

**Devotions – December 28, 2014 – January 3, 2015**

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**Sunday, December 28**

Text: Matthew 2:18

**“A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”**

Just a few days ago we heard the Christmas story...Mary and Joseph, like any parents would be, are in awe of the miracle of birth. The angels are singing and the shepherds are excited because they have been chosen to experience the glory of the newborn king. There's excitement in the air because people have been waiting for the Messiah.

We hear the Christmas story every year but we hear about the slaughter of the holy innocents every three years and the story is only found in Matthew. It is about a certain character named King Herod. It's a story that doesn't fit in with "Joy to the World" or with bright lights and poinsettias. To Herod, killing a few children was no big deal if it would help him remain in power. Is it any wonder that we don't want this to be a part of the Christmas pageant?

It would be hard for us to imagine such cruelty if we had not heard such stories in our news today. It's not fair that the young and innocent should suffer...it's not fair that good people have to hurt.

When we find ourselves in the valleys of deep questioning about fairness, suffering and hurt we need to ask God, "What would you have me do?" We have to remember that God is in charge. He didn't leave Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem to go it alone...he didn't leave them in Egypt to tough it out...he always gave them directions and Joseph trusted God and obeyed and because of his faith he knew that the safest place to be is where God leads you. We celebrate Christmas because Jesus has come. It is God's way of letting us know he cares about us and takes care of us.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, thank you for your promise to take care of you children when we are unsure of what is right and unsure of your will for us. Amen.



**Monday, December 29, 2014**

Text: Mark 11:25

**“Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”**

Have you ever received a gift that didn't correspond with the picture on the box? When you removed the paper there was a picture of wrenches on the cover and you wondered, “Why did they give me wrenches?” And when you open up the box you find a beautiful soft cashmere sweater.

Just look at the wrapping God chose for His gift: a teenage girl, engaged to a carpenter from the backwoods, and a baby lying in a manger filled with hay and surrounded by animals. Wouldn't you think that a gift this special would be wrapped with a wealthy, experienced family? Maybe an oak crib and a polar fleece blanket with satin edging. The wise men didn't recognize the gift but we who have heard the story many times through the years recognize the gift for what it is, the wonderful gift of a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes that would ultimately be a special gift of forgiveness.

Today we can experience the Christmas story with a fresh new mind, to celebrate the true gift of Christmas. It comes wrapped in a familiar package but it's a new gift every day. Come to the celebration and open your gift...the gift of forgiveness...to extend forgiveness...and to receive forgiveness.

Let us pray: Forgiving God, we are not what we should be, but we are grateful for the gift of your mercy time after time. Amen.



**Tuesday, December 30**

Text: Luke 2:30-31

**“...for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples...”**

Simeon spent a lifetime of dreaming and waiting for the promised Messiah. I wonder what he thought this figure would look like? He must have had the same thoughts as everyone else...that this Messiah would be a mighty ruler that would reform the nation. A leader who would motivate the people into action, but it isn't a king in all his splendor who comes to fulfill Simeon's dream. It's a little child, an infant. Several years ago we had a bulletin cover depicting a smiling, joyful Simeon holding the infant Jesus in his arms in the temple. Simeon holds the salvation that he has waited for.

When we come together in worship we hold in our hands all of God's promises to us: forgiveness, life and salvation. We know that we still will not be perfect, but we know that God is near when we break bread, the body of Christ that has been broken for us, and drink from the cup, the blood of Christ that has been shed for us. Living signs of God's presence among us.

Let us pray: Lord, may we, like Simeon, see the joy that is before us. Amen.



**Wednesday, December 31**

Text: Galatians 6:9-10

**“So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.”**

Have you ever watched someone play with a child, tickle them and roll on the floor, throw them in the air and catch them, while the child is laughing and having the time of their life...and then say, “I’m done” – and the child is left looking for more? The birth of Christ confronts us with a decision. It is not enough to look at this cute baby as adorable and charming. It is not enough to think that Jesus is fun to play with on Sunday morning and then say, “I’m done” when he gets too demanding.

How do we respond when Jesus is looking for more? It can be summed up in one word... discipleship. Discipleship isn’t just what we do; being a disciple is who we are. We are sent out into the world to be the eyes and ears of Christ, to be a support system and to show concern and compassion. People sent out through Christ to be the Church.

Let us pray: Lord, help us to remember that the work of Christmas begins with us, to bring hope to the lost and broken-hearted, to feed the hungry both physically and spiritually. Amen.



**Thursday, January 1, 2015**

Text: Luke 2:49

**He said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”**

January 2015...a brand new year is here. January is named after the Roman god, Janus, who is pictured as a man with two faces, one looking backward and the other looking forward. The challenges of the past year may have seemed like mountains in front of us, but we were probably amazed at how quietly God worked in our lives.

It is knowing we are wiser today than we were yesterday. We have learned to accept the gift of grace and the gift of learning. In the days ahead we will be wishing one another a Happy New Year. It is an announcement of new beginnings. Jesus invites us to walk into the New Year with confidence, to strengthen our relationship with Him, to accept doubts and uncertainties as reminders that we need to be in our Father’s house. Through His word we trust that God will give us direction and a purpose for a fulfilling life.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, in our desire to grow in our relationship with you we need to set aside a time and place to meet on a daily basis. Help us to do just that. Amen.



**Friday, January 2, 2015**

Text: Isaiah 43:1b

**“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name and you are mine.”**

And His name shall be called Jesus. It was common practice for the Jewish people to give an infant boy a name on the day he was circumcised. It symbolized admission into the fellowship of God’s chosen people. Mary and Joseph followed the angel’s instruction and Jesus fulfilled the rules and laws of Israel.

We celebrate the name of Jesus and what it means to Christians. As Christians we have been called by name at our baptism to commit ourselves to God. Our name identifies who we are. We sign checks, important papers, greeting cards, and we respond when we hear our name.

Our thumbprints, our bodies, our personalities and maybe a birthmark are different from those of other people, but as Christians we have inherited the name of Christ because we have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We have been adopted into the family of God. We are heirs to God’s kingdom. Our inheritance promises that God will provide the strength we need in adversity.

Let us pray: We give you thank, Lord, for our inheritance, a Christian family sharing the name of Christ. Amen.



**Saturday, January 3, 2015**

Text: Mark 9:35-37

**Jesus sat down and called the twelve disciples to Him. He said, “Whoever wants to be the most important must be the last of all and servant of all.” Then Jesus took a small child in His arms and said, “Whoever accepts a child like this in my name accepts me. And whoever accepts me accepts the One who sent me.”**

Children were loved in Jesus’ day, but they weren’t considered to be the greatest members of society. They had no rights, no power. They were expected to be servants. Children, women, tax collectors, and sinners were considered second class citizens.

Who is seen as less important by us or by our community? Who in our families or circle of friends do we feel superior to?

Who are the children today? They are people of a different race, those with AIDS, welfare recipients, those suffering from addiction. They are the homeless, the prisoner, the person who has just been released from the psychiatric ward, the one whose body is twisted with disease. These are the people on the fringes; these are children of God.

Being number one in God's kingdom is not about power or being better than another. Being number one is about putting other people first and ourselves last. Greatness is found in the willingness to accept the weakest children of God including those who are weak spiritually.

Our prayer should be that of St. Francis:

**Make me a channel of your peace, where there is hatred let me bring your love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is darkness light; and where there is sadness, joy.**

**Master, grant that I may never seek so much to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love with all my soul. Make me a channel of your peace for it is in pardoning that I am pardoned; in giving that I receive; and in dying that I am born to eternal life. Amen**

