

Devotions – December 20-26, 2020

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Sunday, December 20, 2020

Text: Matthew 1:20b-23

“...an angel of the Lord appeared...in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus....”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.”

The Advent hymn, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” repeats the words of the ancient “O Antiphons” which Christians have chanted and recited since at least the 8th century. Traditionally one antiphon is used in daily devotions on the seven days prior to Christmas, December 17-23. Every day, a different title for the Messiah is used as the antiphons call upon Emmanuel with pleas to teach, redeem, rescue, unite, and more. Consider using these ancient, sacred writings in your devotions this week by using verses from “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” In doing so, we join Christians across time and around the world in hope and anticipation.

Let us pray the “O Antiphon” for today: “O come, O Key of David, come, and open wide our heavenly home; make safe the way that leads on high, and close the path to misery.” Amen.



Monday, December 21, 2020

Text: Isaiah 60:1

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.”

Today we observe the winter solstice. For you, is this the longest night of the year or the shortest day?

During December in our synod, we are definitely a people who know darkness. Today, we’ll have 8 hours and 34 minutes of daylight and more than 15 hours of night. Perhaps, the darkness gives us a greater appreciation for light.

On these long, dark nights, the stars seem to shine more brightly. Northern Lights are more dazzling. Candles and fireplaces cast a comforting glow. This year, the alignment of Jupiter and Saturn provide a special treat. Tonight, as soon as it gets dark, Jupiter and Saturn will be the brightest objects in the southwestern sky, near the horizon-- so close they seem to be touching each other from some locations.

May we experience wonder and awe for God's creative work as we remember that the light of Jesus also dwells among us. In the midst of our darkness, light is central to our observance of Advent and Celebration of Christmas.

Let us pray: *Creator God, let our light shine before others so they may see our good works and glorify you, our Father in heaven. Amen.*



Tuesday, December 22, 2020

Text: Luke 1:47

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

Each week, our church commemorates saints and renewers of the church, and often includes them in our weekly prayers of intercession. This week we remember Katharina (Katie) von Bora Luther, renewer of the church, who died in 1552. Born to an impoverished nobleman, Katie took vows as a nun. Influenced by the writing of Martin Luther, she left the convent around age 24, along with several other nuns who shared her convictions. She eventually met and married him.

By all accounts, the Luther's had a happy and affectionate marriage. Martin admired her intellect and relied on her to negotiate his publishing deals. Katie ran their busy household, caring for six children and constantly accommodating and entertaining up to 30 visitors at a time. She grew much of what they ate in her garden, raised livestock, cooked, and even brewed her own beer. We can only begin to imagine her contributions to the Reformation and the Lutheran Church.

Let us pray: *Good and gracious God, we give you thanks for the ministry of Katharina von Bora Luther and other women across time who dedicated their lives to serve you and your church. Help us to find inspiration in their examples as we seek to follow you. Amen.*



Wednesday, December 23, 2020

Text: John 3:16

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.

Growing up in a Lutheran congregation, John 3:16 may be the only Bible verse I committed to memory as a child. How about you?

It's certainly one of the best-known lines in Scripture. Martin Luther called the verse "the gospel in a nutshell."

In one of his sermons, Luther made it very personal when he said: "For God so loved Martin Luther that he gave his one and only Son for Martin Luther so that if Martin Luther believes in him, he shall not perish but have eternal life ... And all of you," Luther continued, "may add your own name in silence." Try it! Insert your name in the verse like Martin recommended.

Let us pray: *Emmanuel, God with us, we celebrate your love for us and the eternal gift of your presence. Fill our hearts and minds with your wisdom, peace, and joy. Amen.*



Thursday, December 24, 2020

Text: Luke 2: 11

Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.

My daughter Molly skipped happily out of worship on a snowy Christmas Eve when she was almost five years old. "Yep, tonight's the night that Jesus was born," she shouted. "And next year ... he'll get borned all over again."

Every year, I enjoy this story ... all over again. I take joy in the memory of Molly's childhood ability to suspend her imagination, to believe that Jesus really is born again every year. The story inspires me to seek newfound expectation, anticipation, and joy every Christmas. Like me, I know that you have memories -- of your own childhood or children you have known -- that bring a special joy to you this season.

Let us pray: *Lord of all, we give you thanks and praise for children, who make all things new. Give us the ability to truly experience joy in the birth of Jesus with grateful hearts. Amen.*



Friday, December 25,2020

Text: African American Spiritual (public domain)

***Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere.
Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born.***

“*Go Tell It on the Mountain*” is one of our favorite Christmas hymns, especially among families. Children love this song. This lively spiritual was the hymn of the day at worship on the Sunday after Christmas in the 1990’s. One by one, children in our midst began to clap. Within minutes, they were dancing. They knew this song. They’d been practicing it in Sunday School. It was the most movement I’d ever seen during an ELCA worship service. Surprised, if stiff, adults looked at the joyful children around them, but did not join the clapping. (I think we’ve loosened up a bit since then.)

As you know, “*Go Tell It on the Mountain*” is an African American spiritual a “type of religious folksong that is most closely associated with the enslavement of African people in the American South,” according to the Library of Congress website. The songs [flourished] in the last few decades of the eighteenth century leading up to the abolishment of legalized slavery in the 1860s. The African American spiritual (also called the Negro Spiritual) constitutes one of the largest and most significant forms of American folksong,” which has made an extraordinarily rich contribution to the songs of faith now sung by Christians worldwide.

Let us pray: *We thank you, Lord, for the music. We celebrate the songs created by your children to tell your story, to share your love, and to praise your name. Amen.*



Saturday, December 26, 2020

Text: Acts 6:5B

They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit.

In the United Kingdom, and other countries, the holiday celebration continues on December 26, called Boxing Day or the Feast of St. Stephen, honoring the first martyr of the Christian Church. The Bible tells some of Stephen's story in Chapters 5-7 of the Acts of the Apostles, where he is referenced as a man full of wisdom, faith and the Holy Spirit. He was among the seven chosen by the apostles to be the first deacons of the church, charged with overseeing the welfare of the poor, the widows, and the orphan. Stephen's servant leadership inspired others as the young Christian church grew.

According to Acts, the young, outspoken deacon performed many miracles and signs among the people and angered the Sanhedrin, the high council in Jerusalem. The council prosecuted him for blasphemy and sentenced him to death by stoning. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." His last words were, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

Let us pray: *We give you thanks, Lord God, for Stephen and others who faithfully served your church. Help us to serve our neighbors and to pray for our enemies with forgiving hearts, in the name of Jesus, our strength and our redeemer. Amen*

