

..... **Daily Devotions**

Devotions – December 22-28, 2019

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Sunday, December 22, 2019

Waiting

Text: Micah 5:2-4

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Therefore Israel will be abandoned when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the end of the earth.”

“How much longer until it’s Christmas?” When my son was young, he posed this question again and again. Although we used a daily Advent calendar to count down the days until Christmas, he still found the wait unbearable.

We can easily recognize a child’s trouble with waiting, but we might underestimate the challenge involved for all of God’s people. Consider, for example, those who received the message of the prophet Micah, who promised that out of Bethlehem would come “a ruler over Israel” who would “stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord.” The initial fulfillment of this prophecy came when Jesus was born in Bethlehem—after the people had waited. But some of the fulfillment of this prophecy is yet to come. We wait in hope for the return of Jesus when all of God’s people will live securely. “His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.” Then we will rejoice greatly, for our long wait will be over.

Most of us don’t find waiting easy, but we can trust God’s promise that He will always be with us as we wait. When Jesus was born in little Bethlehem, He ushered in life in all its fullness—life without condemnation. We will enjoy His presence with us today while we eagerly wait for His return.

Let us pray: *We wait, Father, and we hope. We wait, Jesus, as we long for peace to break out. We wait, Comforting Spirit, for all the world to experience your love. Amen.*



Monday, December 23, 2019

Everlasting Hope

Text: Psalm 146:5

“Blessed are those whose god is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God.”

The week before Christmas, two months after my mother died, holiday shopping and tree-decorating were at the bottom of my priority list. I resisted my husband's attempts to comfort me as I grieved the loss of our family's faithful matriarch. I sulked as our son stretched out and stapled Christmas lights on the inside of our home. Without a word, he plugged them in just before he and his dad left for work.

As the colorful lights blinked, God gently drew me out of my darkness. No matter the circumstances, my hope remained secure as the light of God's truth, which always revealed His unchanging character. I knew this to be true.

Psalm 146 spoke of what God reminded me on that difficult morning. My endless hope is in the Lord, my helper. "The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down." He "watches over us, "sustains," and will always be King.

Sometimes, when our Christmas rolls around, our days will overflow with joyful moments. Sometimes, we will face loss, experience hurt, or feel so alone. But, at all times, God has promised to be our light in the darkness, offering us tangible help and everlasting love.

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, thank you for inviting us to know and to rely on your unchanging character as the Source of our eternal hope. Amen.*



Tuesday, December 24, 2019

Silent Night of the Soul

Text: II Corinthians 5:17

"If anyone is in Christ, creation has come: the old has gone; the new is here."

Long before Joseph Mohr and Franz Gruber created the much-loved Christmas carol "Silent Night," Angelus Silesius had written:

*"Lo! in the silent night a child of God is born,
And all is brought again that ere was lost or lorn.
Could but thy soul, o man, become a silent night
God would be born in thee, and all things be set right."*

Silesius, a Polish monk, published this poem in 1657 in the *Cherubic Pilgrim*. During a Christmas concert at Concordia University, the choir sang a memorably beautiful rendition entitled "Could but Thy Soul Become a Silent Night." It reminded me of the two-fold mystery of Christmas: God became one of us so that we might be with Him. Jesus suffered everything that was wrong so we could be made right again. That's why the Apostle Paul could write, "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone; the new is here. All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself in Christ."

Whether our Christmas is filled with family and friends or empty of all we long for, we know that Jesus came to be born in us.

“Ah, would thy heart but be a manger for the birth, God would once more become a child on earth” (David Maclaslane).

Let us pray: *Lord Jesus, thank you for being born into this dark world so that we might be born again into your life and your light. Amen.*



Wednesday, December 25, 2019

God With Us!

Text: Matthew 1:23

“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call Him “Immanuel.”

“Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ within me;
Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ at my right, Christ at my left...”

The words of this hymn, written by the fifth-century Celtic Christian, St. Patrick, echo in my mind whenever I read Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth. They feel like a warm embrace, reminding me that I’m never alone.

Matthew’s account tells us that God, dwelling with His people, is at the very heart of Christmas. Remember the quote from Isaiah prophesying of a child who would be called “Immanuel,” meaning “God with us”? Matthew points to that very prophecy: Jesus, the one born by the power of His spirit to be God with us. That truth is so central that Matthew begins and ends his gospel with it, concluding with Jesus’ words to His disciples: “And surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age.”

St. Patrick’s words remind me that Christ is with believers always, with the Spirit living within. When I’m nervous or afraid, I can hold fast to His promise that I will never be alone. When I can’t get to sleep, I can ask Him to give me peace. When I’m celebrating and filled with joy, I can thank Him for His gracious work in my life. Jesus, Immanuel – God with us!

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son to be God with us. May we experience your presence this day. Amen!*



Thursday, December 26, 2019

Transcending Traditions

Text: Luke 2:10, 11

“I bring you good news that will give you great joy. . . a Savior has been born to you!”

As you savor a candy cane this Christmastide, you might say “Danke schoen” to the Germans, for that confectionary treat was first created in Cologne. As you admire your poinsettia, say “Gracias” to Mexico, where the plant originated.

But as we enjoy our traditions and festivities of the Christmas season – customs that have been collected from around the world—let us save our sincere, heartfelt “Thank You” for our gracious and loving God. From Him came the reason for our Christmas celebration: the Baby born in that Judean manger more than 2000 years ago. An angel announced the arrival of this gift to all mankind by saying, “I bring you good news that will cause great joy. . . a Savior has been born to you!”

This Christmas, even in the light of the sparkling tree and surrounded by newly opened presents, the true excitement/great joy comes when we turn our attention to the baby named Jesus, who came to “save His people from their sins.” His birth transcends traditions; it is our central focus as we sing praises to God for this indescribable Christmas gift.

Let us pray: *Lord, we thank You for coming to us on that first Christmas. Help us to keep you first in our hearts. Amen.*



Friday, December 27, 2019

Everyday Moments

Text: Proverbs 15:13

“A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.”

I piled groceries in my car and carefully exited my parking spot. Suddenly a man darted across the pavement just in front of me, apparently oblivious of my approach. I slammed on my brakes, just barely missing him. Startled, he looked up and met my gaze. In that moment, I knew I had a choice: respond with rolled-eye frustration or offer smiling forgiveness..... I smiled.

Relief flickered across his face, raising his lips in gratefulness.

Proverbs 15:13 says, “A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.” Is the writer directing us to cheery grins in the face of every interruption, disappointment, and inconvenience life brings? Certainly not! There are times for genuine mourning, despair, and even anger at injustice. But in our everyday moments, a smile can offer relief, hope, and the grace needed to continue.

Perhaps the point of this proverb is that a smile naturally results from the conditions of our inner being. A “happy heart” is at peace, content, and yielded to God’s best. With such a heart, happy from the inside out, we can respond to surprising circumstances with a genuine smile, inviting others to embrace the hope and peace they, too, can experience with God.

Let us pray: *Lord, today as I cross paths with others around me, make my heart happy, that I may share with them the hope only you can offer. Amen!*



Saturday, December 28, 2019

Accomplishments

Text: Acts 14:26

“They sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.”

As the year ends, the burden of uncompleted tasks can weigh us down. Responsibilities at home and at work may seem never-ending, and those unfinished this day usually roll over into tomorrow. But there are times in our walk of faith when we should pause and celebrate God’s faithfulness and the tasks we have completed.

After the first journey of Paul and Barnabas, “they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.” While much work remained in sharing the message of Jesus, they took time to give thanks for what had been done. “They gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (v. 27).

What has God done through you during this past year? How has He opened the door of faith for someone you know and love? In ways we can't even imagine, He is at work through us in tasks that may seem insignificant or incomplete.

When we feel painfully aware of our unfinished tasks in serving the Lord, let us not forget to give thanks for the ways He has worked through us. Rejoicing in what God has done by His grace sets the stage for what is to come!

Let us pray: *Lord, as this year 2019 comes to a close, we give thanks for all you have accomplished in and through us. By your grace, lift our eyes to see what is to come! Amen!*

