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Immanuel”
— which means,
“God with us.”*



Matthew 1:23

*Devotions for Advent
2018*

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The title at the top of this page announces the great good news of the Advent season, that God, in wisdom and mercy, chooses not to remain distant and aloof, but close, personal, near at hand. Many religions have gods that do their own thing in the heavens while demanding service of their subjects on earth, but the God of the Bible is no such god. Though infinite and eternal, majestic and glorious, almighty and all-knowing and ever present, he is also the God who is there, the God who heals, the God who loves, the God who provides, the God who is with His people for their joy and for His glory.

There was a moment in the history of ancient Israel when the reality of God with us was tested. Moses, God's leader of God's people, spent forty days on the top of a mountain in fellowship with God. He was gone from the people so long they thought both Moses and God had abandoned them so they urged their other leaders to make them a god of gold to be with them, a golden calf.

While on the mountain God told Moses of Israel's treachery and His own decision to actually abandon them to their unholy desire. Moses pled with God to not leave them, to be with them, for what would it mean in the eyes of the surrounding nations if God brought them out of Egypt and slavery but then left them. Would the nations not think that Israel was just a people like all the people of the earth, and God a god just like all the other false gods in the world?

God accepted Moses' integrity and intercession. God promised to be with His people throughout their journey into the land He promised them. And God has made a promise to people today, that when we put our faith in Jesus as our Savior, He becomes our Immanuel, God with us.

May these devotions this Advent season remind you of and encourage you in God's promise in Christ to be with you all.

In the Beginning

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

This is the commencement of the physical universe and time. In all creation we see the Godhead, the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In John 1:1-3, Jesus is the Word, the Word is God. All things were created by Him, through Him, and for Him.

In Jesus the fulness of deity dwells.

In John 1:1, Christ antedates that of Genesis 1:1. The Son existed in eternity.

The Triune God always existed, but all things had a beginning. Nothing existed from eternity by chance or skill. The whole universe was made by the creative power of God.

Man was made from what God created. My DNA test showed that there were no monkeys in my ancestry! I prefer believing that I was sculpted from the "earth." Because of mankind's fallen nature, I will once again become "earth."

The Word became flesh, died for my sins, rose a victor over death!

I will be changed into His image, His likeness, and His glory!

– Bernice Howard

Lord, I praise You and I thank You!

Monday November 26, 2018

READ: Genesis 1:26-31

God Created!

This passage of Holy Scripture is the supreme pinnacle of the creation story: the day by day account of the “build-out” of God’s plan sets the stage for our understanding of who He is and His relationship with the creatures He has made. From this passage, along with the preceding verses from *“In the beginning God created...”* we learn that first, God is a God of order and that when He brought humans into the scene, all that He had made was *“very good.”* God did not create man and woman by mistake or as an afterthought; we are not the result of a random, purposeless process.

Second, the Almighty Sovereign has an important job for us to do. He proclaims that we, as humans, are set high above all the other creatures He has made - we are created in His image! God’s charge to us is this: we are to multiply and be fruitful, and we are to subdue and have dominion over His creation.

These truths about God and His character, in addition to the whole of Scripture, are the foundation of my waking and “doing” every day. Amidst the chaos that sin has created here on planet Earth, it brings great peace to me knowing that my God has a plan and that from Him alone order has been established and neither can be thwarted (Job 42:2). And the Father’s ultimate plan to bring to an end the chaos and “groaning” of creation because of sin (Romans 8:18-25) through His Son, Jesus Christ - that is the cornerstone of my life’s foundation.

In my personal life and profession, God’s charge to me is very clear - be a good steward over all that He has given me.

—Michael Crotteau

May I honor and glorify God in all that I do. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Tuesday November 27, 2018

READ: Genesis 3:1-7

Our Need Met

The little boy looked up at his mom with wide but defiant eyes. Her offer to help him upright the trike was met with blatant independence: “No, mommy! I can do it. I don’t need help!”

Perhaps you’ve seen this scenario played out before your own eyes. Perhaps you’ve been the little boy or the little girl growing into their “big kid britches.” At some point we all take that step of determining for ourselves whether or not we have a real need.

The Advent season reminds us that God came in human flesh, that God sent His Son from the realms of heaven to the sands of earth, not on a lark, but for a reason! What reason? Because we, all of us and each of us, has a need that only God come in human flesh can meet.

Genesis 3:1-7 introduces the need we all have. The progenitors of the human race failed to seize an important moment of faithfulness and obedience, turned away from God, rebelled, and burdened every person who came after them with the guilt they incurred in their strike against the Creator. They sinned, and with them, all who were to come from them. We are sinners by birth (our heritage) and sinners by choice (our legacy), and, on account of that sin, subject to the punishment of sin against God: death.

We have a need we cannot meet on our own, the need for a restored relationship of love with our Creator. We need someone to pay the price, to take the punishment sin deserves. That someone is Jesus, God come in human flesh to rescue us from our sin, our otherwise unmeetable need. Jesus came to live and to die in our place, so that we, through faith in Him, might live and not die.

—Dale McIntire

Father, as you in mercy have sent Your Son on our behalf, let us not be like little children who reject help, but let us accept your mercy by faith and so gain eternal life.

Wednesday November 28, 2018

READ: Genesis 3:14-15

Never Abandoned!

Adam and Eve believed the deceiver and disobeyed God. Consequences for that disobedience - severe! Loss of relationship with God. Prince of darkness given dominion over the earth. Physical and spiritual death! But God never abandons His Creation.

Here God promises a Savior to do what we cannot. The deceiver will not win. In fact, he has already lost. But his downfall will cost God: God gave up His Son as sacrifice to restore relationship with mankind. God does not abandon His Creation!

But the world must still suffer the consequences of believing the deceiver. And we also suffer consequences when we believe deception. A word spoken long ago, a result of believing a friend who lied, cost a relationship I valued. And Satan, self, and the world still whisper tempting lies: Just one won't hurt. I don't have to do that for my neighbor. If I love you, I will affirm your choices. All sorts of attractive lies that lead away from the revealed truth of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

That spoken word, that broken relationship, ended the path I was on, but God had plans for me. I went on to college, met my husband, had children - and God brought me to this place through His blessing: a life more blessed than that young girl could ever have imagined...

Do not believe the deceiver. God is Truth.

And so God saves. He saves me and you at the cost of His Son because He so loves the world that He gave His Son - Jesus Christ the Savior. God does not abandon His Creation!

—Irene Laine

Lord, You promised a Savior even as we fell. Thank You for your Son, Jesus Christ, through whom relationship is restored!

Thursday November 29, 2018

READ: Genesis 17:1-8

Covenant

This passage in Scripture focuses on the covenant God made with Abraham in the Old Testament. The word covenant usually refers to an agreement between God and His people in which God makes a promise which requires a certain conduct from His people. It can take the form of not only an agreement but also a promise or an alliance. But the end result of the covenant is for the glory of God!

As I was reading the passage, the word “covenant” stuck with me as I was reminded of the promise I made several years ago to Mutti (my mother) as she was nearing the end of her journey here on earth. As her health was declining and she ended up in the hospital once again we talked about the near future. The doctor wanted her to go into the Care Center, and Mutti wanted to come home with me. Mutti seldom asked me to promise her anything at all, so when she asked me if I would promise that she could die at home in her own bed, I of course, without a moment's hesitation, agreed to it.

Little did I realize what all was involved for me to keep that promise to her! Yet I managed to fulfill it, for she did die at home in her own bed. As I look back on those days, I realize I was not “alone” in keeping that promise, for God was by my side every moment of every day during that journey. He provided a support system to allow me to keep my promise to Mutti. How wondrous is that!

—Gine Meissner

Father, I thank You for keeping all your promises that You have made to us. You are an awesome God! In Your Son's name, Amen!

Friday November 30, 2018

READ: Exodus 20:1-17

Law Then Grace

God made the Law for man. The first four commandments focus on our relationship to God, the next six on the impact of that relationship to God on others through us. Reading this passage reminded me of another fact: my failures in life. God's standards are too high for man to keep. It is because of the impossibility of keeping the Law that God brought Jesus to man.

Alone we can't keep the Law but through faith in Jesus we can instead of can't. Because Christ lived the Law for us, in faith we can live for Him. He lived the Law. He took our Hell we deserved and gave us heaven, showing his grace and love. Because He came I have victory through Him.

When my wife and I came to Grand Marais, we were roaming, working odd jobs, trying to get somewhere in life. But we both were failing in all aspects of life. We were passing by this church one day, going back to our camp, and I told her to stop, I need to talk to somebody because I'm tired of failure in all we do. This is when I first met the pastor and a few members of the church. They lent a helping hand no matter what our outward appearance. That warm embrace began to turn all our failures into victories. You see, due to that embrace, my wife and I found Jesus. We went from negative to positive, homeless to a home, unbelief to belief, no church to church, not baptized to baptized. So I say, victory!

—Steven English

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the victory You have given us in our lives. We praise You and thank You for the glory You have shown us in the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday December 1, 2018

READ: Matthew 22:36-40

Love and the Golden Rule

The message of these verses seem clear to me. Jesus tells us to love God first and to love you neighbor as much as you love yourself. This brings an important thing to my mind: the golden rule, which says, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This got me to thinking how truly important this is and how it should be used a whole lot more in today's everyday life.

I can remember a time when I saw first hand how this proper gesture can make others feel. I was at Walmart in line behind a lady who was in a wheelchair. She was paralyzed. She asked the cashier to please hang her bag on the back of her wheelchair and to drop her change into the open pocket on her purse. For whatever reason the cashier didn't. She set the woman's change on the counter and told her that she could get her bag at the end of the line.

I don't know why the cashier did what she did but I knew what I had to do. I reached over and got the woman's change and dropped it into the pocket of her purse. I hung the her bag on the back of her chair. The woman in the wheelchair was very grateful. The whole situation might have been handled so much differently if only there had been room for the golden rule.

Ever since that day, for me, I make sure to use the golden rule a whole lot more in my life. I want to thank Jesus for showing me how important His words are in my life. I thank Him for showing me how He works in my life.

—Robin English

Sunday December 2, 2018

READ: Exodus 32:1-4

When – Emmanuel (Jesus) – Is Not - God with us

Exodus says that for 400 years the Hebrews were Pharaoh's slaves. Only a few remembered or believed in the God of Abraham. Most thought their God had forgotten them. Then "Let MY people go into the wilderness to worship our GOD" asked Moses of Pharaoh. Wow, thought the Hebrews, if Pharaoh agrees, its 3 days head start and then goodbye Egypt. And GOD did provide Moses with the miracles which caused Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go.

Our scripture finds the Hebrews in the wilderness: fire and smoke have descended on the mountain top; Moses goes up and has not returned after 40 days. Consider their situation; two-million people in the wilderness which cannot support life; their leader in whom they trusted gone. Without hope they tell Aaron to make an Egyptian god to save them.

The golden calf Aaron made could never save the Hebrews, only a real god could! And GOD was not within their hearts. They believed the miracles were done by Moses in whom they trusted. If GOD is not within us our nature is to not believe in HIM. Since we must believe in something we replace the Creator with special men, false-gods, or even ourselves.

As a child, God gave me the gift of His Spirit, to comfort, guide and instruct me in this earthly life. While my life has been filled with hardships and sorrows, GOD the Father, JESUS and the SPIRIT have filled me with joy and peace. My prayer is that you receive these wonderful blessings.

– Chuck Flickinger

Monday December 3, 2018

READ: Exodus 40:36-38

God Present!

As the people of God were on a perilous journey out of Egypt, God chose to show His presence to His people in the form of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

It would make it easier today to know God's presence in our lives if we had such visual cues. Things are not so easy at times.

We walk in faith, knowing that God keeps His promises. In our busy lives we tend to forget that God is in everything. When we walk and live in this faith, He is always surrounding us.

The journey we are on is similar to the Exodus journey. We need God's presence to get us through. I often ask God for things in prayer. However, it is much harder to listen for God's direction. The Holy Spirit is God's presence in us. The guiding light we search for is God in us. When we let that light shine, or do God's work on earth, we become a beacon to others.

After many years of wandering through life, I can now see that God was, and is, in my day to day living. It took me 50 years to truly realize this. I think that's why I am at my best when I give aid and help others. This is God's plan, fulfilled through me.

–Patrick Scully

God, please keep my skills sharp and my judgment keen, that I may make Your presence known as I perform my duties and render aid to those in need. Amen.

Tuesday December 4, 2018

READ: Psalm 40:16-17

Deliverer!

Since I am afflicted and needy, let the Lord be mindful of me. You are my help and my deliverer, do not delay, O my God.

In my sheltered life I have no recollection of being particularly picked on, abused, or afflicted (except maybe by my 4th grade teacher). My afflictions at this stage of my life are those that can best be described as self-inflicted. J.C. Ryle in his excellent little book, “A Call to Prayer,” tells of a humble African tribesman who calls out to the Lord, “God deliver me from all my enemies, especially that bad man...myself.” That man’s simple prayer is one I find myself praying often.

Recently I stumbled into an area that we call gossip. It’s a sin I’ve never felt myself prone to; I neither feel an interest in seeking information about others that is private nor have an urge to reveal matters that might injure another. So when I blurted out details about a situation I was privy to, I wished words hung in the air so I could gather them back in. I was deeply ashamed. “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” (1Cor 10:12) I learned that I am not so immune to gossip as I prided myself on being.

God is with us in the most complete way we can know this side of glory: He dwells within those who love Him. He afflicted me with appropriate guilt and brought me quickly to repentance. He is my help. He pointed out my need for forgiveness; I sought Him out. He is my deliverer. He made salvation and forgiveness possible through Jesus Christ’s coming and complete fulfillment of His purpose - the redemption of repentant, believing people. Who, having experienced this could help but live in thankfulness and joy, saying with the Psalmist, “The Lord be magnified!”

—Laurie Hill

Lord God, I thank You that You never leave me nor abandon me, even to my worst enemy - that bad man, myself.

Wednesday December 5, 2018

READ: Isaiah 61:1-3

God is Holy!

What a sight that must have been for Isaiah! God’s glory! A throne high and lifted. The train of a robe filling the temple. Heavenly beings flying, mysteriously covering their hands and feet. Their voices singing, “Holy, holy, holy...” Wow! My first thought when reading this was, “Now that would most certainly eliminate my doubts! Wouldn’t that expand my belief in God, to see and hear THAT?” But in John 1:14 it says that I “...have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Why am I so slow to believe? In Isaiah, it says that the seraphim are proclaiming that He is holy, Lord of hosts, and the whole earth is filled with His glory. I may not be able to see this heavenly sight yet, but I most certainly can see His presence on this earth. Grand Marais has been a wonderful place to experience God’s glory. As I drive down the hill and see the big lake spread before me, different light every day, I can see God’s handiwork. When I feel the kindnesses, patience, connection with others, I am a witness to God’s love. When I hear the cedar waxwings high in the trees, I think of God’s eye being upon the sparrow. When I taste split pea soup made by a friend, I feel God’s comfort. And when I hear Sara Beth’s hum and see her smile, I know that He cares deeply for each of us.

—Martha Olson

Dear Jesus, thank You for filling this earth with Your glory, that I might know something of who You are before I meet You in all of your glory, where we will proclaim “Holy, holy, holy!” In Your loving name, Jesus. Amen

Thursday December 6, 2018

READ: Psalm 130

God Walks With Me

One of the memories that has stuck with me since childhood is the “Footprints” poem. It is a very powerful and comforting image to have God walking with me and even carrying me when I can’t go forward on my own.

The last few years have been rough for a number of reasons I won’t go into, but there have been times I have cried out to God with all the passion and need that is evident in this Psalm 130: “*Out of the depths I cry to You, Lord; Lord hear my voice.*” There were times I felt His hand move and His comfort flow into me. Knowing that He is with me always is a rock that I cling to.

At the time the psalm was written, God was only approached through the high priest at the temple, not directly by His followers. To be forgiven for sins involved a sacrifice at the temple, through the priests. Because He sent His Son, Jesus, here to live among us, teach us, die on the cross for our sins, and because He was resurrected, we no longer have that separation from God. We who are followers of Jesus are covered by His sacrifice, and He sent the Holy Spirit to live within us.

—David Laine

Lord, thank You for always walking with us and never giving up on us.

Friday December 7, 2018

READ: Isaiah 11:1-10

Jesus - the Very Best!

Christmas can be a roller coaster of emotions for a grade school age boy. At least for me it was. There were soaring highs that could suddenly scream down to stomach-churning lows. It was all about the presents.

Our family typically opened presents on Christmas morning, and the anticipation kept me awake well after bedtime. Some years we were allowed to open a present, just one, on Christmas Eve. That was almost torture for me. I wanted to open a medium level gift. I certainly did not want to open my best gift because everything would be a letdown after that and ruin Christmas morning. I also did not want to open a really disappointing gift that would leave a bad taste in my mouth the rest of the night. Christmas morning could be even worse. I didn’t really care what my older sister got because it was junk like purses, jewelry, and scarves. But what my little brother got - that was worth my attention! What if he opened an awesome GI Joe with Kung Fu grip and all I opened was a pair of pants to wear to church? I wanted the most presents and I wanted the best presents.

As an adult I like to think that I have a different perspective on Christmas and presents, but not getting what I want in life can still bring the storm clouds rolling in. Not getting what we want can cause all kinds of conflicts. We argue with our husband or wife or brother or sister because we are not getting something we want. Think about politics or terrorism or war. People are upset, angry, violent because they do not have what they want.

When Jesus returns all that will change. Jesus will be with us. The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord. We will have immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine. We will be beyond satisfied. We will have everything in Christ and because of that we will want nothing else. Jesus brings true peace.

—John Hay

Dear Lord, when we are dissatisfied because of what we want, please let us turn to Your Son, Jesus, and in Him let us find satisfaction and peace. Amen

Saturday December 8, 2018

READ: Isaiah 7:14

...The Virgin Shall Conceive

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call his name Emmanuel.”

This promise came at a time when there was grumbling and fighting among the people and it must have been as preposterous then as it is now to unbelievers. A virgin shall conceive! But when you believe God is real and all-powerful, it's not so crazy.

I've always loved the Christmas story: that God would love us so much that He would send His Son to save us!

But I also think of Mary and Joseph. They were real people with hopes and desires. In love. Although they knew of the prophesy that God was going to send his Son, born of a virgin, the reality must have been shocking. Mary, believing the angel, now had to tell Joseph and her parents that she was the one chosen: the virgin who would bear the Son.

I remember having my first child. I was age 20, married with family for support. I was a Christian and believed God was with me. At the time I thought of Mary, age 14, giving birth to Jesus in a far away land with no family but Joseph. Her faith that God was with her must have been so powerful!

This was God's plan all along. It was a sign that God is with us. He loves us. He was going to save us.

—Gloria Johnson

Lord, thank You for your faithfulness, Your promise foretold so long ago. Thank You for showing me every day that You are with me! Amen

Sunday December 9, 2018

READ: Isaiah 9:1-3

Out of the Darkness Came Light

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation; You have increased its joy. (Isaiah 9:2,3)

For many years my focus has been searching for joy. I find joy in the Light. On my daily trips to work I am reminded of the Light as beams of sunlight come out of the clouds over the mighty lake. Or as the sun rises and the beauty is almost overwhelming joy. I often get choked up by the beauty.

I put my face toward the Light and close my eyes and soak it in. And on cold clear nights with the moon brightly shining and the stars aglow, I just stop in awe, gazing. Northern lights: their vast beauty fills my heart with joy on the rare occasions that I see them.

All of these are daily reminders of God's Light that He has shone on me, and the darkness He has brought me out of.

But my trips to Haiti have given me awareness of His vast Light and the deep darkness He has overcome, and the joy that His Light has embedded in others' hearts. Awareness of the importance of sharing the Light and the blessings you receive.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine... let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

—Valita Bockovich

May God always keep joy in our hearts and our lights shining to share with others. May we spread the joy! Amen

Monday December 10, 2018

READ: Isaiah 9:6-7

God's Only Son

Isaiah's words were recorded and kept as God's word because "the test of a prophet was if what he prophesied came true." And Isaiah's did, particularly in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, born 600 years later.

Nobody told me what my children were going to be like, not even if they were boy or girl. But even as a first time mama I could tell you with each turn and poke that the first one was going to give me a run for my money. The second time I feared I had a miscarriage a couple of times because he/she was so quiet for a number of days in a row. The first was a girl. She walked and talked way too early, never napped, was strong-willed, and taught me to be patient. The second, her brother, started as a non-talker because his sister did it all for him. He'd point to the fridge and say "Ouuu." Me: "What do you want?" His sister: "He wants juice." Me: "I know he does, but I want to hear him say it."

I'm pondering about my Heavenly Father, and the incredibly interesting experiences He had when his one and only Son was born as a human being. Did He miss his Son when He left heaven to be born? Did He ever shake his head, knowing the miracles Jesus would perform, but also know the refusal of many to believe who his Son really was? Did his heart break when his Son was hanging on the cross, and couldn't even look at Him because He became sin for you and me?

—Mary Freeman

*Father, I have so many questions, but the more I read Your word from beginning to end, I see Your finger has inscribed the words into the minds of those like Isaiah. Thank You so much for sending Your one and only Son to be Immanuel, God with us!
Amen*

Tuesday December 11, 2018

READ: Isaiah 12:2-6

The Sovereign God

2017 was a year of health issues for my husband and me. George had open heart surgery in March, and I wrote about that last year.

Then in November I had my turn. I cracked a rib and started taking over-the-counter pain medication. Things kept getting worse until I had pain so severe I had to call 911 to get help.

After I had been in the hospital a week, they found the problem was ulcers in the unused part of my stomach from the bypass surgery I had done in 1984. One had perforated and they had to do surgery. Then another one burst to the outside and my body filled with infection. They opened up the incision and cleaned me out. But that hole had to heal from the inside, and so it took a long time. I spent one month in the hospital, and another month and a half with home health.

During this whole time, I was only afraid they were not going to find out what was wrong with me. After we knew that, I had no fear. I listened to hymns that my daughter had downloaded to my phone, and I felt safe in the arms of the Lord.

We both fully recovered, and we praise the Lord for our health. No one knows how fast one's health can go bad, but we all can know that God is in control and will give us strength. We can trust and not be afraid.

—Florence Bloomquist

Praise the Lord for my salvation!

Wednesday December 12, 2018

READ: Isaiah 63:1

Mighty to Save!

Many of us are familiar with great accounts of redemption. Pastor John Piper tells of a Minneapolis drug dealer and addict who was contemplating suicide. The Word came to him clearly, convincing him of his sin, showing him the Savior, and totally turning his life around. Clearly a mighty work of salvation!

My experience was quite different. I came from a Christian home; my grandfather was a pastor, my father an elder, my mother the pastor's secretary. I went to Sunday School, youth club, confirmation, choir, camp, inner-city missions, and ministered to the mentally disabled. I got good (enough) grades and did not talk back to my teachers. Clearly I was "good".

One Saturday when I was in 10th grade a kid my age approached me and explained a tract called The Four Spiritual Laws. He told me there was a gap between God and me and that the gap was my sin. He told me I was under God's judgment and was going to hell unless I repented and put my faith in Jesus. What? Seriously? Don't you know I am at church 3 days a week? We say grace before eating and sometimes at bedtime. I'm a really good kid; God must love me! You are crazy!

I walked away shaking my head, but this experience stuck with me. Our church did not teach on sin often or clearly. Could there be a gap between God and me? A couple years later with the guidance of our Sunday School teacher and the Holy Spirit, I put my faith in Christ. My repentance started slowly but has gained momentum over the past 46 years. And today my assurance is strong as I follow a pattern of repentance and faith.

—John Hill

Father God, thank You for sending that young man to me so many years ago. Thank You for sending Your Son to save me from my sins of pride, arrogance and ignorance. You are truly mighty to save!

Thursday December 13, 2018

READ: Psalm 91

Trust in the Lord

It seems to me that Psalm 91 is a document or contract. Verses 1-2 is the author's confession or confirmation of confidence in the Lord. Verses 3-8 explain that those who trust in the Lord have no need to fear evil. In verses 9-13, God promises protection, and verses 14-16 describe the promised protection. In these, it seems to me that God Himself is talking.

I was a child adopted into a family of 8 children. I was the oldest girl, with 4 older brothers, none of whom wanted this imposter or her mother. At age 8 I dedicated my life to Jesus, and for me there was no turning back. I spent my childhood trying to give them the full measure of what would please them. I grew up with the expectation that the isolation and loneliness would somehow be replaced with close, loving family and friends. As the years continued to trek on, neither happened.

It was only after reading, studying, and praying about this devotion I realized how God had brought me into this safe place at a very young age to shield me from so much. It was in this safe place that I would recluse with my little hurts and disappointments. It was here that I began to learn how special I was and that I had a very special calling. It was here that I was totally accepted for what and who I was and am. Having been raised in the church, I suppose it was easy for me to find identity and accept this refuge.

But only now do I see promises and provisions made by the Lord and the amazing grace that allows me to be partner and partake in them. It is here in this shelter and refuge that I am my best, because I am unconditionally loved by the greatest!

—Tammie Corder

Dear Lord, I would never pray the isolation and life lessons on anyone, but I thank You for using them to make me who I am, for being in my footsteps all along the way. I love who You are.

Friday December 14, 2018

READ: Haggai 2:1-9

The Beauty of the Temple

God is talking to the people through the prophet Haggai, asking them if they remember the great temple, before it was destroyed. He asks, *“Does it not seem like nothing now?”*

In verses 4-6, God tells the people 3 times to be brave, that God is with them. God announces that He will shake the world! I believe that God is forecasting to the people to be patient, something special is going to happen: a new temple will appear.

This new temple is the Messiah, Christ Jesus. God goes on to say that He will fill the temple with glory. This new temple will be greater than the one before. God continues, *“In this place I will bring peace.”* God’s Son, Christ Jesus, is coming. But it will take time.

As a gardener, the most common way of plant propagation is seeding. A seed is made up of 3 parts. First, a plant embryo: a small stem, a tiny set of leaves, and a miniature root. Second, a hard outer coating that protects the embryo. Lastly, a food storage area which provides energy for the seedling until the young plant can make its own food.

Seed germination is different from plant to plant: marigolds require darkness, zinnias only take 3-4 days, while spikes require 3-4 months. Once the seeds have germinated, the process of transplanting begins. After this long wait, a beautiful garden is the result.

The wait for a new temple to know and love God is over. Because the Father sent Jesus, His Son, we can know the beauty of the love of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father sent His Son, Christ Jesus, to die for us. What love!

—Dave Flynn

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all. Amen

Saturday December 15, 2018

READ: Proverbs 16:25

There is a way that seems right...

Solomon repeats this proverb twice because it is an important lesson for us all to learn. We need to listen and be obedient! Many times there is a way that **seems** right to us: the key word here is seems. Just to do what feels right or seems right seems to be the way most people think these days. If it feels good or makes you happy, do it. Not always the right way, but the easy way. Less conflict. No sacrifice. But with God there is only one right way that leads to joy and life everlasting. If we are obedient to God’s will, listen to Him, and choose His path, the right path - the right path - we will not end up on the path that leads to death.

This year God chose to send me on a different path when my full-time job at Hillhaven ended on January 31st. It is hard to find a new job in the middle of winter in a tourist town, but God had already selected a new path for me to take. A job opened up as a baker at Johnson’s Foods at just the right time I needed one. This was the right path for me, at the right time. I have experienced several changes like this during my time in Grand Marais. God chooses different paths for me to take. It has not always been easy, but I just keep trusting God to lead me in the right way.

Follow God’s leading in your life, and you will experience the pathway that leads to life everlasting, not death. Do not rely on your own opinions or those of others to tell you what to do, but put your faith and trust in God to lead you the right way.

—Valerie Gustafson

Thank You, God, that we can rely on You to lead us in the right way and not do what just seems right, but rather know that we are following the path You would have us take.

Sunday December 16, 2018

READ: Psalm 46:10

God is With Us

This psalm begins *“God is our refuge and our strength,”* and proceeds to describe the occurrence of major catastrophes: earthquakes, floods, and war. Then in verse 10, God speaks and says, *“Be still and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world.”* In other words, when adversity strikes, trust in God. He is more than sufficient to get you through it. This, of course, includes personal catastrophes - terminal illnesses, physical issues, relationship troubles, etc.

In the last year we watched the suffering and death of two of our adult daughters with cancer. The emotional pain was at times beyond description and sometimes still flares up, but we were, and are always, aware of God's presence. He is with us. He comforts us. He gives us peace, and there is even an inner joy knowing our loved ones are now in Jesus' arms.

However, to feel the warmth of His presence and to have peace in our hearts required a trust in the Lord, support of fellow Christians, and a relationship with Jesus that was developed through studying the word, prayer, worship, and listening to the Holy Spirit, not just when trouble strikes, but every day.

The Bible does not promise that we will not have suffering, but in fact indicates that we will have adversity and suffering in this world. But no matter what happens, God is with us. He comforts us. He loves us. He demonstrated His incredible love for us by sending his only Son to die on the cross for our sins so that we could have everlasting life.

—Jim Chupurdia

Lord, thank You for being with me, not just in times of trouble and suffering, but every day. Thank You for helping me learn to not be anxious about anything, but to put my trust in You. Thank You for accepting that I am still a work in progress. I know that You are good and that You love me.

Monday December 17, 2018

READ: Isaiah 60:1-2

The Play

For many, this life is heavy and dark. All we have to do is read the news. But guess what? Isaiah 60:1-2 tells us that in the Creator's Kingdom there is **hope**. When you dedicate your life to the One who created you, there is hope - and He is glorified!

Imagine Isaiah 60:1-2 as a play unfolding on a stage...

At first, the audience sees total darkness.

Then the spotlight, ever-so-dim in the beginning [*Arise, shine, for your light has come*]

Slowly starts to illuminate one lone actor [*and the glory of the Lord rises upon you*]

The spotlight brings the character to life. It's in that spotlight that we watch the play...play out.

The spotlight follows the actor as the rest of the stage continues to be in darkness.

The contrast between the dark stage and the spotlight is severe.

Other thespians may move around on the dark stage [*See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness over the people*]

...but the life of the play is always in the spotlight.

The actor must stay in the spotlight in order for the audience to continue watching [*but the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you*]

Choose to play out your daily performance in the spotlight.

It is here that people in the darkness will see the Life.

Traci Crotteau

Our Father in heaven, thank You for sending Your Son Jesus Christ to shine hope into a sometimes unbearable world. There are moments of joy, I know, but there can also be much darkness. Please remind me to move in Your spotlight: it is the hope and steadiness in an ever heavy world. In Jesus' name - Amen.

Tuesday December 18, 2018

READ: Micah 5:2

Out of Bethlehem

Out of Bethlehem is the One who will rule over Israel. The prophet Micah accurately predicts Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus hundreds of years before He is born. Even more amazing, Micah tells us that Jesus' origins are "from old, from ancient times." In other words, Jesus has always been!

We live in a time of constant and rapid change. I'm sure every generation has had similar observations as increases in technology and advancements in medicine improve the quality of life. Many changes are good and make life easier, but there are many changes causing more stress, confusion, and sadness than ever before. Values and morals are fluid, the world works hard to convince us that we define truth at an individual level, and humans have more questions than real answers. There is no relief in shifting sand.

The good news is that God has provided an answer for us in His Son, Jesus Christ! Micah prophesied that Jesus has always existed. Jesus is constant, and His word is true and sure. When the challenges and frustrations and uncertainties of life get me down, I press in to Jesus. Hebrews 13:8 says, *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* I am so grateful that my Savior never changes!

God tells us in Jeremiah 31:3, *"I have loved you with an everlasting love."* In Matthew 11:28, Jesus invites us: *"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* Accept Jesus' invitation this Christmas season!

—Monica Klanderud

Dear Father, it is a great comfort to know You never change. Thank You for being our constant in uncertain times. Amen.

Wednesday December 19, 2018

READ: Habakkuk 2:14

Why Am I Here?

Why am I here? What is my purpose? These are questions everyone has asked themselves as a teenager trying to justify their existence. Most of us are probably still trying to find an answer to that ominous query even as adults.

As a follower of Jesus, my belief is that I am here to spread the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, to share His wonderful news and embrace His teachings. As much as possible, live as Christ would have us live. Such an amazing calling that takes no special gifts other than being able to talk! We should be so excited about our Savior that we should ceaselessly be shouting His joy from the rooftops! But that would interfere with our daily routines and needs - right? What would our neighbors think of us if we openly discussed Jesus at every opportunity?

I recently met someone who told me about hearing a missionary speak. He had just returned from Russia and told of how people, children included, were being beheaded for praying or having a Bible in their possession. As a matter of record, Russia allows some limited religious freedom, yet these atrocities are a daily threat. These are believers so hungry for Jesus they are willing to put their lives on the line. Russia is not the only country that treats believers this way. Yet, here we sit in our comfortable homes, with no religious restrictions, thinking it an inconvenience to spend an hour a day in conversation with our Lord, or show up at church, or offer a Christian hand to someone in need.

I know why I am here. My purpose and direction in life has been solidified by my faith in Jesus! It is an honor and a privilege to be able to openly worship and share the joy - and it is my purpose. Will you make it yours?

—Bill Doucette

Lord, forgive us for not holding up our part in spreading Your word throughout the world. You have given us means and opportunity to fulfill your request, but our personal agenda is more important than Yours - NOT!

Thursday December 20, 2018

READ: Luke 1:26-38

Nothing Is Impossible With God

What a marvelous passage with incredible truths! When God sent His Son to give His life for us, He came as a **baby!** Jesus would know humanity's experiences from beginning to end!

Gabriel, God's messenger/angel, encouraged Mary with the words, "God is with you" and "Nothing is impossible with Him!"

In 2005, as the result of an accident, I was in a coma for six days. That turned out to be a great blessing in at least two ways.

First, as the doctors tried to ascertain the reason for the prolonged coma, they discovered a tumor growing on my brain. It was getting large enough to soon cause major problems, such as seizures. After I came out of the coma and had a time of recuperation from the accident, I returned to the hospital for removal of the tumor. The Lord knew about the tumor - and was providing for me!

Secondly, while I was in the coma, I was having wonderful visions of heaven: visits with loved ones there who assured me that Heaven was marvelous, but I couldn't come yet because God still had work for me to do here.

So out of a dire event, God worked wondrously. He was with me, leading guiding, providing!

And for 78 years He has been with me, proving over and over that through tough times and wonderful times "nothing is impossible" with Him!

So - as the Lord was with Mary, so He will be with us. And as we follow Him, He will bless us and use us, as He did Mary.

—Joyce Duck

*Thank You, Sovereign God, that You are with us always!
Enable me to sense Your Presence and to follow Your leading.
Amen*

Friday December 21, 2018

READ: Matthew 1:18-25

Divine Confirmation

Mary and Joseph had made a sacred life-changing commitment: they were engaged to be married. Later Mary told Joseph that she was pregnant, and he knew that he was not the father, but he cared for Mary and decided to break the engagement privately to save her the public disgrace. An angel of the Lord came to him in a dream and told him the child conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit - thus confirming Mary's story. He immediately took Mary as his wife.

I was on the brink of making the same commitment to Dale, but I didn't have complete peace because in the past there were three other times when I had almost been engaged to wonderful Christian men, but the Lord had let me know that they were not the right ones for me. So naturally I felt hesitant. I cried, prayed, and asked God to speak to me through His word, the Bible. One day Dale told me that he believed God had given him a verse for me about this decision, but before he could tell it to me I said, "Thank you, but I believe God will give me my own verse." Many days went by and Dale asked if God had given me a verse. I said, "Not yet." One day as I was praying a very obscure verse came into my mind. I used a concordance to find it. Later Dale asked again and I said, "I think so." He asked what it was and I said, "I can't tell you yet. I need a confirmation from the Lord that it really was from Him." After several days he asked again. I wasn't ready to tell him, but he said, "Just tell me if it is from the New Testament or Old." I said, "Old." He replied, "So's mine. Is it from the 1st or 2nd half?" "Second" I replied. "So's mine. Is yours in Isaiah?" My heart started beating fast. I said, "Yes." Finally he said, "Is yours Isaiah 30:21?" I almost stopped breathing! "Yes!" God had definitely confirmed His will for my life's mate through His word, given to both of us separately!

—Linda McIntire

*Dear Lord, thank You for confirming Your love and desire
for a relationship with us by sending Jesus to earth to pay the
penalty for our sin so that, if we believe, we can live with You
forever in heaven.*

Saturday December 22, 2018

READ: Luke 1:39-56

Wisdom from a Mother

As I read these words and Mary's response to Elizabeth, I was struck by the wisdom of her words in the Magnificat (a hymn of praise to God), since it is thought that she was around 12-14 years old at that time. So I asked myself, "What can we learn from this very beautiful song that was sung by the mother of Jesus?"

Here are several things to think about: We can steep our minds and hearts in the scriptures so that words and thoughts about God come to us as easily as they did to Mary. This is one of the best ways to strengthen our relationship with Him.

We can strive for humility and be grateful for all He has given us. We can be faithful and trust in Him through hard times in our lives when we don't know what the future has in store for us.

Lastly, we should remember that God is always with us. Especially through this Advent season, be thankful for the gift of our Savior, Jesus Christ, Who came for each one of us so that we can have eternal life with Him.

– Maxine Chupurdia

Heavenly Father, help me to take one thing that I can learn from this devotional and apply it to my life.

Sunday December 23, 2018

READ: Luke 1:56-80

Preparing for the Savior

God prepared over the centuries to provide us with a Savior. John the Baptist was born right before the birth of Jesus. Once again God defied human logic when He blessed Zechariah and Elizabeth with a baby in their old age. When Zechariah doubted God's promise, God prevented him from speaking until the baby was born, named, and circumcised. Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied about the coming of Jesus, that John would prepare the way for the Lord.

There was so much excitement in Zechariah's prophecy! John would give God's people knowledge of salvation and mercy through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Light would shine on those living in darkness; John's purpose would be to share the good news. What a privilege!

I remember when I was a boy my mother wanting to prepare me for God's purposes. Edith was a wonderful woman who loved Jesus very much. She wanted me to come to know Jesus as my Savior, and she challenged me about what I was going to do with all my sins that disappointed God. My mom prayed with me to seek God's forgiveness and accept Jesus as my Savior, which was the start of my relationship with Him. I once lived in the darkness but now live in the light of Christ.

Two thousand years have passed, and God still uses people to share His good news. I consider it a privilege to share what Jesus has done in my life and to help bring God's light into the lives of others. Jesus is Emmanuel - God with us.

–Philip Klanderud

Dear Lord, thank You for loving us so much that You became one of us to reconcile us to You. Please help me to always share Christ's love with others. In Jesus' name - Amen.

Monday December 24, 2018

READ: Luke 2:1-20

The Savior is Born!

When I was a young boy in grade school, this passage was always my favorite part of the Christmas story.

I thought it was so cool that God sent angels to the lowly shepherds to tell of His good news for all men.

In second grade music class we learned “The Little Drummer Boy.” I sang it for my mother when I got home; she liked it so much she had me go around the neighborhood and sing it for everyone. All I remember is being embarrassed to have to sing for everyone by myself.

All my life I have wanted God to send an angel to me with a special message. I mean an angel with wings, and dazzling brilliance! So far it has not happened that way. What He has done is place many wonderful people throughout my life, and He has given me eyes that see and ears that hear the truth of His word that He has given us in Scripture.

Four days ago I underwent knee replacement surgery. I don’t think I’ve ever felt so helpless in my life, but it is a good reminder of how helpless I am without Emmanuel.

I am so joyful that God has given me wisdom and understanding as spoken of in Job 28, to see how intricate and loving and true His word is and that what He says will be, will be.

That His Son was made flesh and witnessed by the shepherds that glorious night is all the help I ever need!

—Steve McNeally

Dear God, thank You for loving me and sending Your Son to save me. Amen

Tuesday December 25, 2018

READ: Luke 1:21-39

Knowing the Savior

When I was a child, my mother took me to church and Sunday School each week. During Lent we also went Wednesday evenings. I don’t recall studying the Bible in any of these sessions. It was more like attending an on-going lecture series. The children were taught the Bible stories and the words to “Jesus Loves Me.”

So my parents’ Christian duty was fulfilled, but once church was over, there was never any reference to Jesus during the rest of the week. No Bible study, no saying grace, no bedtime prayers. Jesus never seemed personal to me. His name merely referenced a Sunday morning social occasion.

As a teenager I began to look at the church I attended differently. There was much discord among the parishioners, who could be heard discussing someone’s shabby dress, or criticizing someone’s child-rearing. How could they sit there passing judgment while the pastor was proclaiming forgiveness and the love of Jesus? I drifted away, very disillusioned, and remained in that state for many years.

After a long, unhappy marriage was dissolved, I looked to the church for comfort and direction. I attended several different denominations with varying degrees of teachings about the Bible. Finally, I didn’t just find a church, I found Jesus. I had been taught **about** Him during Sunday sermons, but I never felt it intimately. In the new church it was about actually getting to **personally know Him!** He was real! That was a life-changer. He was something I wanted and accepted and needed in my daily life.

Knowing that He came into the world by such humble means, yet was a King, makes me realize that our treasure is experiencing the love of Jesus and the promise of eternal life with our Lord.

—Lynn Doucette

Lord, help us to share the message that You are still present with us just as the star of Bethlehem proclaimed Your birth. That You were an offering of the Father so that You could teach us the way and experience Your joy. Amen.

Wednesday December 26, 2018

READ: John 3:16-18

God So Loved the World...

I can only imagine... I imagine very well!

But it is beyond me to fully understand the Creator's love for mankind. But then, I have never breathed life into anything, to make it a living being.

Again: He gave Himself so that we, you and I, could have life. And more: there are all the everyday needs He gives us. Air. Food. Homes. And let's not forget those people we love.

God so loved the world - us - that He gave Himself. He redeemed us by His death on the cross; He affirmed this in the resurrection.

He wants to fill us with His Spirit so we will live in heaven when our time on earth comes to an end.

–Tereice O'Kelly

Lord, it is beyond imagination that You came to earth to save us! May we be ever faithful to You. Amen

Thursday December 27, 2018

READ: John 3:3-7

You Must Be Born Again!

"You must be born again"

That doesn't leave any wiggle room. Being born of the Spirit: the glory of God enters within as we accept and trust Jesus.

There is not a "How to..." of five steps to accomplish this. It is a work of God and not of ourselves.

My question is: How can we be so mixed up, when everything good comes through Jesus? Our handbook is the Bible. The Glory of God makes it happen.

I was down by the lake, watching the power of God and feeling my smallness. In the moonlit quietness of God, the presence of Jesus came through to me.

–Lois Ann Eyinck

Thanks, God, for letting me be here, and for those who have helped me see and know more clearly as I approach 86. (Me and Nicodemus)

Friday December 28, 2018

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:17

The Moment of Born Again

Back in the days when my parents insisted I attend Sunday School and church with them - in the quiet - my thoughts would wander. I yearned to be grown, fall in love, get married, and give **birth** to children. In time, the Lord blessed the desires of my heart, and my husband and I experienced three transcendent moments when our babies birthed into the world. With great love, however imperfectly, we guided them into adulthood while developing bonds that have never been broken.

As a family, and at other times individually, we attended Christian churches and partook of their rituals, celebrations, and offices: infant baptism, Sunday School teacher, confirmation, women's circle, deacon. I identified myself as Christian even though my denominations did not include teachings on being "saved" or "born again."

All the while, internally, I could identify a resistance. I could only accept a portion of what church had to offer. My spiritual self mirrored my human personality - stubborn, contrary, contentious. Kind of a cranky Christian!

Until one day - May 7, 1995. My Lord Jesus, in the person of the Holy Spirit, came into my consciousness in such a glorious way that I could do no other than surrender my sinful self and commit all that I was to all that He is, and pledge to follow Him forevermore. A new life had begun!

Birthing children has remained a high point of my life - but being apprehended by Christ to be born again takes the cake! After all, it's about Eternity!

—Jean Perkins

Thank You, Lord, for choosing me for adoption into Your family and changing me. Deeply and sincerely I pray for that transformation and joy for multitudes!

Saturday December 29, 2018

READ: John 14:1-6

The Way and the Truth and the Life

John 14:6 records a statement Jesus makes that is hard for many people. Only through Jesus can anyone come to the Father. People want to believe that there are many paths to God, but there is nothing ambiguous about what Jesus says. He is the only Way, Truth, Life.

And so it is: one path to God, through Jesus. But, our path to Jesus can take many turns! On the path I traveled to Jesus, I was led by the Holy Spirit as I wandered for many years through circumstances, through people who taught, led, mentored.. I can tell you some, if you ask.

Others come to Jesus on different paths: Some through childhood in a Christian home. Some through desperate circumstance when Jesus was a last resort. Some simply awakening one day to the call. But all paths to God begin with the Father's call (John 6:44) and lead to Jesus, where, empowered by the Holy Spirit to desire and choose Jesus, we can come to the Father and everlasting life.

There are many paths to Jesus! Any path to God the Father must go first to Jesus and through Him to faith and eternal life with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is the Way and the Truth and the Life. None can come to the Father but through Him. He told us so, in order that we may live forever with Him.

—Irene Laine

Triune God, thank You that You provided the way for the lost - for me - to live forever joyfully in Your glory!

Sunday December 30, 2018

READ: Matthew 25:31-46

The Sheep and the Goats

The first part of this is one of my favorites. My mind immediately fills with thoughts of the times I helped out in ways large and small. I gave money and volunteered packing meals with “Feed My Starving Children,” helping provide food for the most vulnerable children all over the world. I help out with our local “Habitat for Humanity,” providing housing for our neighbors. I work at our church’s monthly free community meal. I donate money monthly to causes that help feed the hungry and spread the word of God. *“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” v.40.* That places me firmly in the herd of sheep, right?

But what about the second half of the passage? *“Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.” v.45.* How many times did I walk past someone asking for money on a street corner without giving even the change in my pocket? How many times have I seen someone hurting and looked the other way while hurrying past? I have never visited anyone in a prison or invited a complete stranger into my home. Do I really belong with the goats?

But I am much blessed that there was a special Baby born one day long ago. The Son of God, sent to this world to die for my sins, to cover all of the times I failed to do what I should have done. Once we give our lives to Jesus, it is not our works that place us in the herd of sheep. We already belong to Him.

—David Laine

Lord, please help to open my eyes to see what I can do to serve as Your light to those around me today.

Monday December 31, 2018

READ: Revelation 21:1-4

He Will Dwell With Them

Many people seem to wonder at the book of Revelation with its accounts of opened seals, sounded trumpets, and outpoured bowls but, in reality, the Revelation is the simple story of God’s actions in history to reunite creation, and in particular, human beings, with Himself. Revelation uses word pictures to describe the entire course of human history as salvation history. And the entire book comes down to the third and fourth verses of the twenty-first chapter:

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall their be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

The dwelling place of God is with man . . . He will be with them. All of history is headed to that moment, that eternal instant of glory when every longing of every human heart is utterly fulfilled by the Presence of the Glory of Almighty God, the Creator.

We have a foretaste of that day in Jesus, Immanuel, God with us. We have seen a foreshadowing in the life and ministry of Jesus, God come in human flesh, of the eternal kingdom when God dwells with His people. The miracles of Jesus’ day will be the environment in which God’s people will live forever in the day He makes His eternal dwelling with us.

—Dale McIntire

O Lord, while we await the day You make Your dwelling among men forever, dwell in us, present in our hearts through Your Spirit. Amen!

Tuesday January 1, 2019

READ: John 1:1-5

The Light Shines in the Darkness

The small Haitian village of LeJuene had little electric service back in the early 1980's. The hours power was available were often random and occasionally inconvenient, lights coming on at 2:00 AM that had been left on days before. Nighttime in LeJuene was the definition of darkness. Small oil lamps might cast a sunflower yellow glow on the clay walled houses with palm frond roofs, but there the light was trapped, not strong enough to reveal the steps of passing strangers in the street.

Darkness exploited the cracks and crevices of roads, and fields, and houses, and . . . hearts. Poverty, need, sorrow, despair, failure shadowed the steps of many Haitian people then as much as they do now. But one evening, in spite of well-intentioned and, admittedly, wise warnings, I decided to take a walk in the dark. I took no light and there was no light to be seen that night, not even the moon or a star.

I headed out toward the hospital since I knew that road best. It was just a short distance away, on the same road as the house. As I was walking, people passed. I know they came by me because they would each say, “Bonsoir,” as they passed. Otherwise I might not have known I was not alone.

Part way through my jaunt I heard the voices of angels. Well, not angels in the ethereal sense, but angels in the “messengers of grace” sense. A few feet away, sitting in the dark around the front door of one of the better houses in the village (it was made of hand-mixed, hand-poured, hand-formed concrete), five or six Haitian women and men were seated singing in the most exquisite harmonies the gospel of Jesus Christ. Hymn after hymn of love and grace and mercy flowed from the Light in their hearts to battle the darkness that surrounded them.

I knew only one hymn in Creole: *Vini Kretian Chantez*. To my utter amazement, as I stood at the gate listening to their worship of love, they began to sing the only song I knew in the language of their hearts. *Vini, Kretian, chantez, alleluia, amen.*

Kris roi nous nap louez, alleluia, amen. “Come, Christian, join to sing, alleluia, amen. Praises to Christ our King, alleluia, amen.”

The invitation to join them in singing praise to Jesus reaches me even today, more than 30 years later. Christ has come. He is Immanuel, God with us. He is the Light that shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it. He is the Savior, the Redeemer, the One Who suffered and died, who took on Himself, in His body, the death my sins deserve so that I might enjoy the life, now and eternal that I, in my sin, could never deserve!

I wonder, as we begin this new year, will you let their invitation come to you? Will come and join in dispelling the darkness of sin and shame and guilt and fear? Paul wrote to the Ephesian church, “Walk as children of Light . . . take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness.” Will you surrender your heart and life to be the lamp through which the true Light that has come into the world may shine into the lives of those around you?

—Pastor Dale McIntire

Jesus, you are the Light that shines in the darkness of human sin and depravity showing us the way to God and to eternal love and grace. Shine on us, shine through us, shine in us and make us light in the darkness threatening to engulf our world and its people. We ask in Your name. Amen.

Immanuel: God With Us
Devotions for Advent 2018

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