. A wise person will not count what she or he gives. Instead a wise person will always look for places to give, times to volunteer, opportunities for service. And in so doing be a holy vessel for God's work. It is a great day to be generous.

“O Lord God, you know that we cannot place our trust in our own powers. As you protected the infant Jesus, so defend us and all the needy from harm and adversity, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.”

- ELW p.20.

