

Expect the Unexpected



Expect the Unexpected: An Advent Devotional
2011-2012 Advent-Epiphany Devotional
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Expect the Unexpected:

An Advent Devotional

November 27, 2011– January 6, 2012

Beyond the hanging of the wreath, the decorating of the tree, the stringing of the lights and the buying of gifts, expect the unexpected. Expect the arrival of Christ and the biblical messages of hope, love, peace and joy.

Advent means “coming or arrival.” The Incarnation (God becoming human through the birth of Jesus Christ) is the heart of the Advent season. It is a time of devotion and prayer, marked by anticipation and expectation. The anticipation is not only of the birth of Jesus Christ the Messiah, but also the second coming of Christ, the King in all power. In between the birth and the second coming, we acknowledge our own spiritual journey. We are present in the world, striving towards holy, righteous living by the grace of God. We are striving to live so others may see Christ in us. The celebration of Advent embodies themes of hope, peace, love and joy.

Epiphany, celebrated on January 6th, is the culmination of the twelve days of Christmas that start on December 26th. The Wise Men who brought gifts to the infant Jesus after his birth were first to acknowledge Jesus as "King" and so were the first to "show" or "reveal" Jesus to a wider world as the incarnate Christ. Today, we already have the assurance that the birth of Christ brings, yet we eagerly anticipate his arrival as though for the first time. As we wait, let us slow down to reflect on the promises.



Advent

Rev. Dr. Conley Hughes, Jr. - Senior Pastor

Day 1

November 27, 2011

Advent- Expecting the Unexpected!

Read: I John 3:1-4

Key Verse: *"But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." I John 3:2b*

The devotionals we read during Advent focus on the first coming of Christ to the world. The four-week period of preparation for commemorating Christ's initial coming was not observed by the Christian Church in the West until close to five hundred years after our Lord's birth. I often wonder why the Church took so long to establish this sacred period of reflection. Most Bible students believe that the major emphasis of the Christian faith was directed toward the Resurrection. After all, the Resurrection gave the faith its credibility. Once Advent became the accepted norm for study and reflection, Christians realized its great importance. The scripture passages we read,

whether Old Testament or New Testament, speak of anticipation! Our information accessible age today does not allow people to enjoy the wonder and excitement of waiting and anticipating. Most people want and expect everything to happen instantly. This rapid succession of events leaves no room for people to become excited about events that are timed and deliberate.

The beauty of the Advent season is that we are both encouraged and somewhat forced to *slow down*. The scriptures we read place a window before us so that we can carefully observe the timely (and timeless) events that lead to the birth of our Savior. As we journey on the road to Advent we might just be surprised to take note of a divine happening that we previously paid scant attention. For example, "Why did Luke include shepherds, who normally had no place or position before an infant king?" Or, "why would a distinguished group of intellectual astrologers travel 900 miles in search of an illusory star?" It is the unexpected experiences in the Advent story that will lead us to the Savior. So, expect the unexpected to draw you closer to Christ during this Advent season. Read and absorb!

Thought: O Lord, help me to see Christ as I read the scriptures that speak of His coming. Help me to become familiar with the Savior today.



In Whom do you Trust?

Day 2

Moreen P. Hughes

November 28, 2011

Read: Psalm 25: 1-5; Proverbs 3:5

Key Verse: *"In you I trust, O my God. Do not let me be put to shame nor let my enemies triumph over me."*
Psalm 25: 2

Trust! Associated with faith, hope, confidence, assurance, and belief. Many of us put our trust in friends, relatives, government, and even the church and that trust can easily be broken, leading us to ask the question, whom can we really trust? Notice that David says, *"In you I trust, O my God,"* not in friends, for even the kindest people will disappoint you ever so often. Not in your talents and abilities, for it often pleases the Lord to bring us to the end of ourselves that we might learn to lean upon Him. Not in our own righteousness, for it is only the righteousness of Christ that pleases God, while ours is worse than filthy rags.

When there is an important decision to make sometimes you may feel that there is no one to trust... not even God. Solomon in Proverbs 3:5, tells us to, *Trust in the Lord with all your heart...*"These words are easy to say. But what happens when faced with an unexpected crisis...doubt and fear creep in. The little voice says. How sure am I that God is there? That he will hear me. That he will save me? So where does our faith go in these times? The psalmist speaks boldly and with confidence that his *trust* is in the Lord; and so should we.

We are to trust God for temporal things, for He understands the things we need. We are to trust God for spiritual things, for He knows our thoughts and needs even better than we do. And we are especially to trust Him during times of affliction. Not only does He have the power and strength to help us, but He is moved to help us because of His unchanging love, grace, and mercy. **Trust in the Lord - you'll experience a new dimension in your life!**

Prayer: Almighty God, teach me to trust You completely, show me how through Your Word, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Expect the Unexpected

Day 3

Brenda A. Fluker

November 29, 2011

Read: Isaiah 26:1b-4

Key Verse: *"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you."*
Isaiah 26:3

Distractions are everywhere. Many of us awaken each morning with "to do" lists that cannot be accomplished through our human abilities. Others awaken with anxieties about money to pay bills, the safety and well being of a child, the physical or emotion health of a relative or friend, even the hurt and pain of a broken relationship. If left unattended, our very thoughts can paralyze our thinking and our actions. When we are absorbed with distractions, our inner lives are filled with turmoil. While we cannot avoid burdens in this life, we can have hope and peace.

How can we have hope when burdens seem to overwhelm us? How do we maintain hope and walk by faith? Expect the unexpected during this season of Advent! Expect God's peace in the middle of our storms and trials. Maintain firm and unwavering hope in God to bring victory to our situation. Keep our mind and our eyes fixed on the unborn child! Not fixed on our problems or difficulties or opposition. We stay focused through unceasing prayer, daily Bible study, and constant meditation. God will change our perspective. With God as our focus, distractions will fade. We will be filled with peace and hope. Trust in the Lord always.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me keep my focus on You. I expect You to work in ways beyond my comprehension and abilities. And in so doing, all the glory and honor belong to You. Amen.

“Equipped through His Word to Wait for the Promise”

Day 4

Danielle Gantt

November 30, 2011

Read: Psalm 130:5-6

Key Verse: “*Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!*”
Psalm 27:14

Due to advances in technology, we are used to having everything right at our finger tips. So when we encounter a situation that we can't fix immediately or navigate easily, we get anxious. If someone were to ask me to define the acronym “W.A.I.T” without a second thought I would say What An Impossible Task! I have found that it is particularly difficult to wait when God has made a promise and I can't see a glimpse of it coming to pass. These are the times that I have to take refuge in God's word and trust that because God said it, it WILL come to pass...but in HIS time.

In Psalm 130:5, we are reminded that as we wait, we have to put our hope and trust in the word of God. Narrowing our focus to the challenges in our circumstances will cause us to question what God said (*Did he really mean that He would supply all of my needs, because I never seem to have any money?*) When we begin to doubt, we try to orchestrate things and end up making a bigger mess. (*Maybe I should give up participating in this ministry and get a 2nd job.*) Regardless of what it looks like; if He said it, He will do it. After all, in Numbers 23:19(NLT) the Bible is clear: “God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?”

As you sit in your waiting room of life, let God's word be your refuge and strength. I am sure that you will find, like me, that when God does come through the results will be more amazing than what we could have imagined or accomplished on our own.

Thought for the Day: With God, all things are possible...even waiting. Rest in the promises of His word. Be still and let God be God!

From the Start, He was There

Day 5

Sharon Bryant

December 1, 2011

Read: John 1:1-5

This scripture should give every believer hope in their times of confusion, trouble and despair. The text says in the beginning meaning from the start. The Word was there and it goes on to say the Word was with God and the Word was God. If you must ask what Word, the one, the only, Jesus Christ Himself, that Word. The Bread of Life, the Way Maker, the Road Fixer, the Mind Regulator, the Healer, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Alpha and the Omega, I could go on and on. He was there when everything under the heavens was created for He spoke and it was done, He thought it and it came to pass. As Christians, we can get tripped up, caught up and even lost in our circumstances, but I want to encourage you today that no matter what you are going through the Word is the way out for you. If He spoke and the heavens and the earth formed in their masses then most certainly, He can speak to any situation you may be facing. He is your light. He is God.

The best part of this text is where our hope comes from. Verse 5 says, “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it” From the start, when He was born, He was victorious over the enemy. He was glorious. He was more than a conqueror. And because He was with God in the beginning and is God in the middle and will still be God in the end. Your dark days can be filled with light. For He is the light of all men. In other words He is the answer, go to Him and let Him speak on your behalf and the darkness will not overcome you either.

Prayer of the Day: Lord, it is my prayer for the persons reading this that they would give you complete control over their lives. To let you light their pathways, to guide them through the dark times and even give you praise in the good times that they too shall be victorious. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hope Makes the World Salvageable

Day 6

Deborah Barabino

December 2, 2011

Read: Colossians 1:3-6

Key Verses: *“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people.”* Col. 1:3-4

Christmas and all of its celebration can be a very lonely and depressing time. In this country, we are taught to covet. Television bombards us with images and catchy songs that make us desire things, to possess them, to feel less without them. This year, for many of our people, has been one of stress and uncertainty. I know that it has been that for me. My mother’s declining health and subsequent death, the battle to make a teenager understand the value of getting a good education, and looming unemployment has made this year particularly hard. My comfort is in understanding the bountifulness of grace and how hope enables one to hang on to God. These lessons learned are useful in order to keep going.

One Sunday, Sister Mae Fripp gave a very brief summing up of a Sunday School lesson by telling us that we have to go through something in order to see the blessing. It was a good reminder. I had Jesus’ word on not worrying to see me through problem, after problem, after problem. If God did not exist, I would be overwhelmed and crazy. He provides grace through the gift of Jesus Christ and this is the reason my hopes are raised during the Advent season. None of us would be successful trying to earn eternal life through following the law because we are flawed. Jesus alone makes this whole world and us salvageable. He is our gift! No other gift is as valuable to me as grace that brings peace and sustains hope...Jesus. God is generous.

Prayer: May God grant us gratitude for His sending His only son to save us. May we in turn witness to others struggling today that Jesus can bring peace and hope to them too if they believe for the whole world is salvageable if we believe and trust God..

Betcha can’t eat just one

Day 7

James N. Fripp

December 3, 2011

Read: 1 Timothy 6:11-12

Key Verse: *“Fight the good fight of faith.”*

1 Timothy 6:12a

A young person in the faith asked his teacher, “how can a religion of love, Christianity, have a verse like: ‘fight the good fight of faith?’ Isn’t that hypocrisy?” The teacher smiled and asked, “do you know that commercial, ‘betcha you can’t just eat one?’” The student responded, “Sure but that’s about potato chips.” The sage instructor said, “where do you think the writer got that idea? Sin is just like that – one sin, often leads to another sin then to another sin, then to the lie to cover up those sins. Jesus for 40 days and nights was tempted by Satan, yet Jesus vigorously fought back with the best tools available – the powerful and convicting WORD of God.”

The persistent student said, “How could he best Satan with the Word?” The teacher pleased his young charge had seen the example of Jesus and wished to follow him excitedly responded, “You will be, actually all of us will be tried and tested in this world with worldly pleasures and sinful distractions. Satan and evil are real like death and they are no joke. Your peers, family and friends may attempt to entice you and drag you away from the truth of Jesus Christ. But by equipping yourself by studying/implementing/ingesting/digesting/using/singing/shouting/living the Word of God you will be able to “just stand and be sure” of God’s love and purpose for your life. The student stood up and said, “that’s the kind of fighting I can get into!”

Thought for the day: *“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”* 2 Corinthians 10: 3-5

Second Sunday in Advent

A Lesson in Love

Day 8

Venessa Rosemond

December 4, 2011

Read: Deuteronomy 6: 4-9

Key Verse: *“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”*

Deut 6: 5

Whenever we gather as a clan, my family likes to play board games after the meal is over. So whoever is not involved in kitchen tasks, watching a sports event or engaging in some online activity is at the table playing a game. These games can go on for hours with family members substituting for those with waning interest or losing positions. One of my favorite is a card game whose objective is to give away cards. I like this game for several reasons. It’s simple to learn. In order to play you only need to know four primary colors and ordinal numbers 0 – 9. So preschoolers can be included which they love. Another reason I like the game, aside from its simplicity and inclusiveness is that giving away things is counter-intuitive to most of us. Keeping and collecting seems preferable to offering and giving. Playing this game is an object lesson in giving away and letting go. The quips change from, “hey, you took mine to “here, take mine” as the quest to become the winner proceeds. An essential part of love is giving.

As we enter this Advent season now is a good time to practice the giving part of love. Just as God gave us His Son in love, we can give back to Him our love in abundance. Our objective is to give or show our love until we have none left to give. What a winner you will become!

Thought for the Day: God is love.

You Took My Parking Space at Church

Day 9

Author Unknown

December 5, 2011

Read: Leviticus 19:33-34

Key Verse: *“When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him.”*

Leviticus 19: 33

One day, a man went to visit a church. He got there early, parked his car, and got out. Another car pulled up near him, the driver got out and said, “I always park there! You took my place!”

The visitor went inside for Sunday School, found an empty seat, and sat down. A young person from the church approached him and stated, “That’s my seat! You took my place!” The visitor was somewhat distressed by this rude welcome, but said nothing.

After Sunday School, the visitor went into the sanctuary and sat down. Another member walked up to him and said, “That’s where I always sit! You took my place!” The visitor was even more troubled by this treatment, but still he said nothing.

Later as the congregation was praying for Christ to dwell among them, the visitor stood up, and his appearance began to change. Horrible scars became visible on his hands and on his sandaled feet. Someone from the congregation noticed him and called out, “What happened to you?” The visitor replied, as his hat became a crown of thorns, and a tear fell from his eye, “I took your place.”

—Author Unknown

God's Unconditional Love

Day 10

Patrick Johnson

December 6, 2010

Read: Psalm 89: 1-4

Key Verse: *"I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations."* Psalm 89: 1

It was an elysian evening last Sunday as I sat on my back porch. The birds were singing their final evening notes as I savored the last moments of the week-end, before I confronted the rigors and challenges of the coming work week. As I sat there on this cool evening, embracing the wonders of Mother Nature amidst all the tranquility, I just had to marvel at the wonderful gifts that God has bestowed on us.

We take so many things for granted but if it wasn't for God's unconditional love none of this would be possible. We wake up each day and go through our daily rituals, go to work, come home, do our chores, take care of our families, engage in our various pastimes, sleep and then repeat the cycle again the following day. If we encounter any hiccups during the day we are apt to be stressed and are prone to ask "why me?" How often do we take the time to think how horrendous life would be if these occasional glitches were an everyday occurrence? There is an old maxim that says "God does not give us more than we can bear." So even in trying times we should always be mindful that it could be a whole lot worse. Christ has given us his unconditional love and he is always there as a source of refuge.

The word love is one of the most used words in the English lexicon but how many of us use this word in all sincerity? As Christ has loved us so we should in turn love one another. When we think of gifts we tend to think of only gifts of a tangible nature, but sometimes the best gift is a portion of yourself. Today, think of a friend with whom you haven't communicated in a while, try and reach out to this person with a phone call. You may be amazed at what this simple gesture could do.

Prayer: Lord help me to be a good disciple, help me to love my brother and sister as you have loved us. Amen

The Love of a Shepherd

Day 11

Deborah Brewington

December 7, 2011

Read/ Key Verse: Psalm 116:1-2

I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy.

Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.

I grew up in a large house, where some of the rooms were separated by a swinging door. Since I was the baby of the family, it was rare that I would be in a room alone, never in the house alone. On the few occasions that I was alone in a room, my father thought it would be fun to scare me. He would push the swinging door to make it squeak, while making weird noises until I screamed for my mother. He chuckled and slipped away just as mother came to help me.

During those earlier years I was lost and frightened like a sheep. I had heard how the shepherd was there to protect the frightened and save the lost sheep. They depend on him when danger is near.

I did not know the shepherd, but heard much about him, yet never understood who he was until I met Jesus. When we surrender to Him, He becomes our Shepherd then, we too can cry out for His mercy.

We all need a Shepherd in our lives that is why God, the Father, sent his son Jesus to save us all. When we surrender to Jesus, He then is our savior, Shepherd, protector, provider, healer and director of our lives. Learn to trust him, cry out for his mercy; he knows our voice and will answer our call.

Question: Who do you call when you are in trouble or facing danger? Do you know the Shepherd; does he know your voice?

A Smart Christian

Day 12

Sharon Bryant

December 8, 2011

Read: Proverbs 3:1-4

Key Verse: *“Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.”* Proverb3:3

In these perilous times with everything moving in microwave speed, the economy in record breaking decline and crime at an all time high, as Christians we cannot afford to act or live foolishly. Now more than ever we must seek Christ. We must govern ourselves according to the Word of God.

The text tells us not to leave the teachings that our Father has given us. A smart Christian is one who not only reads the Word of God but he/she hears the Word and then carries it out. Binding the Word of God in our heart simply encourages us to take it wherever we go. Let it be known that you are proud to follow God and not of ashamed of His teachings.

Our key verse encourages us to let love and faithfulness never leave us. It takes a courageous love to go out in this world and see God even in the face of your enemies, it takes faithfulness to get up every day and keep moving despite the condition of the economy. And it takes the Word of God within you to witness on the street or on your job to a dying society.

I encourage you today to live smart, get the Word of God in you and bind it in your heart. Gain wisdom that is of God so that you will gain favor with God and man, and your way will be prosperous.

Prayer of the day: Lord it is my prayer that the persons reading this will gain wisdom, that they will make smarter decisions to live life righteously in your sight. Lord that they will gain favor in your sight and in the face of man. Lord that they will be prosperous in what they do. In the mighty name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

Love God First and Everyone Else Too

Day 13

Deborah Barabino

December 9, 2011

Read: Luke 10:27

Key verse: *He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”* Luke 10:27

As a child, I was always sure that my parents would run out of love when it came to me. I had what I thought was so many siblings that love for me from my parents would simply run out. As I grew older, I learned that while patience might run out love grows. My mother told me once that while she loved me a whole lot God loved me more. As a more mature Christian, I understand better what Ma meant when she said as much as she loved me God loved me more. Love grows and can cover more than space and time. God who created everything is space and time so his love for us is infinite. My part as a Christian is to do what Jesus said about loving God and others. The Advent is the perfect time to demonstrate God’s love for us, and our love for others by being especially kind to those neighbors and co-workers who have little or no one with whom to celebrate. Sometimes a phone call or a shared lunch or dinner permits the person who is alone or under pressure from financial constraints, bereavement, or illness to know that they are thought of and loved.

Take someone homebound to church for a rare Sunday out or allow the caregiver a chance to go while you take his or her place for a spell. Your most valuable commodity that you can use to show love is time. Spend time with your family and include someone who has no family in your midst. Both you and they will be blessed for your generous gift of love. Witness the pageantry of the Christmas story at church through a new believer’s eyes. God’s love is big enough to share.

Thought: Let everyone see God’s love in you through your loving others.

No Ordinary Water

Day 14

Moreen P. Hughes

December 10, 2011

Read: John 4: 7-21

Key Verse: “...Everyone who drinks this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to come here to draw water.” John 4:13-15

When I am thirsty, in spite of how much liquid I may drink, nothing quenches my thirst like a tall refreshing and renewing glass of water. Our bodies need water in order to satisfy that physical feeling of thirst. Water is essential for the physical life.

Just as our bodies thirst, so it is that our souls thirst for the living water that comes from the Word of God. The woman at the well was thirsty; she came looking for the physical water. She came with her bucket to draw water from the well, but instead encountered the “Living Water,” Jesus himself. She came to satisfy the flesh but her thirsty soul was satisfied. The water she received was no ordinary water, but the water of love springing forth unto eternal life. She had been given the gift of God’s love. For so long she had been thirsting and now her soul was quenched.

We all thirst for something, whether it is attention, affection, recognition, or acceptance, the body and soul is constantly in search for something to quench that thirst. While temporal things quench it for a little while it does not last. The eternal living water that we drink through Jesus Christ, not only quenches the thirst of our soul it also gives satisfaction to the flesh as it receives that attention, affection, recognition, and acceptance from God. What better gift to receive than the one given by God as we drink from the fountain of his love.

Prayer: Dear God, The source of all living water, thank You for the gift of life that comes through Your Son Jesus Christ. May this spiritual water ever quench our souls as we seek to worship You in spirit and in truth. Amen.

Third Sunday in Advent

9 ½ Narrow

Day 15

Venessa B. Rosemond

December 11, 2011

Read: 2 Chronicles 14:2-6

Key Verse: “He built up the fortified cities of Judah, since the land was at peace. No one was at war with him during those years, for the LORD gave him rest.” 2 Chronicles 14:6

Often I am my own worst enemy! Whether I make a bad decision or even see a good decision have a bad outcome, I have trouble extricating myself from the terrible results. There is a wonderful Annie Lee print that makes me shake my head about knowingly or even unknowingly going along with a poorly devised plan. Ms. Lee creates the image of a woman nattily dressed who takes off her shoes in public to rub her feet. All pretense of decorum or sophistication had fled and in its place are feet as they were intended. She has reached the point where comfort is more important than style or vanity. Who among us hasn’t loved a pair of shoes that were secretly tormenting us? We wore them either hoping we could break them in or tried to step gingerly hoping to minimize the agony.

What if my folly is not just shoes? Can my Christian walk have a stock of ill-fitting footwear? Do I have some ways that resemble flip flops, a casual attitude to prayer and Bible study? Is my service as unserviceable as six-inch stilettos in terms of being prepared? Can my spiritual boots withstand the torrents in life as they would the floodwaters or heavy snow? Am I afraid to get my welcoming shoes soiled by people I don’t know? If any of these may be the case, then this Christmas season is a time to seek out the unexpected. Toss out the sentimental nonsense, and find the structures designated to cover feet with peace. The unexpected gift may be the very relief to be obtained from the perfect gift.

Prayer: Thank you God for the gift of Your Son Jesus who holds the source of our peace. In His Name, Amen.

What Type of Fruits Do We Want To Reap?

Day 16

Patrick Johnson

December 12, 2011

Read: Isaiah 11:1-5

Key Verse: *“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.”*
Isaiah 11:1

As humans we are all one big family. Even though we may be divided by color, race, or creed we are all descendants of that same family tree and as such, we all have an obligation to each other. Without even realizing it we are all unwitting role models. In the enclaves where we carry on our daily lives our actions serve as a microcosm of the real world to the children around us. A child for the most part becomes a product of his or her environment as there is a natural tendency for children to gravitate to the people who they think are more in touch with their circumstances.

It is against this backdrop that we should be mindful of how we conduct our lives; we should question ourselves as to what we want our legacy to be for the generations that follows us. The seeds that we sow will determine the type of fruits that we reap. Seeds such as love, kindness, caring and sharing should always be hallmarks of our beings. No one can dispute that these elements can serve as seeds of change which will in turn bear wonderful fruits. Incidentally, our actions may not only influence children, but other adults as well. If we look around us we will undoubtedly notice that the attitudes that we personify as Christians may serve as the catalyst for non-believers and others who may be sitting on the fence but need that motivating factor to begin their spiritual journey.

Everyday we should all make the resolve to be change-agents, sowing the seeds that will benefit us all in the long run. Be mindful of how we treat others; help the causes that we are passionate about, knowing that in the end we will all be richly rewarded.

Prayer: Lord help me to be a good disciple as I journey along life's roads. Help me to sow positive seeds that will ensure a bountiful harvest. Amen

Golden Shoes

Day 17

James N. Fripp

December 13, 2011

Read: Isaiah 52:7

Key Verse: *“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”* Isaiah 52:7

Two great Olympians, one American the other Jamaican, Michael Johnson and Hussein Bolt wore gold track shoes. They were so confident of their abilities and upcoming track victories. Both men were determined to not only win, but to win in style. They similarly defied traditional track theory, and ran straight up, not leaning beyond their natural body lean. They ran like gazelles, fast and agile. They broke world records that have not been overtaken. They ran curves and straightaway powerfully, uprightly; one could say they ran righteously.

As believers in Jesus Christ, we are called to be powerful/persistent/purposeful/prayerful proclaimers of the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding. We are called to confess/teach/preach the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. We are called to confess Christ in the beauty of fields or in the bustle of the marketplace. No mountains high or valley low can deter us from knowing Christ and making Him known.

We do this because we cannot outrun death. We do this because the plentiful harvest of runners (sinners) are too busy running in circles after every sinful earthly trend and fashion and they need someone, (like you seasoned saint) to point them toward that life-saving love of Christ. We trumpet Christ because others in this race of life will attempt to run us off the salvation road race. We proclaim the Good News because God provocatively asked, “did you tell your brother and sisters about Christ's redeeming love?”(2 Chronicles 7:14, Luke 8:38-39)And finally, we do this proclaiming of Christ because you have believed in your heart and confessed with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. Hallelujah!

Peace

Day 18

Deborah Brewington

December 14, 2011

Read/Key verses: Colossians 3:14-15

And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them altogether in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.

Paul reminds the Colossians and Christians today of the rules of Holy living, to put off the things we did while in the world, to be kind, forgive one another, be humble to each other and put on love. This seems impossible to do however; we have already put most of these rules into our daily living. We love our family, are kind to our friends, and humble to our spouses. We forgive our children. But God calls for us to follow these rules in our Christian walk for everyone, especially those in the household of faith. Then Paul; instructs us to wrap all these virtues in love. There we will find peace.

In today's fast paced world we have to diligently look for peace. We can find it in quiet places such as, by the sea, on the mountains or in the desert. This type of peace is temporary. We want to find a peace in our souls that is genuine and everlasting. Jesus shows by example how we must love one another and forgive one another.

Before my mother died she bought the entire family together to tell us, "let the circle be unbroken." What mother was saying to us is that we are family and should try to stay together. Be of one mind and focus on things of God. Do good things and love one another. The last thing she said was to "hold no grudges, but to forgive and move on." I decided to try harder to get along with the most estranged family member. Guess what! It worked.

We are family in Christ Jesus, if it takes more of an effort on us to show our love for one another we all benefit. Just use Him as an example and we can find peace.

Thought: Do you want peace?

Peace

Day 19

Debra Johnston-Malden

December 15, 2011

Read: I Timothy 2:1-2

Key Verse: *"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone- for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet in all godliness and holiness."*

I Timothy 2:1-2

The concept of peace is a theme recited continually in the New Testament. As Christians, we are instructed to go in peace, live in peace, maintain peace, cultivate peace, and be at peace with believers and non-believers. This includes striving for peace with everyone. I don't know about you, but between the Ten Commandments, pursuing a Godly presence and lifestyle, while following instructions for peace, I often fall short and weary from trying to keep it all together!

Where can we seek peace? At home, at church, at work, in your secret closet, all of us need a spiritual resting place, a peaceful space to regroup and connect with our God.

Despite my human failings, it is comforting to know that the God of peace is ALWAYS with me, in and through every situation, trial, and accomplishment. "What a fellowship, what a joy divine, leaning on the everlasting arm."

Thought for the day: When I think about the Lord, and all that He has done for me, my soul cries out Hallelujah!

Living in Peace

Day 20

Moreen P. Hughes

December 16, 2011

Read: 2 Corinthians 13:11-12; Hebrews 12:14

Key Verse: “...be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.”
2. Cor. 13: 11b

One of the greatest experiences I have had, as a mother is to see my children grow into the mature adults that God has allowed them to become. But I can remember when they were younger, if being left with a babysitter how the complaints would roll upon our return. Every once in a while they would get into each other’s space and begin to squabble and complain about the other. One of our favorite parental statements was “you guys must learn to get along and live in peace.” Even though they did not fully understand it then, they were being taught valuable lessons on being peacemakers. As parents, we encouraged them to settle their disagreements in a peaceful manner.

The Apostle Paul in speaking to the church at Corinth had taken on the responsibility of a parent, as he implored the saints to grow into mature believers and live in peace with one another. Upon his return to Corinth, Paul realized that there were many believers in the body, whose actions were not in line with their Christian teachings. The behavior and actions of those professing Christ had become like those of non-believers. Attending church but weak in the faith, not practicing what they were taught. The Apostle is urging these Christians to change their ways and “allow the God of love and peace” to be with them.

The apostle sees beyond all the fragmentation in Corinth to the basic unity of the church. God created that unity, and it is there even though there can be divisiveness, quarrelling, jealousy and division in the assembly. Christians belong to each other. They are part of the family of God. Beyond the rebellion, the power of God is able to heal and restore even to the point when we are able to “greet each other with a holy kiss.”

Life Application: When faced with stressful situations in our lives know that the God of Peace will give you peace.

Join the Praise Party!!

Day 21

Christopher D. Williams

December 17, 2011

Read: Luke 2:8-20

Key Verse: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”
Luke 2:14

The first two chapters of Luke’s Gospel are filled with praise and jubilation. After many years of feeling abandoned and being oppressed, God acted on behalf of his people. The birth of John the Baptist and the subsequent birth of Jesus Christ were events that forever changed the course of the world. This event was so enormous and breathtaking that a host of heavenly beings appeared in the heavens with the angels and began a praise party. The content of their praise enlightens us to one of the major facets of Christ’s world altering birth.

The praise party going on in the heavens have as part of its audible content: 1.) Glory being given to God; 2.) Peace being given to humanity. In the very birth of Christ, God is glorified and peace is given to humanity. This implies that before Jesus’ birth there was no peace and by bringing peace, Jesus has glorified God.

Through Jesus’ birth, we received peace between God and ourselves. Whereas at one time we were alienated from God, through the life of the Messiah we are reconciled to a peaceful relationship with God. Through the birth of the Messiah, we have been given peace in our minds, in our souls and in our hearts. When life is chaotic and out of control, we can rest in the peace of God. When the noise of everyday life seems too loud, we can speak peace to our situation. We have access to the power of God because Jesus brought us peace. No wonder the angels and the heavenly hosts began praising God! That baby swaddled in cloths and placed in a manger was the peacemaker for the world! The only suitable response is to give God glory by giving him praise!!

Prayer: Lord, help me to understand the enormity of the work You accomplished through Your Son so I can respond in jubilant praise.
Amen

Insults will Come, Don't be Disheartened

Day 24

Moreen P. Hughes

December 20, 2011

Read: 1 Peter 4: 12-19

Key Verse: *"If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."* 1 Peter 4:14

It can be disheartening to listen to the news and hear the ridicule and criticisms given to the President of this country despite your political affiliation or philosophy on the economy or the state of affairs. There are those who are intent on majoring in criticizing and disrespecting our leader. But this is what I have observed over his tenure, whenever the opposition rises up against him, God somehow steps in and allow some piece of foreign policy or a glimmer of hope in the economy to go in his favor.

Persecutions and sufferings have a purpose. The Bible never commands or exhorts Christians to pray for persecution. But the Bible very definitely tells the growing Christian to expect persecution. 1 Peter 4:12 emphatically states that "we are not to be surprised" when persecution comes, or think that "some strange thing" is happening to us when we are persecuted as Christians (Philippians 1:29, 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 John 3:13.) Persecution is "part of the package."

By no means is such a statement meant to imply that the salvation of our souls is earned or merited through suffering. No, the Bible clearly teaches that salvation is a personal gift from God. The price of our salvation was fully paid by God Himself when our Lord Jesus suffered and died on the cross for our sins. But while persecution is not part of the purchasing price of our salvation, it certainly is part of the "path of progress" of our salvation. We do not "get saved" by suffering persecution, but when we are saved, we will suffer persecution.

Thought: Don't make it your objective to avoid persecution. Persecution builds character.

Let Us Rejoice!

Day 25

Christopher D. Williams

December 21, 2011

Read: Isaiah 9:2-7

Read: *"You have enlarged the nation; and increased their joy; for to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* Isaiah 9: 3a, 6

Every time we turn on the news, we are reminded of how much our world is fallen. Our myriad forms of media constantly communicate to us grim images of murder, shocking tales of child crimes, corporate greed and heart wrenching stories of extreme poverty. If we take time to observe our world we are forced to respond in the immortal words of Marvin Gaye, "What's going on?"

During Isaiah's times, the Israelites were dealing with many of the things that we deal with today. The collapse of their economy, political strength and religious integrity left them feeling as if all hope was lost. It was in the midst of these turbulent times that Isaiah brought the people news of God's plan for redemption.

While it is easy to get depressed because of all the wrong in our society, the faithfulness of God always gives us a reason to have joy. Despite what is going on around us, our God is still on the throne. The truth of God's kingship over creation is most expressly seen in the birth of Jesus Christ!

On the one hand, Jesus' birth was the inauguration of God's kingdom. The only King who can rule with justice, peace and love had been born in a manger. Let us Rejoice! On the other hand, Jesus birth is a foreshadowing of his second coming. In that day, righteousness will be established forever; there will be no more crying and no more pain. Let us Rejoice! Despite what is going on around us, we can live a life full of joy because our God reigns. Let us Rejoice!

Oh God, we cannot even begin to image what life will be like when you come back and fully establish your reign. Yet we can trust that you will rule with justice, you will establish peace, and you will vanquish evil. Maranatha!

If God said it. It Shall Be Accomplished

Day 26

Joseph Smith

December 22, 2011

Read: Luke 1:26-56

Key Verse: *“Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!”* Luke 1:45

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to give Mary a disturbing message. He tells her that she’s going to give birth to a son. Mary is troubled by this news because she’s a virgin and there’s no way possible for her to be pregnant. When Mary heard that the Holy Spirit was going to come upon her and the power of God was going to overshadow her (Luke 1:35); she rejoiced because she knew her life was about to be changed forever and her son Jesus is going to bring life to a dying world.

Sometimes the things that God asks you to do can be very troubling to you. You’ll even say to God I’m a virgin at doing what You are asking me to do; I’ve never done it before. Unlike Mary the Holy Spirit had to come upon her, you have Him living within you. Mary received the word through Gabriel. You receive the word through the Holy Bible. You may not know it but you’re about to give birth to your destiny.

You are carrying something within you that’s going to change the lives of men, women and children. Mary gave birth to Jesus and He brought joy to the world. I was shocked when I found out that God wanted to use me to preach and teach His word and to carry the Gospel of Christ out into a dark, dark world. The Holy Spirit encouraged and told me not to be afraid, it’s God’s will. I rejoice at the thought of God using me to bring joy into the lives of others. I don’t know what it is that God has asked you to do and how troubling it is for you. But I do know this, if God said it to you believe Him and it shall be accomplished. Nothing is too hard for the God you serve.

Prayer: God I pray that every time You wake me up to see another day I ask that someone will benefit from the fact that I’m alive. Amen

The Coming of Joy: When the Angel Appeared

Day 27

Keith Turner

December 23, 2011

Read: Luke 2: 8-10

Key Verse: *“But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”* Luke 2:10

A shepherd was appointed to watch and care for his flock. God appointed Jesus to be the overseer of mankind. There are moments in your life when you feel vulnerable unprotected, worried or unsure about your current circumstances. I urge you not to be discouraged, because the Lord will always appoint an overseer to watch over you. You see the Lord appointed the shepherd to watch over his flock because there were many potential dangers that were lurking around the fields during the night. The flock was uneasy in the fields at night because of danger or predators that could arise at any moment.

The omnipresent God knows what is lurking about in this world before you know. There are many negative and evil encounters that we will be faced within our lifetime journey, but you must hold on to your faith. You have learned from scripture that “weeping might endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning,” and “We walk by faith and not by sight.”

This passage reminds us that an angel of the Lord appeared and the glory of the Lord shone around them. When God appoints His angel to appear in your life it is a blessing. This is the anointing and joy that God has placed on your life. God is always there for you even when you have doubt. When the angelic angel of the Lord appeared some became afraid. God said “don’t be afraid.” God will send the overseer and an angel to watch over and to bless you. The Good News is the Joy of the Lord that is provided to all the people.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be strong and encourage me by Your Holy Word. There are moments in my life when I struggle with circumstances. Lord I pray that You keep me close to You. God when You send Your angel to me I shall not be afraid. I will be encouraged by Your good news and great joy. Amen

Christmas Eve

Children – Jesus' Many Joys

Day 28 Willie Mae Bennett-Fripp December 24, 2011

Read/Key Verse: *“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”*
Romans 12:12

Some of us are old-fashioned enough to think children should be well-behaved. Whenever I see children, I see the face of God. So for every small child I encounter, I see my role as helping that little soul understand and practice what God requires of him or her. In other words, I teach God's rules for proper behavior as proscribed in His Holy Word. Remember Baptist Training Union (BTU)? Before the church was so affluent as to own Bibles for each pew, scripture was taught at BTU orally, through drills, repetition and recitation. The challenge was to know all of the books of the Bible, in order or by category, major Bible stories and major Bible characters. We still do some of the rote learning today, but with all of the access to information, many of children will grow up using a search engine to get their Bible knowledge. Online or in line doesn't matter, it is the discipline that counts. Regularly children of God need to search the Word. Children need to be guided and engaged in activity until they can stand on their own.

As instructors we have to be constant and committed. The time with our children in Bible study competes with time for school and recreation. In that limited amount of time, we need to teach prayers and conduct and character. So for all of the years that we are blessed to instruct, we should never weary of repeating the messages of this Advent season and we should model the joy that Jesus brings tomorrow and every day.

Prayer: Father God, I thank You for every child You give us, especially for Your Child.

Fifth Sunday in Advent

Christmas Day

Finding the Savior on Christmas Day

Day 29 Pastor Conley Hughes, Jr. December 25, 2011

Read: Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 2:8-20

Key Verse: *“So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.”* Luke 2:16-18

It is beyond me why more Bible commentators don't pay more attention to the Shepherds. These men of common stock were the real communicators of the Christmas story! The angelic appearance to these men of the field was completely unexpected. The Shepherds were fearful of the angelic messengers, which was not uncommon since the early days of the Old Testament. But little did the Shepherds know that they would become actors in a divine drama. Instructed to go to the place of the Savior's birth, the Shepherds hardly would have imagined that *they* would communicate this divine happening to the residents in the tiny town of Bethlehem. One glimpse of the Savior in his divine presence will cause a person to engage in unexpected witnessing! We sing, worship and share joyous praises on Christmas Day because we have encountered a glimpse of Christ. We have observed Him in the scriptures through the proclamations of the prophets; the reflections of the Psalmists; and in the glad tidings of the Gospel writers. Very personally, we have experienced Christ in our hearts: We have become familiar with the tenderness of His love. The plan of God often has been fulfilled in unexpected ways. Herod, the king of Judea, was baffled and angered to learn that the King of kings was an infant, born in innocence and seclusion. The shepherds never would have imagined that the Savior was born in a cave, so commonly used as a stable for livestock, even for sheep. You and I can rejoice on this Christmas Day and be confident in the knowledge that Christ brings unexpected joys! We can surely find Him when we seek Him.

Thought: O God, as You sought us through the coming of Your Son, who found us, may we find Christ within us and all around us this day.

Mountain Moving Prayers

Day 30

Moreen P. Hughes

December 26, 2011

Read: Mark 11: 22-25

Key Verse: *“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”*

Mark 11: 22-24

Prayer is powerful, but how many times we fail to realize the possibilities of our prayers through God’s unfailing goodness. Have you ever said to someone, “I’m praying for you, “but” is there anything else I can do?” In making such a statement, we are devaluing the power of prayer and the omnipotence and sovereignty of Almighty God. Many of us underestimate what God can do through us when we come to him in prayer through faith.

Many times, we want to feel like we are physically helping someone, feeling as if it is not enough to just pray. The reality is that prayer is the most powerful, most important thing we can do. We should never take our prayers lightly or feel as though they are not enough or that we have to be doing more. Yes, sometimes we can do more and there are times that we should, but it is never because our prayers are not enough to make a difference.

How do you pray a prayer so filled with faith that it can move a mountain? Shift the focus from the size of your mountain to the sufficiency of the mountain mover. The next time you mention to someone that you are praying for them, take the “but” out. Realize that “whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it shall be yours.”

I challenge you to shift the focus of your prayer. Don't spend a lot of time describing your mountain to the Lord. He knows what it is. Instead, focus your attention on the mountain mover - his glory, power and faithfulness.

Not the Same Old Soup

Day 31

Venessa B. Rosemond

December 27, 2011

Read: 1 Peter 1: 3-8

Key Verse: *“...he has given us new birth into a living hope”*

1 Peter 1: 3b

What a variety of soups we have today. There are the humble soups from the days when people ate to live. Thick, hearty soups were a way to produce a one pot dish that needed little attention, for people who worked hard or to stretch a meal for a large family. These soups were often composed of the remnants from previous meals, a bit of meat too small to serve alone, or the extra rice or potatoes and vegetables left from a side dish. There are also the special soups that are more celebratory, like a Sunday meal of gumbo, or the chicken soup when no one is sick. A small vegetable garden that yields a harvest is a reason to make a soup worthy of the bounty from the earth. All of these soups are meant to nourish the body and soul. The ingredients are often fresh and the meal is presented as soon as the soup is finished.

But for some people, when there is leftover soup, something magic happens when it is stored overnight. The next day the flavors have melded and the fresh taste that tantalized the day before is now a mature taste that satisfies the taste buds and rewards the palate for the patient wait. How this fusion happens is not important. What matters most is that it does happen. As Christians we are like those myriad ingredients, some fresh, some spicy, some sweet, some savory and some mature. We welcome the one who has come to create within us a new thing.

Thought for the Day: Praise God for the Master Cook.

Our Blessed Gift: Jesus

Day 32

Deborah Barabino

December 28, 2011

Read: 2 Corinthians 4: 16-18

Key Verse: *“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”*

2 Cor. 4:18b

The world has hope because of Jesus Christ. His birth which we celebrate in December marks the great joy for grace and hope that God sent us in the form of Jesus. His gospel sustains us, empowers us, and allows us to rest upon the knowledge that we are saved from eternal death because of him. Great is the blessed gift we call Jesus!

We do not see him. We believe him because we feel him. Jesus has not broken his promise to never leave us. His spirit protects and guides us. His word builds us up and sustains us. He is the gift that keeps on giving well past the time when we have little faith, when we are estranged from him, when we question him and when we cry out to him. Jesus is the BLESSED gift. Generously he shares his blessing with us.

We fix our eyes on the permanent, which is Jesus. His birth is our gift. He is God’s fulfillment of his promise to save us. No gift under a tree or in a box or bag is as valuable as the blessed gift. No treat, sumptuous dinner, or favored guest is as good as our blessed gift. Let us remember why we focus on the Advent season. The season is all about Jesus the gift to all of humanity from our Father.

Thought: Share the Blessed Gift with someone. Tell someone about Jesus!

Love in All Things

Day 33

Brenda A. Fluker

December 29, 2011

Read: 1 Corinthians 13

Key Verse: *“If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”*

1 Corinthians 13:3

Love is not something we fall into or fall out of. It is not a feeling, an experience that happens to us, or an event for which we wait for in eager anticipation. Love is a responsibility that grows out of our relationship with God. God commands us to love one another.

In this passage, some of the characteristics of love are stated, that we may know how God loves us and how we are to love others. Love is an enemy to selfishness. Love does not desire or seek its own praise, or honor, or profit, or pleasure.

Relationships form a crucial element in the discipline of service to others. Often we pass by people in our effort to get things done. At times, we are more concerned with producing visible results than with caring for people. But even the most unselfish actions are nothing without love. While love does not destroy all regard for ourselves or neglect our interests, love always prefers the welfare of others to one’s private advantage. No one loves perfectly, but we must keep trying and ask God to let His love flow through us. Love is a call to watchfulness, diligence, and prayer.

Reflection: How does love guide our behavior to others? Are you willing to lay aside selfish desires? Write down specific ways to express true love as you go about work and life.

Is Your Love at Work

Day 34

Joseph Smith

December 30, 2011

Read/Key Verses: *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* John 13:34-35

I may know you are a Christian because we speak to each other about salvation and any number of Christian topics. We may have broken bread together, shared the sign of peace and held hands during prayer. Simply said, Christians can be found in places where other Christians dwell. If you say you are a Christian, I will not refute it. However, don't be surprised if others doubt your claim. You see scripture tells us to Love one another. If we do that or if we say that we love one another and we operate under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we have no need to question or be questioned by anyone. Furthermore, I am not concerned about exposing anyone. Rest assured that the one who knows if we are truly Christians is the one who sees all. However as a fellow Christian when I share worship, or Bible study, I am concerned that you are equipped for the journey ahead.

Fellow Christians there is much love to be given. First we must see ourselves as Jesus sees us, needing salvation, redemption and grace. Another thing is if want to love one another we also must see others as Jesus see them, made in His father's image, needing salvation, redemption and grace. We show love to one another by meeting unmet needs such as feeding the hungry, consoling the bereaved and visiting the sick. Who among us doesn't have a family member, a neighbor, a class mate, a co-worker or an adversary who needs some help? Can you talk to a troubled teen, or visit with a senior or mentor a child? Can you share a meal with a struggling family, or give time at a homeless shelter or money to an individual going through a job layoff? Can you do any of this without telling others how good and generous you are? Because if you can, then you will be able to answer the question of why are you so kind, with the response because I am a Christian and I am charged with loving others.

Question for the Day: Does anyone know you are a Christian?

Love at Play

Day 35

Venessa Rosemond

December 31, 2011

Read/Key Verses: *“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love.”* I Corinthians 16: 13-14

A childhood game we often played called, Freeze, was one in which everyone except the caller would jump or squirm or shake in ways to contort our bodies so that when the caller said freeze, each child would try to hold the action. Anyone who was able to do so was the winner. The more outrageous the movement the more skill needed to freeze. We would play for hours. Some of my playmates were naturally more gifted than others. They seemed to be able to watch the caller and anticipate when the command to freeze would come. Still others managed to stay upright no matter how high they lifted a leg or how far back they tilted over. The clever ones could contort themselves in ways that even if they tumbled or trembled, their intended poses were vastly entertaining. A final group of friends were fearless because they could stand or walk on their hands or manage to transfer and hold their weight on one handed pushups. Collectively we were just children at play using our imaginations and having a grand time doing it. This game was not for the timid even though anyone could play. Natural leaders emerged because they could see possibilities or perform feats that most of us could not. The leaders were also the teachers, because they wanted to play with us and keep us engaged by showing us how they did it. Since we were all children, the leaders didn't believe we couldn't do it, they just kept patiently trying to show us what they did. Usually what emerged was an amalgamation of the teachers' skill and the students' enthusiasm.

Tomorrow starts a new year. I looked back on this childhood game and see lessons for us. Try to perform the most outrageous task you can and teach it to someone else. Do it with the innocence of a Child who can see the possibilities inherent in each of us.

Thought for the Day: Do everything in love.

Gift of Peace

Epiphany Sunday

Day 36

Debra Johnston-Malden

January 1, 2012

Read/ Key Verse: *“Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”*
2 Timothy 2:22

The word ‘youth’ sticks out to me in this verse. Generally, I consider youth, any person who is young enough to be one of my children. Within this category are ‘young adults’ who consider themselves ‘grown’.

The children of the millennia are indeed experiencing a time, and opportunities that were not afforded to many of their parents. This includes first generation college graduates, homeowners, and entrepreneurs. Many of them believe they have struggled to achieve these landmarks by themselves (despite the sacrifices and sufferings of those preceding them) and consequently some ‘youth’ are sometimes egocentric and having feelings of entitlement.

These young people are to be applauded and supported in their accomplishments. Yet, they often have difficulty with the discipline of the tongue which includes anger management (temper tantrums) and disrespectful dialogue with their parents, peers, and persons in authority.

Those of us who are placed in the presence of these young people have the duty and obligation to strive for and maintain peace at all times. The next time a 20 plus year old begins to have a tirade and tantrum, it will best for me to say a silent prayer, and keep my cool!

Thought for the day: May the God of peace be with you.

“Midnight Train to Georgia”

Day 37

Howard A. McLendon

January 2, 2012

Read: Philippians 4:4-7

Key Verse: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your request to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*
Philippians 4:6-7

R & B singer Gladys Knight made famous the song, “Midnight Train to Georgia,” a song about a man who sought fame in Los Angeles, but could not find it, and was leaving on a midnight train to Georgia, going back to find peace and in her words “a simpler place in time.”

Many of us, like the brother Gladys Knight sang about, have a deep sense that there is something wrong with and missing from our lives. Like the brother on the midnight train, we are searching for a way to deal with our anxiety and searching for a simpler place in time. Thank God that in the midst of our anxiety, Gods sends a “chill pill” through His Word and tells us to be anxious for nothing. We don’t have to catch a midnight train to Georgia or engage in any other forms of desperate behavior, but simply “in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present (our) request to God.” His promise of a peace, which transcends all understanding, is ours for the asking.

Prayer: God in this Advent Season I ask with Thanksgiving that you will supply every need and work out every situation. I receive the promised peace, which transcends all understanding, and say thank You for working it out for me, in Jesus name.

I Still Have Joy

Day 38

Gloria Johnson

January 3, 2012

Read: Galatians 5:22-23

Key Verse: *“The fruit of the Spirit is Joy.”*

Galatians 5: 22b

Having experienced an incident in which an individual raped me some 20 years ago changed my life in such a profound way. This individual, who I shall call Marcus, was in total darkness and despair and felt that I should be the target of his sea of loneliness. This situation taught me never to view an unbeliever from a carnal eye again.

The Joy of the Lord, the Great I Am, took over my emotions that day in such a way that I was not my own. He enabled me to minister to Marcus about the saving Grace/Love of his Son Jesus Christ. Just walk with me my sisters and brothers and try to stay focused with your spiritual eye and know that I still had Joy because Jesus was carrying me every step of the way.

Even in this awful experience, the Lord gave me assurance. He also changed the circumstance. When the scene and course of my day changed, this man could walk in my path of light and experience a walk from his sea of darkness. The forgiving power of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit deep down within in me enabled me to forgive.

I say even today, that I still have this Jesus joy, something so precious that the world cannot take from me. I got the joy of Jesus down in my heart .No, the devil doesn't like it, but it's down in my heart to stay.

Food for Thought: It was the desire of the Holy Spirit to allow joy to develop within me so that the testimony of Christ might be seen.

New Positions, New Perspective

Day 39

Christopher D. Williams

January 4, 2012

Read: Romans 5:1-5

Key Verses: *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”*

Romans 5:1, 2b

One of the key concepts found in Paul's letter to the church in Rome is “justification.” The term refers to the process of being “made right with God.” Those who have been justified have been forgiven of their sins, given a right standing with God and endowed with the Holy Spirit.

When we are made right with God, we are given a new position. Instead of being an enemy of God, we become sons and daughters of God. From this position, we can now view the world from a different perspective. Whereas we use to view suffering as an unnecessary pain, now we can see it as a necessary process. Whereas our trials may have appeared as terrifying events, now they are terrific testimonies. When we have been made right with God, we can truly have a right perspective on life. We can rejoice in our trials, we can rejoice in our hardships, we can rejoice in our suffering because we know that God is working in us a far greater purpose than we can ever imagine. God is conforming us to the image of his glorious Son! Don't focus on the pain of the process; rejoice because of its purpose! A purpose that has us attaining to the full glory of the one and only Triune God. We cannot even imagine the greatness of what that glory will be!!

This year, rest assured in what God is going to do in your life. Face every day with the new perspective that comes with your new position, a perspective that sees God's hand in every facet of your life. A perspective that knows that although you may go through fiery trials, you're coming out like pure gold!

Prayer: Father, thank You for justifying me through Your Son, help me to continue to walk in the newness of life You have given me so that I might daily resemble Your blessed Son. Help me to see things with a new perspective, because you have given me a new position. Amen.

Complete Joy

Day 40

Brenda A. Flucker

January 5, 2012

Read: John 15:9-17

Key Verse: “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

John 15:11

Do you know someone who appears happy and full of enthusiasm when things are going smoothly? At other times, that same person seems to wither away when trials are close. Have you ever reacted that way?

Joy does not depend on circumstances or situations. Joy is the unexpected contentment that comes from our relationship with God. Genuine unconditional love for others and ourselves flows from the abundant love God has given us through His son. When we accept that love through faith, we abide in Christ and depend on His strength, power, and guidance. Then we are no longer tossed to and fro by the situations we encounter. We bear more fruit in every good word and work. Our joy is made complete in Christ.

We can experience success without engaging in excessive pride. We can experience failure without sinking into despair and depression. Let us seek to simply live and rely on the fullness of Christ. Walk with Christ daily. Continually rejoice in the knowledge of Christ and His salvation. God’s joy is made complete in us as we experience His love in our lives and love others accordingly.

Thought for the Day: Is your joy complete regardless of the circumstances?

Epiphany – Arriving Later but Revealing Much

Day 41

Pastor Conley Hughes, Jr.

January 6, 2012

Read: Matthew 2:1-12

Key Verse: *After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”*

Matthew 2: 1-2

The exact arrival of the group of men known as the Magi, or wise men, is unknown. It was at the very least months (or years) after the birth of the Christ child that these men from Persia (or Arabia) found the Savior. The familiar sight of three men standing besides shepherds on Christmas Day is not literal. What is certain however is that the wise men *were* present, as the Gospel of Matthew accurately points out, “*After Jesus was born...*” The presence of the wise men is essential for an understanding of the Savior’s birth for all believers. The wise men were Gentiles and they help us understand that Christ was (and will be) “revealed,” “made known” to the entire world! There is no disdain recorded in the scriptures for what some assume is a late (or “much later”) arrival of the wise men to Christ’s birth event. All events in the divine order of God occur within their proper time! Paul declares, “But when *the time had fully come*, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights as sons [and daughters].” (Gal. 4:4) Epiphany reminds us that while we should respect time and order, we also must be open to God’s divine schedule. The wise men illustrate the point that the Savior comes to all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female. When I was a freshman in college, I arrived on the campus days after the freshmen orientation program. I missed the events my classmates enjoyed. I had no financial resources and barely made it to the campus. But the unexpected happened! I was elected president of the freshman class after the president had to resign abruptly. I accelerated my studies and graduated in 3 years, instead of four years. I arrived late, but I was a part of God’s order. When we reach the Savior, at *that* moment we become His child! The path to the Savior is always in His time.

Thought: O Lord, guide my life according to Your divine plan!

Expect the Unexpected: An Advent Devotional

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An Offering coordinated by the Christian Education Ministry
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2012 Worship Celebrations

1st Night Watch Service - 6PM
December 31, 2011

Ash Wednesday Worship Service - 7PM
Wednesday, February 22, 2012

Maundy Thursday Worship Service - 7 PM
Thursday, April 5, 2012

Annual Spring Revival - 7 PM
April 23 - 26, 2012

Prayer Breakfast - 9 AM
May 18, 2012

Brother to Brother Retreat
June 15-16, 2012

Men's Day Worship Service - 9:45 AM
June 17, 2012

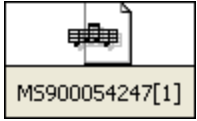
Vacation Bible School - 6 PM
July 9-13, 2012

Fall Rededication Revival - 7 PM
September 17 - 21, 2012

Women's Prayer Conference
October 12-13, 2012

Women's Day Worship Service - 9:45 AM
October 14, 2012

1st Night Watch Service - 8 PM
December 31, 2012



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