

*To the Praise
of
His Glory*



Devotions for Advent and Christmas
20th Anniversary Edition
2017

Preface

It's hard to believe, almost thirty years later, that Mark Maltby's simple request of Linda Fregeau and Dale McIntire, friends at Tabernacle Church of Norfolk, Norfolk, Virginia, would turn into a twenty year ministry at a small church, in a small town, on the shores of Lake Superior in far northeastern Minnesota, but here we are.

It was October or November 1988 (I don't remember exactly when, now) and Mark asked me one Sunday morning if I would prayerfully ponder a passage in the prophecy of Isaiah about the coming of Messiah and write a few words for a devotional the church was going to publish for the coming Advent season. The book's title was, "O Come, Let Us Adore Him." It was written entirely by members and attenders of Tab.

Fast forward to the fall of 1996. Linda and I, then just friends singing in the choir, are now husband and wife. We no longer live in Norfolk, but have attended seminary in St. Paul, and I am the pastor of First Baptist Church (now Cornerstone Community Church) in Grand Marais, Minnesota. We are looking for an outreach ministry that will engage God's people with their community in a way that will be clear, fun, and fearless. We remembered the Advent devotional and proposed a similar idea to the congregation at First Baptist.

Twenty years later, we are still writing an Advent devotional each year, still engaging members of the congregation in careful consideration of God's word, and still engaging our community with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Each year we choose a theme and gather the list of Scriptures. Each year we ask for volunteers to write, volunteers who bravely say "yes" to their assignments BEFORE they get them. Each year we prayerfully match authors with Scripture, trusting God to lead us to assign each author to that word from God that will enlighten and enliven their souls and inspire them to share His heart with their readers. Each year we watch and listen and pray as they struggle to understand what God has said and what He means to communicate to them, and through them to others, about the reality of His Son and

the grace He offered in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, God come in human flesh.

Each year some come, almost in tears at the intensity of the struggle, sometimes looking for help, and sometimes looking to be released. So far, for twenty years, God has never failed the ones who have submitted themselves to the task! Year after year we hear testimonies of how, in the darkest moment of their struggle, God spoke to this one or that one, clearly and powerfully, about the meaning of His word and the message He would have them deliver.

In twenty years, only one has been an accomplished author. All the rest are simply Christians with a desire to be used of God to share faith, and joy, and peace, and love, and mercy with the rest of us. And they have done so marvelously, if their pastor may for a moment boast in the work of God in and through them.

This year we are taking our theme from the apostle Paul's opening outburst of praise in Ephesians chapter one, where he lays out some of the incredible spiritual blessings God has lavishly bestowed upon His children in and through Jesus Christ. Every blessing is itself a cause to praise God in His glory and a cause for each of us who live by faith in Jesus Christ to live *for the praise of His glory*.

This year, in honor of the twentieth anniversary of this ministry, we are also going to include reprints of past articles from the last twenty years by brothers and sisters who, having lived their lives to the praise of God's glory here, have moved on to their eternal dwelling in the presence of the Glory.

We hope you are inspired by everyday followers of Jesus who strive among us now to live lives to the praise God's glory and by those numbered among that "great cloud of witnesses," who testify in heaven to the glory of His glory.

—Pastor Dale McIntire
Grand Marais, MN
November 2017

Don Anderson, 1996

I remember Don fondly. I wish you could have known him. Short. Kind. White hair. Effervescent. Completely and totally sold on the doctrines of grace and especially the doctrine of eternal security (the biblical principle that asserts that once God has forgiven and redeemed a heart and soul from the grip of sin, that person will never turn away from grace or lose the salvation God has exercised on account of Christ and faith in him.)

Don would sit with his wife, Connie, through most of the service. I have to say "most of the service," because for the first few minutes, from just before the service started to a few minutes after we commenced, Don would stand at the back and welcome each and every person who entered the room. And then he would wait for some moment when he felt free to speak of gratitude to God for some blessing in his life and for "securing my eternal home that can never be taken from me."

Don led a small home Bible study for many years. He loves to speak of Jesus, teach of Jesus, live for Jesus, love for Jesus. The scan on the next page is the first devotional article Don ever wrote. It sounds like him when he was teaching. The prayer at the end sounds like him when he was praying.

As we begin our Advent journey, we welcome you, with Don, to start at the beginning and see what God has done in sending His Son, Jesus, into the world to live, to die, to rise from the dead, that those who put their trust in Him might live forever after *to the praise of His glory*.

December 1, 1996
1st Sunday in Advent

READ: Genesis 3:8-20

THE HEART OF THE COVENANT

A covenant is a contract based on promises. And we all know that a promise is only as good as the one who makes it. That's why we ought to pay attention to the covenants God makes. Each time God makes a covenant it reflects Himself: His holiness, eternality, goodness, faithfulness, love, justice, and righteousness.

God made a covenant with Adam. It could be called the covenant with all mankind for it sets forth the condition which will prevail in the world until the curse of sin is lifted. This covenant reflects God's nature as well.

Justice and righteousness are seen in the curse upon the serpent. Great physical changes within the body of the serpent reflect the spiritual upheaval it has caused. From lofty stance to belly crawl God pictures in the body of the serpent the spiritual depth to which mankind has fallen.

Mercy, omnipotence, and omniscience are evident in the words of verse 15: the offspring of the woman will crush the head of the serpent, at best the serpent will bruise his heel. Known as the "protevangelium" this is the first Messianic promise in the Bible. With these words of covenant God reveals His plan to redeem fallen man, to restore the relationship that has been damaged, and to recreate within mankind the clear image of God in which we were created.

Jesus, "the Reason for the season", is the offspring of the woman. He came to destroy the works of the devil. Yes, when He died on the cross, his "heel was bruised," but when He flung wide the gates of death and forever left the tomb behind, He crushed the head of the serpent once and for all!

Lord Jesus, work in my heart to destroy the efforts of the devil. Amen.

DA

Sunday November 26, 2017

READ: Ephesians 1:12

To His Glory!

According to Ephesians, I am IN Christ, I HOPE in Christ, I am for the PRAISE of His GLORY!

When I was in high school in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, I volunteered at a booth that our church had at the county fair. Our goal was to read through The Four Spiritual Laws with anyone who was interested. Next to our booth was a man who owned a local furniture store. The first night he asked me to come over and talk with him. I quickly learned that he was a professing atheist, and that he mostly just wanted to argue. Night after night he asked me to come over to talk.

One night he told me I was wasting my time talking to him, he still believed there wasn't any life after death, there was no god, and there certainly wasn't a need for him to be saved. I said something like, "If I'm wrong, you've got nothing to lose. But if what I said is true, you have everything to lose." I'll never know in this life if he died with or without being "In Christ." Imagine for a moment... if someday when I've gone to heaven, a man comes up to me and says, "Do you remember me? I was at that county fair in Sioux Falls!"

It makes me think about the shepherds. Imagine glowing angels *telling* them to go look for a Baby! They did: then they left and went to *tell* everybody about what they had seen. Our God-given longing to *tell* the Gospel is part of God using us for His eternal purpose, for His glory. It's not our job to "save" but it's certainly our job to "*tell*". All for God's eternal glory!!!

Mary Freeman

Thank You, precious Savior, for using me to reach out to those You've sovereignly put in my path. Please help me to "tell". Amen.

Monday November 27, 2017

READ: Ephesians 1:3

Worship

We all have lives filled with God's blessings. From God's saving grace for His chosen ones, to His mercy in our darkest times. We are all truly blessed. Our gratitude should overflow in worship to God. Our worship can take many forms. We can praise Him with a joyful song or in silence. We can worship as we study and meditate on God's word or even as we cry out for help. Living according to God's words and commands is also a form of worship.

In seasons of our lives, worship can be difficult. I remember times when our family was serving overseas that loneliness and culture shock would consume me. Alone in my room, I would cry out to God in despair. God would always remind me of the many ways He was providing for me, and He would take my cry for help as a broken hallelujah. To this day I think back at those times as the most cherished times of worship with God.

The desire to worship is present in the DNA of all the redeemed. We don't worship to be cleaned but we worship because He cleaned us. Ephesians 1:3 says "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." Just as the apostle Paul praised God for blessings, let Advent be a time where you look back on all of God's blessings in your life and worship Him for His presence, salvation, and provision.

Micah Avery

Father, You truly are good! I love You and am so thankful for Your many blessings in my life. Please take my worship as my offering to You.

Tuesday November 28, 2017

READ: Hebrews 1:3

The Radiance of the Glory of God!

This reading is an answer to prayer for me - though not the one I was looking for. I was praying for an easy passage. I would first like to praise God for His faithfulness in not letting me miss an opportunity to grow in my faith.

Reading it first, I noticed there is a lot of theology packed into this one verse. My initial thought: "Yes! There is a lot to write about here!" But then despair crept in. I did not feel the least bit educated enough to understand what is in this verse. I felt that the only thing I understood was that "He made the purification of sins." Seems simple enough. I mean, what do we think of when we see the cross? When I think of the cross, I think of the sacrifice that was made for me. I believe many of us think this way. While this is a correct observation, it is not the whole picture. Alas, this was not going to be an easy devotional! We need to ask ourselves just Who was this sacrifice? Who died? Who was Jesus, beyond our sacrifice?

Jesus Christ is the expressed image of God: the radiance of His glory, the exact imprint of His nature, the purifier of sins. He upholds the universe by His Word. Right now He is sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on High. How do we apply this knowledge to our life? When we apply this knowledge to the cross, it becomes so much richer. He became sin for us. Sin is the exact opposite of His nature. Jesus' nature is the radiance of the glory of God! And for His glory, He became the opposite of His glory on the cross.

When we praise Jesus, do not merely praise the sacrifice. He was not just a sacrifice God made for us: God Himself was the sacrifice: God in His life, God in His death, God in His resurrection, God yet to come!

Jack Viren

God, we praise you for the supremacy of Your Son, Jesus Christ, Who is the exact reflection of Your character, in Whom belongs the worship and devotion of all Your creation. Amen.

Wednesday November 29, 2017

READ: Colossians 1:27

Christ in You, the Hope of Glory

God chose the Jews to show the idol worshiping nations, the Gentiles, who He was through their commitment to Him, their conduct, and conversation. They didn't always do that successfully, but they knew that one day the Messiah, Christ, would come as their Deliverer and set up His kingdom forever. What they didn't realize was that God was going to include the Gentiles as well.

Growing up as a shy child with a muscle wasting disease, I was always the last person standing on the field waiting to be chosen for a team. What volleyball captain wants to choose a member who can't raise her arms above her waist? It made sense to me, but the "unchosen" feeling was often hard to deal with.

One place I knew I would be chosen, regardless of physical disabilities, was at home. My parents and siblings "chose" me and I knew I was a valued member of the "team."

I will be eternally grateful that as a teenager a group of college students shared the good news of the Gospel with our family. They showed us who God was and how the innocent Christ died on the cross in our place to pay the debt we owed for our sins. They assured us that if we accepted Christ's sacrifice we would be forgiven and become a part of His family eternally. I did believe and confessed my need of Him as my Savior. I was part of the "team."

Here in Colossians 1:27, the apostle Paul was assuring the believing Gentiles that their faith in Christ was the basis for their "hope of glory." Not hope as wishful thinking, but a certain future fulfillment.

This Christmas season are you a part of God's eternal family, or are you still standing on the field waiting to be chosen? Jesus Christ came and died in your place so that you could become a "team member" too!

Linda McIntire

Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for choosing to die for the sins of the Jews as well as the Gentiles, so that we could become a part of your family and live every day and forever with You.

Thursday November 30, 2017

READ: Isaiah 6:1-3

Still on the Throne

The presidential election of 2016 will long be remembered: accusations, scandals, alleged election tampering and a general feeling by the majority that none of the candidates were viable options for the job. All of this left many feeling hopeless and fearful.

In our scripture passage for today we get a glimpse of a similar situation playing out in Isaiah's day. King Uzziah, who had led the country for over 50 years, had just died. Uzziah had been a great king, ushering in a time of prosperity and military victories for God's chosen people, the Israelites. During the very end of King Uzziah's reign, however, he made some very ungodly choices that led to his downfall and ultimate death. The people of Israel were no doubt feeling uncertain about their future as individuals as well as a nation. Who would lead them? Would their new king be compassionate and wise or a tyrannical ruler? What did their future hold?

In verse 1 of Isaiah chapter 6, God reveals Himself to Isaiah in a vision. In this vision, God is seated on a throne. Do you see the message for Isaiah as well as for us today? Kings, kingdoms, presidents and nations will rise and fall, yet we need not be anxious or give way to fear. God is enthroned in the heavens, unfolding His perfect plan. He has not been caught off guard; He has not abandoned us. Rather, He is enthroned on High just as He has been from the beginning. He is reigning supreme, accomplishing His purposes on earth for His eternal glory.

Leanne Avery

Heavenly Father, thank You that You are ALWAYS on the throne. We choose to rest in Your arms rather than give way to fear.

Friday December 1, 2017

READ: 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

Future in Eternity

Soon after my 13th birthday my dad did something I was unable to understand or excuse him for.

The church we were attending had a godly pastor who was attempting to be God's messenger to revive a dying church. This Sunday evening my dad and mother took us five boys and went to another church in town. They were, I felt, being unfaithful to our church and pastor.

At this other church a visiting evangelist, filled with the Spirit, was used of God to stir my soul so fully I itched to respond to the invitation to be saved. I stubbornly refused to do so "because that was not my church."

I spent the following week dreaming, every night, about a small bridge over a stream of blood filled with family and friends begging me to help them to safety. I was tormented night after night. I ached for the following Sunday.

The next Sunday evening our pastor gave an invitation for salvation in our home church. I got up and practically ran to the front of the church where I accepted the Lord as my Savior.

A few months later two of my brothers and I were baptized. Joy filled my heart as I promised, as much as I was able, to faithfully love and serve the Lord.

Later, three of the five of us were led by the Lord to attend Bethel and serve Baptist General Conference churches as pastors. There we found our lives loaded with pressures and problems but flooded with joy as souls stepped out to be saved.

Now we are looking forward to an eternity of joy with the Lord and with those He has chosen to bring to Himself through us. What a reunion is ahead!

How about you? Are you saved? If you are saved, are you one the Lord can use, even today, to introduce someone else to Jesus?

- Bob Haring

The King of Glory

Lift up your heads...that the King of Glory may come in.

Reflecting on these verses, I look back on my Christian life with discomfort and regret. Through much of my life I have had my head down and nose to the grindstone. I think particularly of my early 30s when I was working 60 hours a week, going to graduate school and studying 15-20 hours, finding time for bowling and golf leagues, spending a few hours a day with my wife and small children, and finally spending a couple of hours at church on Sunday before rushing home to watch sports on TV. Clearly my priorities were more worldly than biblical.

King Davis's exhortation is a wonderful wake-up call that rings loud and clear. This Advent season (and all year long) I will strive to lift my eyes to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of my faith. I will make an intentional effort to let the King of Glory fully into my daily life. Please join me that together we can be lifted up to the praise of His everlasting glory!

John Hill

Holy Spirit, align my priorities with the Father's will. Keep me focused on the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Lift up my head that the King of Glory may come in.

Audrey taught Sunday school. And rode motorcycles. She and her husband, Bob, were members of the Christian Motorcycle Association. They were in their late 70's. They had been pastor and wife in the Baptist General Conferences for more than 40 years. They were retired. They lived in a small apartment on the third floor of a senior apartment building. And every summer they rode around the countryside on their motorcycle, camping in a tent along the way. Did I mention they were in their late 70's?

Most of Audrey's history was written before I knew her (though, if you are interested, Bob has books you can read.) And what we might have learned more from her was lost to Alzheimer's before we lost her to its complications. Interestingly, when I think of Audrey, when I really think of Audrey, my thoughts cruise past visiting her in the nursing home, or trying to support her and Bob in the early days when the stories got often repeated and the confusion was settling in. When I really think of Audrey, my mind pauses only briefly on the most amazing ginger cookies ever baked, or the hand crocheted dolls that adorned their couch and the hands of grandchildren.

When I really think of Audrey, I think of curly gray hair shielding her face and eyes as she prayed for her children, her grandchildren, her family, her church, her Sunday school class, her new pastor and his wife, and for the yet nameless bikers they would encounter in the campgrounds on their summer journeys. She wanted them, every one of them, every one she knew and was yet to know, to know Jesus, and she wanted Him to use her to make the introductions.

As Audrey testified in the following article, she was one who gave herself completely to Jesus in order to live *to the praise of His glory*.

December 9th

READ: Isaiah 9:6

"The Gift"

In 1939 a ten year old girl was asked to bring one of her treasured gifts to church on Christmas Eve to offer as a gift to Jesus. The gifts were placed in the front of the sanctuary. After the service they were gathered together and taken to the homes of very poor children.

The young girl thought for quite a while about the doll she wanted to offer as her gift. She asked Jesus to help her choose which one she would offer as her gift. Soon she was carrying her Shirley Temple doll in her arms. Tears welled up in her eyes. She knew this is what Jesus wanted her to do.

Six years later the little girl, now a teenager, heard again the need to give a gift to Jesus. This time the call was for her heart and life. Again tears welled up as she gave herself to Him. She knew that God had given to her His greatest Gift, and she received Him with joy. I WAS THAT LITTLE GIRL!

— Audrey Haring

Dear Lord, help us to realize the great depths of love that you have for the whole world, which you expressed when you gave you One and Only Son to us. Amen.



Sunday December 3, 2017

READ: Ephesians 3:20-21

To God Be the Glory

When I was ten years old, my dad suffered a heart attack. I wasn't sure if he would even survive, or what shape he would be in afterwards. My mother and I would pray for him every night.

My mother never learned to drive a car, and our living seven miles from town made it difficult to visit him in the local hospital. We had to rely on others to get a ride to town just to see him.

Being ten years old, at that time I was not able to go into his room. All I could do was stand outside the window and wave at him with a smile.

They kept him in the hospital about two weeks. We owned a small hobby farm, so Mom and I had to be there to take care of the animals: chickens, a dog, cats, and even a pony. It was April, so we also had snow on the ground. That meant shoveling, too.

God's glory gave us the strength at that time to get through it all. And in and through His glory, God helped my dad recover. He lived a full life even after that heart attack. He got to see me finish school and graduate. He was able to walk me down the aisle at my wedding, and to see two grandchildren born. It was truly my glory to God to see all this come about!

Tracy Scully

Dear Lord, all glory goes to You, Father. You've given me strength and wisdom to be Your faithful servant over the years. I pray that I may continue to experience Your blessings through my life and be pleasing to You, O Father. Amen.

Monday December 4, 2017

READ: Genesis 1:1

In the Beginning God...

In our daily lives, we often focus on creations. However, when we focus on things, this takes away from the real focus. The Creator - God - should be at that center of all. All honor and glory belongs to our God the Creator, our Lord and Savior. Simple as that.

We can become hung-up on material things. While reading the story of Genesis, we tend to forget that though the earth and creation are made for our stewardship, our real attention should not fade from God: the Creator of all things.

A number of years ago, as an EMT, I was called to a horrific vehicle crash. A young person was pinned inside a badly damaged car. We had a massive turnout of firefighters, EMTs, law enforcement and others, all trying to access the badly injured person. We had a first-generation jaws of life and many bending and cutting tools, but the jaw spreader broke, making it useless. But we had a battery-operated saws-all cutting tool. Though it was slow to use, it was the only effective tool to gain the needed space to remove the injured person. We all wanted to do it faster, better! But in the end, that basic tool was the key.

This brings me back to Genesis 1:1. God is the focus. We must not get lost in other things. At that accident, we had to return our focus to the one basic tool. We cannot lose focus on the Creator and get lost in creation.

Patrick Scully

Father God, as we go through life, help us to remain focused on You. We try to do it our way, but let us be tools for Your purpose. All glory and honor is Yours! Amen.

Tuesday December 5, 2017

READ: Genesis 3:1-3

Did God Really Say?

Why do I need a Messiah? Because left to my own devices I would tend to be deceived by the father of lies rather than know the Truth, which is God's Word made flesh. Thank God that He did give us His Word, and praise Him that His Word never changes!

An old friend whom I went to grade school with once asked me if I knew the difference between God and me. Then he added that God never wanted to be me! The more I contemplate that, the more I understand it.

God is perfect; created beings are only made perfect in Him. How can I become perfect in Him? Only if I know Him. How can I know Him? Only through His Word, which His Spirit has given us through the ages by divine inspiration and embodied in Jesus the Christ.

Innumerable are the times in my life when a little voice says to me, "Did God really say...?". At that point I have a choice: to follow the world or to follow the Word. Many are the times I chose to follow the world. What was the outcome? Sometimes I felt very powerful, but that mostly turned to emptiness. The times when I turn to the Word and let God's Spirit guide me in its meaning, knowing it never changes even when I do, I know and feel true peace.

Steve McNeally

Dear God, thank You for Your never-changing Word that guides me to Your eternal Glory. Especially thank You for Your Word made flesh, Jesus my Savior. Amen

Wednesday December 6, 2017

READ: Genesis 3:14-15

Deceived, Cursed and Punished

Satan is the great deceiver who made himself known in the Garden of Eden when the serpent convinced Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. The Lord laid out punishments for Eve's disobedience that would affect the rest of humankind. From that moment on, mankind took on a sinful nature and the serpent became man's enemy. Adam would have to toil with the earth to raise crops. Eve would experience intense labor pains during childbirth.

When I think about how often Satan attempts to deceive me, I can only imagine how often I have fallen short of God's will. But the good news is: God loves me so much that He is willing to teach me, sometimes gently, other times more harshly. I know He cares for me and, in spite of my failings, He will never give up on me. Because of this, I accept my discipline with joy as He gently moves me back into the fold.

If we truly believe and are faithful, I know that our lives will be filled with the Holy Spirit as we are directed to do His will.

Bill Doucette

Thank You, Lord, for the saving grace of Jesus. May I always listen for the direction of the Spirit and do the will of my Father God.

Thursday December 7, 2017

READ: Isaiah 7:14

This Shall be a Sign

God gave us a sign to assure us. It was unthinkable, so that we would not confuse it. The prophet Isaiah shares with us anticipation of what to look for: a virgin would conceive and bear a Son, and His name would be Immanuel - "God is with us."

We are blessed to live in a time when we can have a personal relationship with God through His Son Jesus. Sometimes I like to think of what it must have been like to anticipate God's deliverance, and I am reminded of the song "O Holy Night." A line in the song describes the time before Jesus' birth, and it is still true for many people today: "Long lay the world in sin and error pining, till He appeared and the soul felt its worth."

The song continues, "A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices..." When I reflect on what God has done for us, sacrificing His Son Jesus, to have a personal relationship with me, I am overwhelmed. Yes, God cares so much for you and me that He died for us. No matter what I encounter in life, I praise God for what He has done for me. Jesus is the best gift ever!

God reached out to us by becoming one of us. He is able to relate to our needs and meet us where we are. He reached out to us in a way that was beyond our imaginations so we could recognize Who He is. God can be taken at His word. Jeremiah 29:13 reminds us that when we seek Him with all our hearts, we will find Him.

Monica Klanderud

Dear Father, I praise You for loving us so much that You sent us Jesus our Savior. Help me to joyfully share Your love with others.

Friday December 8, 2017

READ: Micah 5:2

Though You Are Small...

Who does God use to accomplish His purpose? Abraham (99 years old) and Sarah (90) and childless were told they would have a son who would found the nation of Israel. Moses, a man who stutters, was picked to confront the most powerful man in Egypt and tell him "Set my people free!". David, a shepherd boy with a sling, slew the best soldier of the Philistine army. God uses the weak to show His strength. None of them could have done what they did without God's power.

This summer our congregation became a partner with Habitat for Humanity; I agreed to help coordinate the work we would do with them. What I did not realize then was that this would include speaking in front of the congregation. I am terrified of public speaking! The day came, I prayed for help; the time of the service arrived, I prayed for more help. I walked to the front of the church, they handed me the microphone, I turned to face the entire congregation - and talked.

I explained the partnership and what we hoped to do. I talked about the volunteer opportunities and encouraged people to sign up for our first build day. I even cracked a couple of jokes! No stress, no cold sweats, no terror. It wasn't about me - I was promoting a ministry for the church. This was one way we wanted to do God's work - reflect His Kingdom here among our neighbors. God's power working through my weakness - I never could have done that without Him.

So where would the most important person in history, (our Savior, the Messiah, God Himself come to earth in the flesh of a man) be born? Obviously, in a small town, in a stable, laid in a manger, to a teenage mother. In Bethlehem - perfect!

David Laine

Dear Lord, please use my weakness to show Your strength and to do Your will.

Saturday December 9, 2017

READ: Isaiah 9:6

Prince of Peace

As I sat to write this, my husband and I got a text from our daughter, who has been fighting cancer for two years. The cancer has been spreading and she has not been doing well the last week or two. She asks if we can come and help keep the house running - she has 2 kids in school. We are devastated, fearing it might be the beginning of the end. My mind began jumping all over the place. Of course we'll go - drive or fly? We don't know what will happen or when we will be back. What do we have to do at home before winter sets in? I have to write this right now, before we leave! I panicked temporarily but then I told myself I have to ask the Lord for peace as we decide what to do, and please help me write this devotional! Immediately "Prince of Peace" came to me.

Peace can mean a lot of things, and this name from Isaiah traditionally means one who brings peace to the world. But many places in the New Testament link it to health, well-being, safety and contentment, and the concept of Jesus as the source of all peace. Belief in Jesus is critical. Before His coming, we were separated from God because of our sins. He loves us so much that He sent His Son to save us. Had He not done that, an eternity in Hell would be our future after death. Christmas marks the beginning of His Son's journey to save us and culminates in His death on the cross. Jesus offers a peace that is beyond our human understanding.

We will figure out the next steps. We will travel to be with Michelle. We put her in God's hands and pray for peace for her, for us and for her family. We ask for a miracle but trust her to God; if He takes her, she will be at peace in heaven with Jesus.

Maxine Chupurdia

Father, I know other families who struggle with illness and tragedy. Please give them strength, courage and peace to get through hard times, to trust God when it is hard to understand.

Ron Halstead, 2001

Ron was tall, thin, balding, an Air Force reservist, a cook, a husband, a father, and a friend. He was also a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. He strove on a daily basis to take on the likeness of his heavenly Father, a goal God sets for all who "keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Revelation 12:17, ESV).

Ron developed Parkinson's in the last few years before he and his wife, Lynn, moved to Texas to minister to children in a foster home facility. But was not the tremors in his hands that defined Ron. It was the trembling in his soul as he bowed before God and sought grace to deal with the flow of injustice, inequity, and unfairness that drove his heart often to his knees. Facing broken promises at the hands of men Ron found genuine solace in the unbroken promises of God.

Ron knew Jesus. Ron knew that God-taking human form in the man Jesus Christ, packing the fullness of His glory in a tiny baby who grew and lived and died on a cross and rose from the dead— completely demonstrated His love for him. And Ron knew that that love, steadfast and certain, could be trusted even when all else failed.

And that is what Ron sought to be, as he lived to the praise of God's glory: holy, trustworthy, consistent. God helped Ron. God help each of us as we ponder the real impact of the events celebrated in the Advent and Christmas season. God has come. God becomes man, that man might live and *be to the praise of His glory*.

Monday December 3, 2001

Read: John 10:31-38

GOD'S SON

I can't help thinking back some forty or fifty years, as I think about God's Son, to the time when I was growing up. I must admit that on the surface I really didn't admire my father too much. He loved God and loved to be in church on Sunday, but there was much I didn't really like about him.

I have tried not to be like him in those ways, but it seems the more I try the more of his thumbprint comes out in my life. I suppose that living with someone for twenty years means there will be a lot of him in me.

When I think about God and His Son, I think it must be different. God commands us in 1 Peter to "Be holy for I am holy!" Everything about God is great and perfect and holy. Everything about God is right and just. Everything about God is desirable and His Son is just like Him. The Bible tells us that God's Son, Jesus, is the "radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His being." Now there's a "like father, like son" worth bragging about!

At this time of year, as we lift our hearts to God in special ways we may not the rest of the year, let's stop and think about the influence God has made in our lives. Let's be as Jesus is, the perfect picture of his Father.

Whether we are among the fortunate who are proud to bear the likeness of their earthly father or not, we can rejoice that with each passing day the Son of God is at work to make us more like our Heavenly Father.

—Ron Halstead

You've come to share sonship with us. May you make us, through your Spirit, more and more like the son of God each moment of this day. Amen.

Sunday December 10, 2017

READ: Isaiah 52:7-10

To the Ends of the Earth

George has had an aneurysm that his doctor has been watching for the last 15 years. In January we got the call that it was to the point of rupture, and it was urgent that it be taken care of right away.

We were referred to one hospital; after running \$20,000 worth of tests, they told us because of his age and the risk of the surgery, they did not want to do it.

We sought a second opinion and took the first appointment available. That doctor found a surgeon who agreed to operate, even though it was a risk and George might die during the operation.

We understood that and said our good-byes. We knew that either Jesus would bring him through the operation or greet him at the gates of heaven.

During the operation his heart tore; one person held his finger in the hole as they cooled his body down enough to put him on the by-pass machine. After 7 ½ hours the doctor came out and said, "I did everything I could for him. Now it's up to God and him."

After a little over a month in the hospital, he was discharged and today is fully recovered!

During all that, we had a peace that passeth all understanding - Thanks be to Jesus!

George and Florence Bloomquist

Precious Lord, take my hand and lead me to the Promised Land!

Monday December 11, 2017

READ: Isaiah 53:1-3

Rejected and Despised

Israel awaited a Messiah; Isaiah prophesied of His coming: a son would be given, born of a virgin. He would be called Counselor, Prince of Peace, Almighty God! And now he tells us that the Savior would be rejected and despised. How would that be?

God's people expected redemption from their enemies, from their oppressors. They expected a mighty military Messiah who would free them. Human nature rejects what does not meet its expectations.

We do this to people. We have expectations. When someone does not meet them, we are often angry, blaming and accusing that person. It happened in my family. My brother was big for his age, strong. My father had expectations: Tom would be athletic, coordinated, excelling at sports. Tom was not interested. Music was his thing. Father was angry: Tom did not meet expectations. Disappointed, Father attacked on several levels. Only years later was my father able to see Tom's value.

Jesus was rejected. He did not fit who the Jews thought the Messiah should be. It happens still. People now look at their lives, at the condition of the world and reject God - the Messiah - Jesus - because He does not fit their idea of who He should be. They do not desire to know Him; they see only their expectations and reject the wonder of the reality that God sent His Son to save us - God come to earth so that you and I can be reconciled to God through Jesus! The world still rejects Him. Look at the Christ! Do not reject!

Irene Laine

I pray that you take time to know Jesus. The reality is so much greater than human expectation! The Savior came - the Savior will come again!

Tuesday December 12, 2017

READ: Isaiah 53:4-6

Prophecy!

The prophet Isaiah foretold God the Father sending His Son to earth 800 years in advance. Isaiah's vision revealed to us God's plan in this world and the next. Christ Jesus' mission on earth was to die for our sins (or griefs). For we are with sin. We are like the sheep: they do not keep themselves safe, but wander into dangerous situations.

I spent many years as a groundskeeper at a prison. There were a lot of different types of trees on the property: maples, basswood, both red and white oak, and even a few black walnut.

The fruit of the black walnut is round, light green, and the size of a tennis ball. There is a ½ inch thick leather-like outer cover over the nut. When you handle the fruit, you get a purple ink stain all over your hands. I remember how, in the fall, the squirrels in a very hectic way would harvest the acorns. The black walnuts were their greatest prize! After a couple of weeks the squirrels would develop cute little purple beards.

Even after all this preparation, the future of the squirrels is not certain. When there is over a foot of snow, they cannot smell their nut locations. When they are on the white snow, they are sitting ducks for eagles and other predators.

As a believer in Christ Jesus, I have a future. Christ Jesus has borne our sins. By repenting of sins and asking the Lord into my heart, I will have everlasting life!

David Flynn

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending your Son, Who was humiliated, whipped, crucified, and died on the cross for my sins and gave me everlasting life.

Wednesday December 13, 2017

READ: Isaiah 53:10-12

God Keeps His Word

Hundreds of years before the coming of Christ, Isaiah foretells His death and resurrection for our sins. As foretold, with Christ guilt was expiated, atonement made, God's purpose accomplished. The fulfillment of this prophecy demonstrated not only God's love, mercy, and grace, but also that God keeps His word; keeps His promises. On the positive side, this means (as promised) that our sins can be forgiven and through faith we can be justified. We who believe, confess our sins, and repent will have a wonderful eternal life in Heaven. On the negative side, the Bible also clearly states that those who don't believe in Christ, His death and resurrection, and don't confess and repent, will go to eternal torment in Hell.

This is not a pleasant thought for the multitudes who are not saved. In much of our secular world there is no longer a moral compass. We can exemplify our love of Christ and we can give to organizations that evangelize the gospel. That is not enough. As difficult as it may be, one on one proclamation of the gospel is necessary. As Paul says in Romans, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God's power of salvation to everyone who believes." Rewarding, as sometimes received, and frustrating, as sometimes falling on deaf ears - but sometimes belief comes later.

Christmas is a time to celebrate the coming of Christ for our salvation. This purpose is often lost in the excitement of secular celebration, but there are also opportunities. If we "Love your neighbor as yourself" can we do less than share the Good News?

Jim Chupurdia

Heavenly Father, during this Advent season help me share the message of Christ with family, friends, and others. I know You will show me the opportunities and give me the words.

Thursday December 14, 2017

READ: Isaiah 9:2-3

To See a Great Light!

"The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them."

I remember sunny Saturday afternoons as a child watching matinee movies at the then brand-new, now long-gone theater, the Mann Southtown in Bloomington. It had such an elegant lobby - clear, tall windows, and colored glass mosaic all around the interior. During the movie I would sometimes run out to get more popcorn, being led up the aisle by the dim little footlights and bursting out of the deep dark into a blindingly bright sunshiny lobby. The sudden change from darkness to brilliance reminds me of Isaiah 9:2, where a great light shines upon the people walking in darkness.

I thank God for calling me out of the darkness of my selfishness, pride, and rebellion, into the glory of His great light. I am also forever thankful that He put people as footlights in my path to direct me to Him and, with the Spirit's help, to direct me along the path on which He has set my feet. These are the people who brought me to know the Lord, who taught me and encouraged me, and those who continue to teach and encourage. May I be a little light like that to others who need to know the Lord and to grow in Him.

Laurie Hill

Lord God, help us to obey Your command - to let our light shine in such a way that those in darkness may see our good works and glorify Your Name. Amen.

Friday December 15, 2017

READ: Jeremiah 31:31

A New Covenant

A covenant is an agreement between two parties: here, between God and His people. To understand this, we need to reflect on how Israel broke the old covenant with God, and then reflect on verse 33, and on Jesus' words in Luke 22:20, which Paul quoted in I Corinthians 11:24-25. The new covenant was not an external one, but an internal one placed there by God through the blood of Jesus, and whose keeping is made possible by the presence of Jesus within us and by the enablement of His Spirit.

What a blessing! As I reflect on the birth of Jesus, I reflect on His Presence within me as I yield to Him and know Him as my Savior! What joy to know that because of Jesus, I can know God, I can have a loving relationship with Him, I can have daily fellowship with Him. By His love, His power, His strength, I can live as He intended me/us to live!

And when I slip and fall, as I come to Him in contrition He forgives me and the joyful fellowship is restored. As John says in I John 1:9, "If I confess my sin, He is faithful and just to forgive me ... and to cleanse me."

And that is what Christmas is all about! What joy! What delight!

Joyce Duck

Precious Triune God, thank You for Your love, for Your work in my heart and life - and in the hearts and lives of the millions who have come to You. Thank You!

The Light Shines in the Darkness

In past readings of this Scripture I've been amazed to think of Jesus as the Word, *one* with the Father - there from the beginning, and *all* things came from *Him*. In most recent readings of this Scripture, I've been drawn to the fifth verse, "And the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

I am a third grade teacher. Many reading lessons focus on teaching students how to comprehend what they read. Sometimes they lack comprehension due to a lack of background knowledge of a topic. Sometimes it is because of a cultural or racial bias in the text. Sometimes it is because of a lack of experience in a subject or situation. I'll often assess their background knowledge prior to reading about a topic. After reading, I'll ask the students questions to help me assess their understanding. Sometimes a child hasn't experienced a situation and they are unable to relate to the story, the characters, or the plot.

As a Christian I can comprehend Christ's love because I've seen His light. Later in John, he refers to how John the Baptist was sent to bear witness to the light. I had people in my life who helped me to know Christ by sharing their experiences and leading me to the Word. I've been able to see His light in my life and those around me because others (through the Holy Spirit) have helped me to comprehend Him and His glory. All of us as believers must bear witness to Christ's light so that those in darkness may comprehend what He has done for them!

Julie Viren

Dear Father, I pray that You would help me to bear witness to Your Son this Christmas season so others will behold His glory, full of grace and truth!

Sue lived in a cabin on Hungry Jack Lake, miles up the Gunflint Trail from Grand Marais. She heated the cabin with a wood stove. She cut ice from the lake in winter for water. She drove a pickup truck into town each week for church. Her dog came with her.

Sue, it seems to me, was content. She was content to raise her two boys in the cabin at the lake. She was content to work the desk for a nearby resort. She was content to clear the driveway in the winter, which she said went up and then down and up again around a hard curve before you got to the difficult part. She was content to make do with what she had at hand. She was not resigned to her fate. She was content by faith.

Sue had dear friends, good kids, a great dog, a working truck, a job, food on the table, a warm enough house, a church she loved, a life to live. She was content with these. You can see from her writing why, why she was content. Sue was content because she was surrendered to Christ. She surrendered her situation, her sons, her life to the gracious and glorious will of her loving, consistent Savior. She knew that He knew, and that was enough. His way was her way. Sue was content in Him.

That is what the phrase, "to the praise of His glory," means. It means to be so totally and completely confident in the goodness and mercy and wisdom and rightness of God that with confidence and faith we fearlessly surrender every aspect of our lives living each day utterly content that His plan for us will reveal His glory through us and multiply our joy in Him.

Sue's faith in Jesus led to her contentment in a life lived *to the praise of His glory*.

Friday December 10, 1999

READ: Romans 5:12-17

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

SACRIFICE POINT

One man, Adam, disobeyed God and the penalty had been given, "...lest you die..." Through Adam, all humankind faced death instead of eternal life. However, God in His mercy would provide one final, complete sacrifice for this disobedience. Jesus Christ, God's Son—not Adam's—born to become my sacrifice.

When I was younger I wondered if I would be willing to give my life to save my mother or father. When I married I wondered if I would be willing to die to save my husband. When I had children I knew I would gladly die for them. Of course, I never faced that choice. But to die for a stranger? Could I as a Christian do that? Yet, God sent His only Son to die for me. What an awesome final act of a loving Father!

My "sacrifice" point was reached after the death of my husband when I found myself scared to even let my sons out of my sight. God showed me He loved them even more than I and would care for them better than I. All I had to do was be willing to give them up to Him completely!

Remembering that time in my life I can't help but be awed by the parents of missionaries who willingly "give up" their son or daughter. They give them up to strangers in other lands that these same strangers might find life in Jesus Christ. They give them up knowing the possibility of death far from home. Could I? Would I?

— Sue Jankovich

May God grant His loving assurance in special measure this Christmas season to all those who have shown themselves willing to die, or to sacrifice, that others may find life eternal.

Sunday December 17, 2017

READ: Luke 1:25

Future Hope!

About a year and a half ago, I got braces on my teeth. I knew that I would have to suffer for a few months in order to have straight teeth. I held on to that future hope as I endured the dentist pulling teeth and putting on wires that caused sores in my mouth and made it painful to eat. I looked forward to the end, when my waiting would produce the results the dentist promised.

In today's passage, Elizabeth is rejoicing in how the Lord has been working in her life. She and her husband, Zechariah, had been praying to the Lord for a child for years. For years they lived with public shame and empty arms. In fact, it wasn't until, as it says in Luke 1:7, "...well along in years" that God answered their prayers and did something that seemed impossible in human eyes. To the wonder of both Elizabeth and Zechariah, He gave them a son! This baby was not just any baby. He was to prepare the way for the Messiah, God in flesh! Both Elizabeth and Zechariah recognized this as an act of God. They now realized their difficult life circumstance was a necessary part of God's promised glory.

God's plan for our lives often includes suffering, but we can rest assured that God is using even these times to bring about His plan that is for our good and His glory.

Josiah Avery

Dear Heavenly Father, although we may not understand the full realm of Your future glory in relation to our circumstances, I praise You for reassuring us with promises that there is a future glory in store for us through the blood of Jesus! Amen.

Monday December 18, 2017

READ: Luke 1:26-38

...To Me According to Your Word

Luke 1:26-27. "For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word."

To the Glory of God is a great theme to live by. That is my current personal theme that I am trying to live by. But it wasn't always.

If someone told me in high school that I would be a mother of five, divorced twice and now living alone, I would never have believed it. But that is why I believe that nothing is impossible with God.

He has always guided me through. God is and was always there, and I have always believed that in my heart, but sometimes I have needed to be reminded.

You have to listen and obey. We are not puppets; we have to do the work. He will provide the map - we have to read it.

Valita Bockovich

I pray that I will always have the heart to say, "Behold, I am Your servant, Lord. Let it be to me according to Your Word."

Tuesday December 19, 2017

READ: Matthew 1:18-25

Whose Child Is This?

The birth of Jesus Christ was a miracle. He had no earthly father. God Himself actuated Mary's pregnancy. God caused Mary to be pregnant at a time when Mary was legally engaged but not formally married to Joseph. The contract was signed. It was only a matter of time and marriage vows and a move to Joseph's house before Mary's marriage to Joseph would be finalized. Her pregnancy posed scandalous problems for Joseph. A pregnancy at this point in their process would nullify the engagement and be cause for a divorce that would bring disgrace and financial loss to her family.

Joseph chose instead, after having been informed in a dream of God's activity in bringing His Son into the world through Mary, to proceed with the marriage and adopt Mary's son as his own.

Today, DNA tests provide evidence of paternity. Bill Griffith, in his book, "The Stranger In My Genes," explains how a simple DNA test revealed that the only man he ever knew as his father was, in fact, not his father at all. His mother had had an affair with her boss and gotten pregnant. She told no one. She quit her job. She never told her husband. He believed Bill to be his own.

Jesus knew Joseph was his adopted dad. Once, at age 12, he lingered in the temple causing His family to search frantically for him. When they found him, he asked, "Did you not know I must be in my Father's house?"

Jesus did not have an earthly biological father like Bill did, but he did have an adopted father who loved him and a heavenly Father who loved him even more. That same Father loves us and claims us as His children when we put our faith in Jesus!

—Wendy Flynn

Dear Lord, may we always remember who our heavenly Father is, and even if our earthly parents may sometimes disappoint us, that God is our real and true and forever and faithful Father. Amen!

Wednesday December 20, 2107

READ: Luke 2:1-7

A Hard Journey

As a mother of four, I can imagine what it was like to travel at that time of pregnancy. By that time I thought hard about taking a ride in a smooth-running car to visit my folks!

Mary must journey at the whim of a ruler wanting to count his people. Her choice - walk, or ride on a donkey already loaded with travel supplies.

Was she always aware of this Baby being God's Son? Or did she sometimes just think of Him as her precious Baby?

How carefully God chose Joseph to care for His Son! Joseph was willing to face the talk about this Baby: to follow God's direction and leave everything he knew; to go to a new country to protect the Child.

I think of Joseph and Mary, comparing them with my family. How safe and easy my life has been! No fear of someone threatening my children's lives... The same God Who protected His Son protects my children. Praise God!!!

Nelda Westerlind

Dear Lord, thank You for watching over me and my family these many years. Thank You for being the same from the beginning of time to today. Thank You for being You!

Thursday December 21, 2017

READ: Luke 2:8-14

Good News of Great Joy!

The night Jesus was born, God reached out to the lowly, those who work without a break: the shepherds. The announcement was dazzling. An angel brought the message while "the glory of the Lord shone around them." I don't even know how to describe the glory of the Lord - it is too amazing for words!

Maybe you are familiar with Luke 2:8-14 from *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. The birth of Jesus - born to be our Savior - set apart and uniquely designed by God. The angel told the shepherds not to fear. The news was "great joy" and was for all people. I really anticipate Christmas every year when I reflect on these Scriptures and consider the awesomeness of what God has done.

We live in a time of uncertainty, trouble, and fear. The world and its leaders do not have any real answers to the problems of today, and they have not through history, either. Things happening today are not a surprise to God. In fact, He made provision for us 2000 years ago in the birth of Jesus Christ. We can live without fear and can experience great joy when we accept Jesus as our personal Savior and Friend.

Since I have accepted Jesus as my Savior, I am able to see life's events differently, with an eternal perspective. Fear is gone because Jesus holds my future. Regardless of my situation, I am able to look forward to God's promise of eternity with Him.

Merry Christmas!

Philip Klanderud

Dear Lord, thank You for my Savior Jesus Christ. You have given me great joy - help me to share it with others. Amen

Friday December 22, 2017

READ: Luke 2:25-35

The Comforter has Come!

Led by the Holy Spirit, Simeon has arrived at the temple on the day that Jesus was to be circumcised according to the Law of the Lord. Simeon was old but full of hope; he had been chosen by God to experience this event. He knew the Messiah had come not only to save the people of Israel but to save both Gentiles and Jews: He was to be Savior to the whole world. Jesus had come to bring comfort and peace to His people. Simeon praised God!

This summer I experienced that joy and hope as I was involved with our English as a Second Language classes we held here at Cornerstone. What a joy it was to share Christ with the foreign students who come here from around the world seeking to improve their English through conversations with native English speakers! Through our classes and conversations we had a chance to share this joy and hope that we have as believers, that they too can have if they would only trust in Christ. Some were already experiencing this joy, while others were seeking to know more. Some come from Muslim and Buddhist backgrounds, where they do not know this type of joy. Praise God we could share it with them!

Simeon said there would be a time when Jesus would be accepted; also a time when He would be rejected. We are not to lose hope or faith, because Jesus came to save His people from their sins.

Thank God that no more sacrifice is needed according to Jewish law: Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice. We can have an everlasting hope in Him and enjoy the comfort and peace that He provides. Put your faith in Christ today and have the peace and comfort that only He can bring.

Valerie Gustafson

Thank You, Father - Christ the Comforter has come!

Saturday December 23, 2017

READ: John 1:14-18

He Dwelt Among Us

If there is one phrase in the entire Bible that I could use to summarize the Christmas story, it would be the first phrase in John 1:14: *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."* The One through whom all things came into being became one of us. The word *dwelt* means "to pitch a tabernacle" or "dwell in a tent." He *tabernacled* among us! The unique Son of God became a human being! Maybe it was this passage that the hymn writer Emily E. S. Elliot had in mind when she wrote these words:

"Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown, when Thou camest to earth for me...in lowly birth Thou didst come to earth, and in great humility."

Christmas is not magical, and is not merely an historical event. It was not merely a mystical experience for a sleep-deprived group of shepherds. However, the real, true historical fact is that the Son of God became a man - conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary - a story full of wonder, awe, and emotion. Please do get caught up in wonder, awe, and emotion as you digest deeply the great unfathomable truth that the beloved Son of God came to earth to be born as a man, and to die in our place on Calvary.

Ben Mattsen

If you have never had a personal encounter with the Savior of the world, may you pray the refrain to the above hymn: *"O come to my heart, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for Thee."* For those of us who know Him, from the same hymn, let us pray and sing: *"My heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus, when Thou comest and callest for me."*

Ruth Humphrey, 1998

There is an unwritten rule in the world of the local church just as there is the world of family: pastors (parents) shouldn't have favorites. I have a confession. Ruth Humphrey made this one of the most difficult rules of all to keep.

Ruth was kind, gracious, gentle, interesting, invested, supportive, inquisitive, teachable, faithful, devoted, godly, informed, eager, trusting, and willing to ask questions when she didn't understand rather than wrapping herself in resentment and creating her own small version of the truth. Ruth could be amusing and mischievous. But she was always humble and eager to search for God's perspective on everything that concerned her.

Early on in the brief journey we shared together as pastor and friend, Ruth was confronted with a question I am sure she never gave thought to before she called me. Her then husband, Milford, was dying and Ruth was faced with a medical decision. She phrased her question this way, through tears, "Pastor, if I discontinue life support for my husband, am I killing him?"

They didn't teach me the answer to that question in seminary. So we did the right thing, the only thing we could do and turned to the One Ruth learned to turn to years before. We bowed before God, kneeling there in her living room, and asked God to take Ruth's hand and lead her to His answer to her question.

God affirmed for Ruth that life and death were in His hands, not hers, and that He had already made arrangements for MJ's eternal life no matter what course his mortal life might take.

God took Ruth by the hand and guided her. May her devotional article from 1998 encourage and inspire you to take the hand He offers in Christ and allow Him to direct and guide your life as well.

December 10th

READ: Isaiah 41:13-20

"Nowhere Else to Turn"

For I am the LORD you God, who takes hold of your hand and says to you, "Do not fear, I will help you."

These verse in Isaiah are so comforting. When I am in a troublesome situation reading these verses over brings peace to my soul. The fact that God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth, will take my hand in His all powerful hand and personally lead me is so awesome. I remember as a little girl walking to church with my father's own strong hand enfolding my small hand. I felt so protected and loved. That is how my Father in heaven wants me to feel as I let Him take my hand.

Years ago as a young widow with four small children I was angry with God. I thought he had abandoned me. How could he take my husband, the father of my children, when I really needed him? His answer came one day as I bitterly reflected on my situation. "Will you too go away?" Jesus' question was asked after many had turned back from following Him. Peter replied, "To who shall we go, you only have the words of eternal life?" That's true, I thought. Where else could I go?

Once again God took old of my hand, and though I've sometimes been reluctant, He has held me fast.

If you have never let this wonderful God take you hand in His and lead you, why not ask Him to do so today. That would be a Christmas gift to yourself, and ti won't stop there when the season ends. He will walk with you hand in hand through all the days of your life.

— Ruth Humphrey

Precious Lord, take my hand and lead me. Hold me in my fear, strengthen me in my weakness, lead me in my darkness. Amen.

On Christmas Eve

Our family celebrated Christmas on Christmas Day and it was not until I was in high school that I even remember hearing of families that celebrated anything on Christmas Eve. I never went to a Christmas Eve service that I can remember. Christmas Eve was different only that we went to bed earlier and were required to not leave our rooms before 7:00 in the morning.

But there is much to celebrate on Christmas Eve. The celebration starts with this proclamation of great joy (no, not the angel song to the shepherds; that comes next after this): *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son!* When everything in the course of human history was set and all the conditions were ready, God acted upon His word, kept His promise, and sent into the world His own Son, Jesus, the Savior of the world, who would live a sinless life and die an undeserved but necessary death for all the people who ever lived or would live in the future; for the whole world!

God did not delay His eternal plan of love to redeem to sinful man from captivity to the flesh, the devil, and the world. God did not make excuses for missing the deadline because He didn't miss any deadline. When He had fully prepared the world, He acted to save the world by giving to the world His only begotten Son.

God does not play "make up." He is not running behind. He does not forget His plan. He is not slave to the frailties of others so that His calendar must accommodate their crises. What He purposes He accomplishes and when He is ready He acts. He is master of all He has made and creation responds to His command.

Tonight we celebrate the capacity and integrity of God who not only promised to send a Savior, but made the world ready to receive Him, and when all was prepared, did, in fact, send His Son into the world.

—Pastor Dale McIntire

Most High God, give us faith, as we celebrate this night, to know that as you acted in the right time to send Your Son, so you will act again.

Dear Fern resides today in the North Shore Care Center where her brother, Erland, also lives and where her sister Bernice and a host of other family and friends visit her regularly. Fern's husband, Kenny, a man of integrity, quiet faith, and few words, passed away a few weeks ago and Fern can no longer live alone unassisted. It is not that she is not capable. It is just that she no longer remembers how.

I visit Fern. Each time I introduce myself: "Hi Fern, I'm Pastor Dale." Each time she responds, "I know. You don't have to tell me." And a few minutes later she'll say, "And who are you?" And I'll say, "I'm Pastor Dale." And she'll say, "I know that." And then she'll start talking to me like I'm one of her children, telling stories I was never part of or asking questions I can't answer.

But sit Fern at a piano and sing the opening measures of an old hymn and the fingers that made organs proclaim the glory of the Lord move across the keys and bring forth the glory of the Lord once again. The tempo is not as swift as it once was. The fills not as fast, but the chords are there, written on the heart, played through the fingers, lived in the life.

God's glory revealed in His Son, Jesus, does not leave a mere imprint on the soul the way a laser printer leaves the imprint of ink on the page. God's glory molds the soul into His own image, and when all else passes away, He remains.

We asked Fern, all those years ago, to write her story. Instead she wrote the story of Christ. She was molded in His image and lived *to the praise of His glory*.

Friday December 12, 1997

THE CERTAIN PROMISE

Read: *Isaiah 9:6-7*

"For unto us a child is born . . ."

God spoke a promise through the prophet Isaiah that is as certain as the very first promise, that of Genesis 3:15, is certain. This Advent season we celebrate a Child born!

The mighty God is a Child born. The everlasting Father is a Son given. Scripture reminds us that God emptied Himself, took on the form of the servant, humbled Himself to exalt and fill us with Himself.

This Child, this Son of God, this Son of man—His Name is above every name. He is called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

Wonderful is a Child born. Let us know Him and worship Him, submit to Him. A continual flow of wonders surrounds His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection.

Counselor is Child born. He is God's wisdom spoken into the world, proclaimed in our hearts.

The Mighty God is a Child born. He is not only God's wisdom at work in us and through us to accomplish God's will, but He is the power and the strength of all the work God does in and through us.

The Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace is a Child born. He is the Creator of the ends of the earth and the One Who establishes peace therein.

What the zeal of the Lord of hosts determined the zeal of the Lord of hosts has brought to pass. Unto us a child is born!

— Fern Lovaaas

Thank you Lord for the certain fulfillment of your promise in the Son of promise.

Tuesday December 26, 2017

READ: John 3:1-8

To Be Born Again

Who was Nicodemus? A highly respected Jewish Pharisee, a prominent member of the High Council who became a convert of Jesus, intrigued by the authority of Jesus and His miracles, saturated with religious knowledge. In opposition to his colleagues, he argued for a fair trial for Jesus.

Who, or what, is a Pharisee? A Jewish sect, non-political, opposing the combining of Greek culture with Judaism. What is Judaism? A cultural, social and religious belief, deeply devoted to the Scriptures, which desired righteousness and believed in a coming Messiah.

Nicodemus came to Jesus after dark, maybe for fear of public association with Jesus. Jesus told him that he must be born again: to experience a spiritual rebirth, renewed through God's power. Nicodemus' natural mind only understood "natural" birth. In spiritual darkness, no one can understand Jesus or other heavenly things.

Are we like Nicodemus, with knowledge about Jesus: curious, cautious, contemplative? Or a night visitor, fearful? Or like the Pharisees, thinking my beliefs, my life, are very good, with no need for more?

As a young person I thought I was upright, well-behaved and complete, until I saw and believed what the Bible said about me. I was lost, a sinner. I chose to believe God's Word as true and authoritative. I repented of my faulty evaluation of myself and was born again to enter God's Kingdom. To dwell with Him forever, you must be born again!

Bernice Howard

Spirit of God, open my eyes to see and know Your Word of truth. Forgive my sins. Thank You, Jesus.

Wednesday December 27, 2017

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:17

Creation

I love the word “creation.” Great works of art, feats of engineering, and beautiful music stir our imagination, solicit emotions, and summon feelings of awe and wonder. We can’t help appreciating those that bring something useful, beautiful, and original into existence. We are fascinated by creators and deservedly hold them in high esteem.

I have the privilege of driving 35 miles into the Lake Superior sunrise to go to work. Each day reveals a kaleidoscope of new colors and hues. Some mornings are bright orange, some are dusky pink, and some are an ominous steely blue. I have taken note of the ravens. They seem to revel in the coming of the new day, too. They appear to fly, kaw, and barrel-roll in the dawn of each new day for no other reason than to praise their Creator.

This is true: we become “new creations” in Christ when, through faith, we come into a saving relationship with Him. While this act of creation is complete, it is not done. Like sunrise, each day brings new opportunities for God to express His creativity in us. The question is, do we, like the raven, revel in this? Do we hold Him in highest esteem and allow Him to create in us a heart that truly reflects His glory?

Dan Viren

“Create in me a clean heart, O God ... Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation, and renew a right spirit within me.” Psalm 51

Thursday December 28, 2017

READ: Ephesians 1:7-10

In Christ Alone

Change happens. This is the human condition. We live in change and in loss. If all I have in this world is the world, then I must depend on the world for my security—and it will fail me, always. Only God never changes.

I am no stranger to loss: parents, brother, friends; memories, strength, freedom from pain. All these losses I have experienced. Most ease with time, but one hung on tight.

One loss held me, or I held it. I could not, would not, let it go. It was not that I wanted to cling to it—quite the opposite! I so badly wanted to be free of the emotion that would overwhelm! So (finally) I asked God, “Why can I not get past this? Why does it hold me so?”

And in mercy, God answered, “I must be sufficient.”

In Christ I have all that I need. In Christ I have redemption from sin, forgiveness of sin, love. In Christ, I have life eternal with Him, through His grace. His presence is always with me in this life. He must be sufficient for me in everything—He has told me so. When I mourn loss, I must let go and rejoice in what I have in Christ! When I abide in Him, and He in me, I do, truly, have all things. All that I need, He is. All that I need, He gives.

So it is that when I begin to think of loss, the echo of His voice whispers in me, *“I must be sufficient.”*

Irene Laine

Holy Spirit, live in me. Help me turn from the world and accept Christ’s sufficiency for my life.

Friday December 29, 2017

READ: Ephesians 4:32-5:2

God's Glory

God's Glory is many things: it can be the joy we live our lives with.

Every day Loretta and I see God's Glory in nature: the sky, the clouds, the sunsets. We stand in awe and wonder when God intervenes with special blessings or miracles for our family.

We never realized how bad our Jenny's eyesight was in childhood until she had surgery at age 27 to correct this. Then, for the first time, she saw how beautiful a sunset was. Mom was there to share the tears and hear Jenny's joy of "Thank You, God! The world is truly beautiful!"

Ephesians gives us our joyful task to be followers of God and walk in His love by sharing His love with every person we meet, and in this manner proclaim Jesus' advents to the world. His first advent was coming into this world as a human being to show us who God truly is. He is our Father. His second advent is when He comes into our heart and adopts us as God's children and saves us from our sins.

Jesus also sends us His Spirit - the Comforter - to guide and instruct us in our daily walk. As often as we celebrate His birth, death and resurrection, we proclaim that Jesus is coming again to restore God's glorious creation to perfection, where we shall live with Him and one another forever!

Charles and Loretta Flickinger

Our prayer for you is that you, too, would experience the presence of God in your lives every day and know for a certainty that God loves and cares for you: then you, too, will see the beauty of this world and in your lives you shall experience God's glory!

Saturday December 30, 2017

READ: Malachi 3:10

The Glories of Obedience

Several years ago I made a pledge to my church to make a weekly tithe. This was during a time when I was newly divorced and my finances were very unstable. Many times I struggled to make ends meet. One Sunday I wrote a check and sealed it into my donation envelope. But, for some reason I have long since forgotten, I did not make it to church that Sunday.

The following Sunday, as I prepared to write my weekly tithe check, I recalled that I still had the one from the previous week. I considered that my funds were a bit tight at the moment. I thought maybe I could just use last week's envelope for this week's pledge, saving myself some money.

After a lot of reflection and self-examination, I concluded that I had made a promise to God for a weekly pledge, and I would fulfill my commitment. I wrote another check for the current week and dropped both envelopes in the collection that Sunday. I had faith that I would figure out how to manage until next payday on my small checking account balance.

When I arrived at work on Monday and looked at my pay stub for Friday's check, I was surprised to see considerably more money than I would normally expect. After some investigation I was told that I had been given a bonus for a special project I had completed. I am certain that it was not coincidental that the amount of the bonus equaled exactly ten times the amount of my weekly tithe! Since paychecks were prepared on Saturdays, it was obvious to me that the Lord knew my heart and actions even before I did.

I realized that my trust in His promise to me, and my faithfulness in my pledge to Him, provided me with more than my need. True believers not only need to abide in faith, they need to also embrace faithfulness to realize all the glories of God's love for His children.

- Lynn Doucette

Irene Thompson, 2002

I knew fewer details of Irene's life than I did of the others we've introduced to you in these pages. But this I knew of her and was confident: she loved the Lord and she loved her country. And she was moved by love to love those whom God loves. Sunday after Sunday when she was with us she would remind us to pray for our country, to pray for the global church (especially the persecuted church), and to pray for Israel.

Irene had a stroke that put her in rehab for several months. She never recovered from the effects of the stroke and died just two days after her husband, Walter. Their funeral was held together and they were buried together.

Irene carried the burden for those who walk in darkness. Her heart's desire was that those in authority over others would see the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and lead and live in that Light! This was her constant plea before God and His people.

The following article that Irene penned in 2002 is an appropriate start for the New Year. May we, here and now at the head of a new year, seek and find the Light who is Christ and live for the rest of our days *to the praise of His glory*.

Tuesday December 10, 2002

READ: Isaiah 9:2-7

NO MORE WANDERING IN THE DARK

When I was a young girl growing up on Maple Hill outside of Grand Marais, I had to walk wherever I wanted to go. Many times I would walk about two miles in the darkness of night to return to my secure and warm home.

Sometimes, as I walked home, I felt like the world was closing in on me. Often I would hear the eerie sound of a timber wolf in the distance. As my pace picked up I would call out to God to bring me quickly and safely home.

People down through the ages have wandered in darkness seeking hope from anyone who could give them a sense of direction. Often they have sought help from other people equally lost in the darkness. That's when we get led astray.

The people of Israel saw the light of God and were amazed. The promise of the Messiah gave them hope. But not all had hope. Not all believed, and not all believe today. God sent men and women to announce the Light to the people then, and God sends men and women to announce the Light today. Should not those who know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior help the lost to see the Light?

God sent His Son that through Jesus we might find the Light and have eternal life, if we believe and put our trust in him. God did not hide the Light, and neither should we.

—Irene Thompson