

***Advent / Christmas Worship
2021 - 2022***

***Journey Back
to Bethlehem***



***Fern Creek Baptist Church
Louisville, Kentucky***

Advent/Christmas Worship

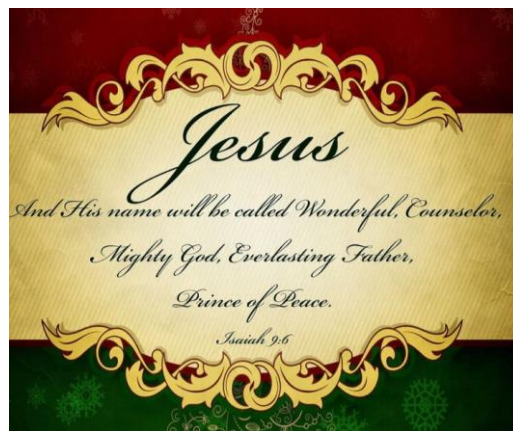
Our theme for this Advent / Christmas season is “*Journey Back to Bethlehem*”. Our devotional booklet consists of our individual journeys with Jesus, how He has carried us through our present unusual journeys, and about Bible characters who journeyed with Jesus or prophesied about His birth. Members and attendees of our church (from youth to senior adults) wrote the devotionals to help us experience the deep meaning of this joyous season. We hope these devotionals will be used as a part of your personal and family worship.

You are encouraged to attend every worship experience during this season. There worship services are listed in this booklet.

Thank you to each who submitted devotionals. Thanks to those of you who typed and compiled the booklet. Thanks to you for accepting this booklet as our Christmas gift to you.

May you all experience the hope, peace, joy, and love found only in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! May you worship Him with gladness as we journey to Bethlehem during this holy season!

Merry Christmas!
Linda Barnes Popham



Church Ministerial Staff

Rev. Linda Barnes Popham, Pastor 239-0316 ext. 103
Rev. Steve Skaggs, Interim Minister of Music 239-0316 ext. 111

Support Staff

Joellen Johnston, Organist 239-0316
Karen Love, Pianist 239-0316
Donna Grimes, Interim Office Coordinator 239-0316 ext. 100
Jodie Towles, Bookkeeper 239-0316 ext. 102
Shereese Caldwell, Director of Facilities 239-0316 ext. 104
Cassie Schitter, Director of Facilities 239-0316 ext. 104

Child Development Center

Terri Bosemer, Child Development Center Director 239-8952 ext. 108

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Louisville, Kentucky 40291
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ADVENT/CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SERVICES

November 28: The First Sunday of Advent

10:45 a.m. – Lighting of the Candle of Hope

6:00 p.m. – “Hanging of the Greens”

December 2

6:00 p.m. – BMDMI Missions Night

December 5: The Second Sunday of Advent

10:45 a.m. – Lighting of the Candle of Peace

6:00 p.m. – Instrumental Christmas

7:00 p.m. – New Members’ Reception

December 12: The Third Sunday of Advent

10:45 a.m. – Lighting of the Candle of Joy

6:00 p.m. – Service of Comfort and Hope

December 14

7:00 p.m. – Child Development Center Christmas Program
(Four-Year-Olds)

December 16

10:30 a.m. – Child Development Center Christmas Program
(Two and Three-Year-Olds)

December 19: The Fourth Sunday of Advent

10:45 a.m. – Lighting of the Candle of Love

6:00 p.m. – “Journey Back to Bethlehem”, a Drive-Through Event: Please enter the driveway on the south side of the property anytime between 6:00 and 8:00 pm. Instructions will be given there.

December 24: Christmas Eve

11:00 a.m. – Christmas Eve Service

Lighting of the Christ Candle

December 26: The First Sunday of Christmas

10:45 a.m. – We Celebrate the Birth of Christ.

Childcare for preschoolers is available during the services.

Most of these worship services are, also, live-streamed. You may view the services by going to our website (www.ferncreekbaptist.org) and clicking the red Worship Livestream button.

ADVENT

The observance of Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas. It is a season of spiritual preparation for the celebration of the coming of Christ. The word Advent means “arrival” or “coming”.

Christ *has come* into our world;
Christ *is coming* into our lives;
Christ *will come* again!

For the Christian, Advent is a season of celebration. Our celebration should lead to both an inward and outward sense of rejoicing as we commemorate the birth of Jesus for us, His birth in us, and His final coming in glory.

May you all experience the true spirit of this holy season! May you worship, pray, and live expectantly in preparation for the coming of Christ! Jesus Christ *has come!* Jesus Christ *is coming!* Jesus Christ *will come again!*

CHRISTMAS

The Christmas season is a time to celebrate, to give thanks, and to praise God for being present with us in Jesus Christ. The name was derived from the first service of the season, Christ Mass. Jesus’ birth was celebrated on December 25 in Rome sometime between 336 and 354 A.D. A pagan winter solstice festival, the birthday of the unconquered sun, was already celebrated on December 25. Christians adopted that date to celebrate the birth of the Son of God, the Sun of Righteousness.



EPIPHANY

Christmas continues to Epiphany Day, January 6. Epiphany is the celebration of the Wise Men’s visit and the manifestation of Christ to the world.

THE CHRISMON TREE

During our annual Hanging of the Greens worship service we will again decorate the tree with Chrismons made by members of our church family. The word Chrismon is a combination of parts of two words: Christ and monogram. A Chrismon is just that, a monogram or symbol of Christ.

Christian symbols date back to the early church and were found in various places. Early Christians used them to identify themselves to one another, to designate meeting places of the church, and occasionally to show non-believers where they stood. Most importantly, these symbols served to transmit the faith and belief of the followers of Jesus Christ. Today we have added other symbols as new explanations of God's never-changing presence in our ever-changing world. Some of our Chrismons are combinations of both old and new elements.

Chrismons were originated by Frances K. Spencer in 1957 and were used to decorate a tree for the Lutheran Church of the Ascension in Danville, Virginia. Chrismons are made in combinations of white and gold. White is symbolic of our Lord's purity and perfection; gold is symbolic of His majesty, glory, and triumph. As you see the tree this holy season, may you realize anew the beauty, power, and purity of our Christian faith!



Sunday, November 28, 2021

JOURNEY BACK TO BETHLEHEM - HOPE

Our theme this year reminds us to think back to the events so long ago in Bethlehem, with hope.

“She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger - there was no room for them to stay in the inn.” (Luke 2:7)

Mary must have hoped all would work out, as she trusted God. We should reflect on those events and how they relate to us.

“That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.” (Psalm 78:7)

We must continue to remember that the story only started in Bethlehem.

“The child grew and became strong; he was full of wisdom and God's blessings were upon him.” (Luke 2:40)

In the following years, Jesus taught, healed, led the disciples to teach, performed miracles and spread the message from God throughout the land, but He paid a price. He was put on a cross to die like a common criminal. Then He rose from the dead.

“This hope does not disappoint us, for God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to us.” (Romans 5:5)

There was hope those many years ago for One who would be born as a Savior. There is hope today for an eternal life.

“For God loved the world so much he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

And there is hope for tomorrow. We hope for many things in our worldly life, but we have assurance for our eternal life.

“To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for and to be certain of things we cannot see.” (Hebrews 11:1)

Glenda Coddington



Monday, November 29, 2021

HOPE

“But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.” Isaiah 40:31

My world had become a continuous cycle of chaos and despair...A constant quest for drugs and other physical pleasures. I was running a race with the devil and he was beating me into submission. All the while on the outside I was trying to live the perfect life that people expected of me. It was a life of hopelessness and constant sorrow.

Then, by the grace of God, I was led to a place of hope...A place where I could let things go and sit still and break the cycle. There is hope in the Lord! He does renew your body and your spirit. Like the song says, *“He will lift you up to walk on stormy seas.”*

Thanks to the hope that the Lord provides, I have been clean and sober for two years now. Each day is filled with new observations and new challenges.

I pray that everyone who reads this does know or will come to know hope in the Lord. And in doing so can live in His eternal grace.

Joe Curry



Tuesday, November 30, 2021

HOPE

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6

Isaiah foretold many different things about the coming of Jesus. He even talked about the coming of His cousin John. Isaiah gave us hope about the coming Messiah and the future He would give us.

Let’s start by looking at the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14: *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”* This was then fulfilled in Luke 1:35: *“The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come on you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to born will be called the Son of God.’”*

There is a prophecy that Jesus would draw the Gentiles to Himself: *“In the day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the people; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.”* (Isaiah 11:10) We see the fulfillment in John 12... *“Look how the whole world has gone after him!”*

Isaiah 35:5-6 and Matthew 11:2-6 tell of the prophecy and fulfillment of Jesus’ miraculous ministry.

John the Baptist was foretold about in Isaiah 40:3-4: *“A voice of one calling: In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord”*...and then it came to pass in John 1:23: John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, *“I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”*

Isaiah also tells us in chapter 42 that Jesus will be a gentle redeemer of the Gentiles and then Matthew 12 fulfills that prophecy. Isaiah 61 and Luke 4 tell how Jesus will set the captives free.

God allowed Isaiah to tell the Israelites what was going to happen because none of them would see the day that it did. But it allowed them to have the hope for the future of the coming Messiah, the chosen one that would give hope for all future generations. He also allowed us to see His divine plan retroactively. We see where it was predicted and then carried out just as He said. It showed His faithfulness and sovereignty for the salvation of the earth. He brought hope in such a small package – in the birth of a baby boy – who would grow up to die for the sins of the world.

Melissa Logsdon-Young



HOPE

What is hope?
What is hope?
How do you define hope?

Hope is an overly used word; we either say, “I hope”, or we think to ourselves, “I hope”. Example of usage: “I hope they get home safely” or “I hope I have enough money left to pay rent”.

Hope seems to be a word we can use safely without thinking of repercussion from others. Let’s face it; everyone has hope. If it works, it works, if it doesn’t, oh well.

Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary defines hope as – *a desire accompanied by expectations of or belief in fulfilment*. I find this kind of hope only in one place.

Hebrews 11:1

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Faith is the substance of your salvation. The unsaved don’t have this. They just have worldly hope.

Hebrews 4:2

“For indeed the gospel was preached to us as to them, but the word they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who have heard.” The unsaved world does not have faith mixed with their hope. That’s why in Hebrews 1, you read the word “now”. You are now. When you pray, you know God is, and He hears you and loves you. God is looking for faith. Your faith overcomes the world.

I John 5:4

“For whatsoever is borne of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” Faith is the substance of hope. God demands faith of us.

Hebrews 11:6

“But without faith it is impossible to please him.” Don’t think you don’t have faith.

Romans 12:3

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God had dealt to each one a measure of faith.” Your hope seeded with your faith will bring results in your life. The faith you have is a gift of God, so use it!

Leon Taylor



Thursday, December 2, 2021

HOPE

It is very difficult for me to separate hope from faith. To me they go hand in hand. You just can't have the hope the Bible speaks of without faith in God. Sure, you can hope for a lot of "things" that will only give you temporary pleasure, but you have to have true faith if you want to experience the true peace from the kind of hope that only our Lord can and wants to provide. Literally, I cannot imagine getting through a day without having hope in Christ because of the many challenges we face every day in this fallen world of ours. The following are just a few scriptures about hope and faith I lean on and I cannot explain it any better than the Living Word:

Romans 5:2-5 NIV

"Through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

Romans 12:12 NIV

"Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."

Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Joshua 1:9 NLT

"This is my command- be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Proverbs 3:5-6 NLT

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."

Romans 15: 13 NLT

"I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit."

My prayer for each of you is that as you read these living scriptures, the Lord would speak to you and provide to you whatever you may need.

Many Blessings,
Danny Hass



HOPE FOR YOU

“We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, hope.” (Heb. 6:19a)

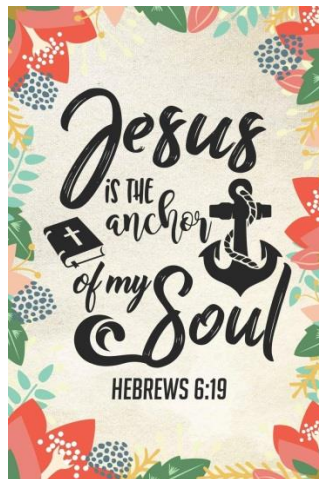
Imagine a ship being battered by a powerful wind, tossed by strong waves. Picture in your mind an anchor underneath grounded on the ocean floor. Anchor stabilizes the ship and keeps it in place. It prevents shipwreck or running aground. Despite the violent movements created by the waves, there is hope for this marine vessel to weather the storm because of the tiny anchor underneath it.

Now imagine you are that ship caught in the storm of life. Anything that can go wrong did go wrong: your plans did not materialize, your health is failing, your marriage is on the rocks, your children have nothing to do with you, your career is floundering, and age is catching up quickly on you. Your boat is powerless against the storm. The wind and the waves beat you mercilessly. But you have hope. You hope that tomorrow will be better, that you will find solutions to your problems, a cure to your disease, that you will find grace in aging. It is true that having hope does not change your circumstances in life, what changes is your outlook. And if outlook determines the outcome, then surely things will get better tomorrow or the following day or the next. You will emerge triumphant, a better person.

We Christians do not put our hope on hope; we put our hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord gives substance, meaning, and assurance to this hope. It is not wishful thinking or avoidance of reality. It is standing firm on solid ground courageously facing reality. Since Jesus never fails, then hope will see us through the storm.

*Christ, the sure and steady anchor
Through the floods of unbelief;
Hopeless somehow, O my soul.
Now lift your eyes to Calvary.
This my ballast of assurance;
See His love forever proved;
I will hold fast to the anchor;
It shall never be removed.¹*

George Payocong



¹ Matt Boswell and Matt Papa, Christ the Sure and Steady Anchor

Saturday, December 4, 2021

HOPE--THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS GIFT

Through the years I have shared the stories of my childhood with the children in my life: my nieces and nephews, our son, and now, our granddaughter. I tell them like fairy tales except every word is true! Here is one of my children's stories that illustrates the hope we find in the birth of Christ.

Once upon a time there was a family with four children that lived on a farm with their mother and father.

The oldest girl's name was Carolyn. She had long brown hair.

The next girl's name was Marilyn. She had long red hair.

Then, there was a really cute little girl named Shirley followed by a little-bitty boy named Larry.

It was just weeks before Christmas and Mother asked the children to come into the living room and sit on the dark blue velvet couch. She asked the children what they wanted Santa Claus to bring them for Christmas.

Shirley was so excited! She wanted to go first because she knew exactly what she wanted. It was going to be the perfect Christmas gift. Before any of the other children could answer Mother, Shirley jumped up from the couch and said she wanted an ironing board with a pink cover and an iron so she could iron her baby doll clothes. Her mother smiled softly and told her that that would be a very nice gift. But Mother thought Shirley would have to stop sucking her thumb to receive a gift that nice.

The other children took their turn telling their mother what they wanted Santa to bring them for Christmas, but Shirley did not even listen to them. She was too excited and worried about how hard it was going to be to stop sucking her thumb. After all, she loved her thumb. It made her feel good to suck her thumb when she was sad, scared, or feeling shy.

All the children finished telling their mother what they wanted for Christmas. Shirley, still deep in thought, announced that she could do it. She would stop sucking her thumb!

Mother told Shirley that she had an idea to help her. She reached in her pocket and pulled out a Band-Aid.

The children played in the house all afternoon and had so much fun. Shirley was getting tired and sleepy. She sat down, pulled off the Band-Aid, and started sucking her thumb.

Little Larry saw Shirley sucking her thumb. He couldn't wait to tell on her so he ran to the kitchen to find the mother.

Mother called Shirley into the kitchen. She reminded her that she would have to stop sucking her thumb if she wanted the iron and ironing board. Shirley told her that she knew she would have to stop, but that it was going to be hard. She loved her thumb! Shirley reminded mother that it needed to have a pink ironing board cover too.

Mother told Shirley that she had another idea that might help her stop sucking her thumb. She opened the kitchen cabinet and pulled out some pepper to rub on Shirley's thumb. Shirley knew that the pepper would taste really bad.

For the next several days Mother would put pepper on Shirley's thumb. The pepper worked! Shirley did stop sucking her thumb! She was so happy. It made her feel like she was growing up!

Christmas Eve night finally came and all four of the children slept in the same bed. They talked about what they hoped to receive for Christmas before they went to sleep. Shirley could not listen to the others talking. She just kept thinking about the iron and the ironing board with the pink cover that she had asked for.

The children all woke up very early the next morning and ran into the living room to see what Santa had brought them. Shirley was so excited to see the iron and the ironing board with the pink cover underneath the cedar Christmas tree. She marveled at it for a few minutes and then ran to get her baby doll clothes so that she could iron them.

Shirley plugged in the iron and it worked just like she had hoped. She had so much fun ironing her baby doll clothes.

After the children had played with their toys for a while Mother and Father called them into the kitchen for a big Christmas breakfast. They talked excitedly as they ate and couldn't wait to finish so that they could play some more.

All of a sudden, Shirley jumped up from the table and ran into the living room. She touched the iron with her finger. The iron was cold! Shirley had left her iron plugged in and it had quit working.

Shirley was so sad. She cried and cried. Her mother came into the living room. She picked Shirley up and hugged her. Shirley told her mother that it was not fair that the iron had torn up. After all, she had stopped sucking her thumb. The iron was the perfect gift!

*Mother reminded Shirley that she was so proud of her. After all, she **had** stopped sucking her thumb! She told Shirley that she could still play with the iron and ironing board with the pink cover. But it really was not safe for the iron to work like a real iron anyway.*

Mother wiped the tears from Shirley's face and told her that she could not receive a gift that would not tear up or that she would not get tired of. Baby Jesus was the only perfect gift. That Gift would last forever!

Mother's encouragement helped Shirley feel better. The children continued to play with their Christmas toys and they all lived happily ever-after.

The end.

This story reminds us that life, from childhood on, has its ups and downs. We experience great victories at times and, at other times, devastating disappointment. But God wants us to put our hope in Him! Isaiah 9:6-7 is a hopeful passage that prophesied how, through the coming of Christ, God would establish justice and righteousness that would last forever. Paul wrote, "*And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*" (Romans 5:5)

More than hoping and wishing for the "perfect" Christmas gift under our tree, we can have faith in the hope that we have in Christ Jesus. "*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*" (II Corinthians 9:15)

Shirley Skaggs

Sunday, December 5, 2021

PEACE

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:26-27

It can seem very difficult to find peace in today’s world. There seems to be so much anger, selfishness, greed, so many things seem to divide us as a people. It’s easy to get swept up in the many tasks to be completed as the holidays approach. It becomes more and more difficult to find joy in the holiday season as we rush and plan and worry. It can be harder and harder to spend time in prayer, or studying God’s Word. The more we feel stress in our lives the less we experience peace or joy. We begin to worry about all the problems we may be facing. We think that everything is up to us and there seems to be no way to accomplish all that must be done.

In the stillness of the night when we are alone with our thoughts Jesus calls to us. Jesus told us that the Father would send the Holy Spirit to be our Comforter and Counselor. He tells us that He gives us peace, not as the world gives, but His own peace He gives to us. If we have come to know Him as our personal Lord and Savior there is nothing we will ever face alone again. We can give Him our cares and our worries and know that He loves more than anyone else ever could.

Jesus willingly gave His life so that each of us can receive forgiveness for our sins and know we will spend eternity in Heaven with Him. In believing Jesus is God’s Son, that He lived on earth and was crucified for my sin, and that He died and arose again on the third day, He became my Savior forever and nothing can ever change that. There is peace in knowing that no matter what might happen He is with me. He loves and comforts me and I never need to fear being alone. There may be many trials to face, but I will never face them alone.

As the holiday season approaches I pray we will focus on the true meaning of Christmas. Do you know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior? Does your heart know the joy and the peace that only our Lord can give? If you have never asked Jesus to come into your heart and forgive you of your sins I pray you will do that today. It is so simple. Jesus loves us just the way we are. We can’t buy or earn salvation and He doesn’t expect us to be better than what we are at this moment. He asks only that we give Him our heart and believe He is the living Son of God and that He gave His life for forgiveness of sin. He died on Calvary’s cross and arose after three days overcoming death. No matter what happens in this world we can know the peace that only God can give. We can know we are safe in His love forever.

Nancy Shewmaker



Monday, December 6, 2021

PEACE
(I Peter 5:14)

Wish you peace...
Pray for peace...
May peace bring you comfort...
Peace...

We wish each other peace. We use this as a greeting and a farewell. But what does it really mean? The simple answer is: without conflict.

But peace is more than that.

We can have relationships without outward conflict, everything appears calm on the surface, but under the surface are many problems and disagreements. How do we get rid of these conflicts and truly have peace?

For me that was accepting Christ as my Savior.

I was raised in a Christian home, with godly parents. I had parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles who were concerned that I would accept Christ and live for God. They talked with me and prayed for me by name. At church I had Sunday School teachers, Vacation Bibles School workers, and others with that same desire.

One year at VBS, my cousin Berneda accepted Christ. She wanted me to do the same and couldn't understand why I did not. "You know you love Jesus and believe Jesus is the Son of God." She was right. I had known the story of Jesus' birth, His life on earth, His crucifixion and resurrection practically since birth.

But the story was too familiar, too easy, until one Sunday during our spring revival, the Holy Spirit wouldn't let me go. The evangelist preached and I held on to the pew and cried. I knew what I needed to do, but was not willing to give up control of my life even to God. It was necessary for me to let go, give God control of my life, and truly say and mean "not my will but Thine."

At that point, a heavy load was lifted from my shoulders and peace entered my life. A peace that whatever happened, whatever problems arose, I would never again be alone! I HAD A SAVIOR WHO WOULD ALWAYS BE WITH ME! PEACE!

Carolyn Simpson

Scriptures used: II Peter 1:2, Romans 15:33, Romans. 1:7, I Corinthians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Genesis 43:23, Philippians 4:7, John 16:33, Isaiah 32:17



Tuesday, December 7, 2021

PEACE ON EARTH

*“And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6*

American poet and educator, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, sat at his writing desk in 1863 discouraged and disheartened. He was 57 years old and a widower with five children. He was still grieving the loss of his beloved wife, Fannie, who had died in a fire three years earlier. To add his sorrow, his oldest son, Charles, was recovering at home from a wound he had received fighting for the Union in the Civil War.

It was Christmas Day, and in a sad and melancholy mood Longfellow took up his pen to write. The poem he started was only beginning to take shape when from outside his window he heard the bells from a Church nearby. His mood changed dramatically and the poem which began in despair ended with hope.

Longfellow called the poem he wrote “Christmas Bells”. In 1872 an English organist set the poem to music and the song, now a carol, appears in our Baptist Hymnal under the title “*I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*”.

The poem Longfellow wrote contained seven verses. We only sing five of those verses, but they are enough to communicate the insight Longfellow had so long ago. Longfellow realized that no matter how bleak things are, God is with us. Christmas celebrates that fact, and because, in Jesus, God truly is with us, we can be certain there really will be peace on earth someday.

*I heard the bells on Christmas day,
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

Karen Purnell



PEACE

What is peace and why is it so hard to find? The world is in turmoil right now and most people are having a hard time grabbing hold of the elusive peace.

I had a hard time finding the perfect topic to write on, so I decided to make a list of people who need to be covered in the prayers for peace. I hope you will join me as I commit to pray for these people throughout the month of December.

1. Peace for those who have lost loved ones and are feeling sad through the holiday season.
2. Peace for those who have ones who are sick and they are caring for them.
3. Peace for those who are sick and going through treatments, surgeries, or medical procedures.
4. Peace for those who have been affected by Covid-19.
5. Peace for those who have “long-hauler” symptoms from Covid-19 and for the children who have long term medical problems due to multi-system organ syndrome from the virus.
6. Peace for those who lost jobs, finances, or homes as a result of Covid-19.
7. Peace for the children who have lost parents to Covid-19 and to the parents who have lost children.
8. Peace for those who are in fear of leaving their homes due to Covid-19.
9. Peace to our country in a time where we are so divided.
10. Peace to those whose families are in crisis due to divorce or marital unrest.
11. Peace to those who suffer from anxiety or depression.
12. Peace to those who suffer from addictions and the strength to hold them at bay.
13. Peace to those who are victims of domestic abuse and fear they have nowhere to turn.
14. Peace to our homeless communities and to those who are supporting them.
15. Peace to our healthcare workers and first responders.
16. Peace to our president, governor, and all those in public service.
17. Peace to our school teachers.
18. Peace to our pastors and spiritual leaders.

I could go on and on, but you get the idea.

John 14:27 says, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”*

God’s desire is for us to find peace in Him. Let us be instruments of peace, helping, encouraging, and praying for others to find it.

My prayer is for all of you to have a blessed and peace-filled holiday season.

Martha Blansette



Thursday, December 9, 2021

PEACE

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:27

2021 has brought much anxiety to the world. People seem to have lost control. The world is volatile and running amuck. There is road rage, an overwhelming number of murders, and even anger toward the elderly. I have been a victim of this. Verbally attacked by a young man in a Walmart parking lot and I still don't know why, other than I was driving too slowly to suit him! I would have witnessed to him, but he would not let me speak. I have prayed for him several times. Asking God to forgive him and come into his heart. I wonder about him a lot. A beautiful young man but full of anger and venom! I wonder if he has a mother and grandmother praying for him like my grandsons do? I doubt it, because my grandsons would never speak to the elderly like he did to me.

I pray over my grandsons and granddaughters almost every day. I also pray for the young man that attacked me. God wants us to talk to Him about everything. He wants to be involved in our lives and remove the anxiety and stress we carry. Many situations seem hopeless to us but are not. I've turned to God many times about things that seem hopeless and that I can't seem to find a solution. But God did. He heard me and answered in an amazing way. He gave me peace. The peace that only He can give!

My journey in life has proved there are no hopeless situations and nothing is impossible through Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Just talk to Him and ask Him for help in all you do. He will give you peace. That's what He wants. You have a friend in Jesus.

I will continue to pray for the young man that attacked me. He would be shocked, I'm sure, if he knew he was the inspiration for a devotional. Maybe he and I will meet in Heaven. Who knows; God is amazing. May He give you peace!

Pray
Endlessly
Always
Considering
Eternity

Finally, *“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.” Numbers 6: 24-26*

Sharon Thompson

Peace on Earth 
GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN

PEACE

Peace like a river, peace like a river in my soul...

What do you think of when you think of peace?

I think of a pasture with a river flowing through it, with the sun glinting on the water as it flows over the rocks, birds singing, and a blanket, a book, and me.

But my life is not made up of calm pastures.

Instead it is like being nibbled to death by ducks.

Can you...

Will you...

You can do this...

You have time...

Little ducks nibbling away at my life, my time, my energy, my prayer life, my reflection time, my alone time with God.

But, I still find PEACE!

How?

I find peace in having a personal relationship with God.

I know that He is with me.

He will never leave me.

He provides for my needs.

He LOVES me!

Because of this I have found peace in the midst of turmoil.

I have found peace in a traffic jam,
when my life feels as if it is falling apart,
while sitting by a loved one who is dying.

I have peace because I have the security of knowing that whatever happens, I am safe in the hands of God.

"I have told you all this, so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." John 16:33

"And this righteousness will bring peace. Yes, it will bring quietness and confidence forever." Isaiah 32:17

Carolyn Simpson



Saturday, December 11, 2021

PEACE

This time of year, we are greeted with Christmas songs and feelings of joy as we spread the good news of Christ's birth. For many, this time of year, the journey to Bethlehem is a wonderful time to remember all that God has done for us in our lives and for just as many, this time can be a time of peace. However, I want to talk about peace from another sense. To me, peace isn't just a feeling of "mutual harmony" or "freedom of the mind" as dictionary.com would explain; it is more than just a feeling that comes and goes as we surpass the hardships of life.

My life has been anything but peaceful for the past couple of years as many others can claim the same. The year 2020 is one for the books with a global pandemic in which many of us lost loved ones, jobs, relationships, and much more. This year has also been full of hardships – even the moments that we think should be joyous like graduating from school, getting married, or finding a new job or career. We tend to even amid such great things feel that we have no peace, that we are rushing everywhere we go, and that we are always pushing through life to get to the next best thing. I personally, have and continue to struggle to find peace when it seems all around me things just aren't going the way I have planned them; and I would imagine this is probably how young Joseph felt seeing his betrothed pregnant. How could he have peace when his whole plan, his whole life has been turned upside down? However, when we look at the story of Joseph and Mary, he was able to push forward and find peace not in his situation, but in God's plan for his life. Peace doesn't come from earthly plans and the situations we find ourselves in, but from the spirit of God. Joshua 1:9 states *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."* 1 Peter 5:6-7 also says, *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."*

Much like Joseph, I have had my fair share of being very frightened and afraid that my life plans weren't going to go MY way. I have felt many times not at PEACE with myself and with God, but God hasn't abandoned us. He encourages and commands us to be strong, but also tells us to give all our anxieties to Him. Peace can only be found through God, so this Christmas and holiday season I challenge you to humble yourselves and see that God's plan, no matter how different from yours it may be, is one where He cares for you and can give you peace.

Jacob Hass



JESUS IS OUR JOY

“The angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.’” Luke 2:10

Today we are living in a pandemic not only of a deadly virus, but a pandemic of violence, incivility, anger, and polarization. It can be difficult to be joyful, but is it impossible? My answer to that dilemma is no, it is not impossible.

The angel who announced good news of great joy to the shepherds was speaking of the birth of Jesus. The great joy was Jesus Christ Himself.

Jesus didn’t “promise us a rose garden.” But, He did promise that He would always be with us. Our joy doesn’t “just happen,” it is intentional. Joy is deeper than happiness, which usually is dependent on externals.

Jesus said, *“I have told you these things so that joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”* John 15:11

When we trust Christ our Savior, we have true joy. When others see true joy in us it can be contagious and that offers an opportunity to tell them about how He can change one’s life, how He changed **your** life. As we grow in Christ our joy increases, not because our circumstances are any better, but because our relationship with God strengthens.

“The joy of the Lord is your strength.” Nehemiah 8:10

When you’re facing troubles, turn your focus on Jesus. He is our joy.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13

Norma Routt



Monday, December 13, 2021

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

*“The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness
and the darkness couldn’t put it out.” John 1:5 MSG*

I have always thought I didn’t have a testimony, but maybe I do. It’s a strange testimony, though, and the details would be so alarming that it’s best I not share much of it. I’ve wondered who it could possibly help, too, but in case it might be of use to someone, here’s what I can say without saying too much.

There was never a time in my life when I didn’t know God. I met Him one afternoon when I was about five years old while I was playing in the backyard. He took me to a place outside the gates of heaven and from that time on, He had my heart. There was, and is, nothing and no one like Him, and nothing I could say about how majestic, powerful and good He is would ever do Him justice.

God told me in the weeks after I met Him what I needed to do to survive eight more years of the abuse I had been experiencing since shortly after I was born. I did what I was told, clinging to God like a tree growing out of a rock. I was baptized at nine, God having become the reference point for my life, and because of His worth I kept reaching for Him in every way I knew how to reach, but more like a drowning man than a dedicated saint.

I met Jesus when I was thirty, finally realized I was a sinner and agreed to have the anguish I carried around inside me healed. As I healed my suffering intensified (because there is no way to heal from what I had endured without revisiting the pain). Eventually I discovered that what I had survived by His grace had so crippled me mentally and emotionally that I would probably never be right until I see Him again face to face.

In spite of the mild internal distress I still feel most of the time, however, I have experienced great joy in Jesus. And God has brought me enough healing over the course of the last four decades, both directly and through other people, that now I wake up and go to sleep more grateful than afraid.

I have not always been faithful to do what I know to be good and right. When I was seventeen I even refused to speak to God for over a year because He wouldn’t make the anguish in my soul go away. But I never stopped wanting Him, and I hope I never will.

I figure I am still here --- alive and sane in spite of what happened to me --- because I matter to God. You matter, too. And if I may make a suggestion: trust Him with what hurts you and let Him begin to heal your heart, because being made whole is as much a part of what it means to be saved as being forgiven.

Karen Purnell



JOY

When I think about the word “Joy”, I immediately think of singing. I don’t know if it’s because of how I feel when I sing, or what is the reason. But “Joy” is one of my favorite words. It’s kind of an old-fashioned word. It’s not used much in conversation any more. People usually use words like “awesome, cool, terrific” to describe feelings instead of joy or joyful. I know of several songs that use words like joy, joyful, or rejoice. ‘Good Christian Men, Rejoice!’, ‘Joy to the World!’, ‘Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee’ are three hymns that immediately come to mind. They all refer to how we should feel and act when talking about and worshipping Jesus. There’s another song that comes to my mind, ‘I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy Down in My Heart!’ It describes how I feel whenever I sing that song; especially when we sing it in Spanish in Honduras on our mission trips. When everyone is gathered around and we sing as a group, it gives me a huge lift.

Now you’re probably wondering what this has to do with Advent. I can only imagine how those shepherds out in the fields felt when the heavenly host of angels appeared to them. Can you see it? There they were, minding their own business and their sheep; when, out of nowhere, *“an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 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. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’”* I don’t know about you, but I would have loved to have been there to hear that heavenly choir and be a part of it! They were worshipping Jesus in one of the purest ways we can. Singing is one of the best ways we can worship.

During Advent, as we prepare for our Savior’s birth, join in and sing. Whether you’re in the choir, in a pew, in your car, at home, or in the shower, *“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all ye lands!”*

Reference – Luke 2, Psalm 100

Lesley Hass



Wednesday, December 15, 2021

JOY TO THE WORLD

*“Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth;
Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises.” Psalm 98:4*

Sir Issac Watts was an English clergyman and poet frustrated with the music being sung in the churches of his day. There was no joy in it, no energy, no enthusiasm for the things of God. The apparent lack of what he called “fervency” on the part of the people in his congregation when they were singing really distressed him.

When he expressed his frustration to his father, his father suggested he do something about the situation. Isaac did. He wrote and published a book in 1719 that paraphrased many of the Psalms ordinarily sung in worship, Psalm 98 being one of them.

Sir Isaac understood the second half of Psalm 98 to be about Jesus’ second coming. He believed it would be then that heaven and earth would shout for joy. It would be then that Jesus would be received as King, the sorrows that plagued the world would vanish and the wonder of the love with which God loves His children would be evident to all.

Some of those phrases might sound familiar, and if they do, it’s because they are from Sir Isaac’s paraphrase, which we know as the text of the familiar Christmas carol, “Joy to the World”. There is no reference in the song to the birth of Jesus; therefore, we might wonder why we sing it at Christmas.

I think we sing it because Jesus’ second coming completes His first coming, making it “the rest of the story”. You see, the story of Jesus only begins with his birth in a stable. Where it ends is with His return. The same angels who sang at His birth will be with Him when He comes back because the King He will show Himself to be then, is the same King He actually was when He was born.

During the time between the first and second comings, however, we who love Him struggle with loss and injustice. But as Paul says in Romans 8:18ff that *“the struggles we are experiencing now are like the struggles of a pregnant woman who groans because something new and wonderful is about to happen.”* The King who came once will come again and this time all wrongs will be made right and all our sorrows ended.

The story that begins with Christmas isn’t over. Instead, it’s still unfolding with more yet to come. What has already happened in Jesus, however, guarantees what lies ahead, which is God’s glory fully revealed. How appropriate, then, that we sing about the joys of the last days when we remember the day Jesus first came to us.

Karen Purnell



EXPRESSIONS OF JOY IN OUR CHRISTMAS SONGS AND HYMNS

*The first Nowell the angel did say,
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,*

*On a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.*

The word “Nowell” used in the traditional English carol quoted above is Anglicized from the French word Noël which roughly means Christmas or the singing of a Christmas carol. So, to paraphrase in prose the opening line of this familiar carol, we might say: “The first carol the angel did sing was a comforting and even joyous song with the message about the birth of the Christ.” The following is a true story told to me by an older member at a church I served decades ago. It tells how music, specifically Christmas carols, enhanced the joy in his home as he was growing up.

Benny's mom was raising turkeys on the small family farm near Lebanon, Kentucky. The effects of the Great Depression were at its worst for this young rural family. Christmas was coming, but more importantly, winter was on the way. Summer and fresh garden vegetables were a fading memory; soon snow would be blowing through the cracks of their rustic house. The sale of turkeys during the Holiday Season meant the family would have a small amount of money to help them face the uncertainties of a potentially harsh winter.

As the days shortened, the family gathered each evening for a meal that always included milk from their old milk cow and cornbread made from meal ground from the corn crop they had raised during the summer. Beans were a delicacy; meat, a rarity. But the children never really went hungry nor did they lack for love. Their mom's sunny disposition shone through in the hymns she would sing as she worked around the house.

Finally, the turkeys were ready for market. Their sale yielded all of \$125! [That was an enormous sum during the depression.] Benny's mom proudly brought the check to her husband for the family coffers, but he refused to accept it. He knew she had hoped to one day purchase a piano she had seen in the Sears & Roebuck catalog. At his insistence, she purchased the piano for \$100 and contributed the remaining \$25 for family necessities. Each evening during that Holiday Season and on through the harsh winter, the family sat down to a simple meal seasoned with the joyous music their mother made with her new piano.

Benny still lives near the family farm. And he will always cherish the lesson of love he learned when, one Christmas, his father insisted that his mother's affection for music and the joy it would bring to their home--even during those hard times--was as important as anything.

The shepherds who were “abiding in the fields” near Bethlehem were living a hard life. No doubt they were underappreciated, perhaps even scorned, by certain people in their culture. Yet God chose to bring His announcement of “good tidings of great joy” to these everyday people. The joy the “heavenly host” sang about was contagious so they rushed into the small town to see “this thing which has come to pass,” then, they hastily “made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.”

The joy expressed by Benny's mother as she played and sang Christmas carols infected the whole family as did the angels' song to the shepherds. May our joy for the Good News similarly joyously echo the message of “peace, and good will toward men” during the Advent and Christmas season.

Gloria in excelsis Deo! [Glory to God in the highest!]
Steve Skaggs

Friday, December 17, 2021

PSALM 30: THE JOURNEY OF JOY

This psalm is filled with joyful words: *rejoicing, healing, favor, praise, dancing, sing, joy, thanks...* I like those words! Don't you? But, what about those other words that the psalmist spoke? Words like: *enemies, grave, pit, anger, weeping, dismayed, cried, destruction, wailing, sackcloth...* Those are certainly anything but joyful words! However, even in the midst of dealing with such difficulties, the psalmist had the assurance that his journey through the dark night would lead to the light of morning.

When the sun sets and darkness takes over the sky, nine to fourteen hours later (according to the season) the sun starts to rise again. The sunshine erases the darkness from the sky and ushers in the morning. The psalmist praised God for joyful mornings because he had experienced some weeping nights. What causes you to weep? What is it that brings you distress and grief? What causes you mental anguish, emotional distress, or physical pain? What causes you to be anxious or worried? What causes you to fret and be a bundle of nerves? What makes you lie awake at night?

For some of you the weeping nights may be about the death of a loved one, the diagnosis of cancer, the state of unemployment, the news of new viruses, the record-breaking statistics of homicides, a broken relationship with someone you love, that sin with which you have been struggling, the addiction which has a tight hold on you, the memory of abuse, the pain of persecution, the heartbreak of betrayal, that situation over which you have no control, the tension and unrest which seem to surround us, or the family member or friend who needs to know Jesus as Savior. When we allow God to be in control of our weeping nights, we will be able to see the joy that is coming in the morning.

Genesis 1:5 says: "*God called the light 'day', and the darkness he called 'night'. And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day.*" Evening came first. It is only after we experience the evenings – the nights – the darkness – that we can truly understand the mornings – the light. Our congregation has certainly experienced a plethora of weeping nights; we are so grateful for the joy of new mornings.

Whatever your weeping nights are about, God knows all about them. Give them to Him. The longer you focus on the nights and the darkness, the farther you remain from the joy of morning. God will lead you to the light of morning. He will lead you to joy.

We remember that Jesus told us (John 10:10b): "*I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*" Jesus truly wants us to have that life on this earth. But we know that the ultimate joy comes when we as Christians meet Jesus face to face in heaven. What a day of rejoicing that will be! We will be rejoicing throughout all eternity!

I am grateful that whatever we face on this earth is temporary. We have questions and not always all of the answers. We may never be able to explain the twists and turns and ups and downs of this life or why we deal with such difficulties on this earth. But, we know that God is faithful and will carry us through anything we face on this earth. Warren Wiersbe once said, "*Every difficult experience of life is an opportunity to have a 'pity party' or attend a rehearsal for singing in the choirs of heaven. We have a lifetime of grace to prepare us for an eternity of glory.*"

God's desire is that we journey through this life in joy! May your journey on this earth be a journey of joy in spite of whatever circumstances you may face! "*...Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.*" Psalm 30:5b

Joy to You!

Linda Barnes Popham

Saturday, December 18, 2021

THE LORD'S SERVANT

"I am the Lord's servant." Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her. Luke 1:38 NIV

What a major shift in Mary's life journey! Mary, the mother of Jesus, was raised in the Jewish tradition of hearing and knowing scripture, believing, and trusting in God. Mary was on the path of most women of her day to marriage and motherhood. She was prepared for this path - learning skills to run a household, engaged to a carpenter. Then, an angel of the Lord appeared before her and changed her journey: Mary, a virgin, had found "favor with God" and would bring the Savior of mankind into the world. Mary praised God: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 7:46 NIV). Her faith would sustain her as she raised her son, as she watched Him *grow* "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52 NIV), as she heard Him preach, heal and perform miracles, as He was crucified. So she experienced the love, peace, joy, and hope that believing in Jesus Christ brings to us. This was God's plan for her.

God has a plan for everyone. It took me most of my life to get on a path that led me to God's love, peace, joy, and hope. I was raised by good people, but they never spoke of personal relationships with Jesus. The earliest memory of attending church with my parents is being spanked when we got home for acting badly during the service. As a teenager, I argued with the Sunday School teacher about the Creation story; I thought some of the Bible stories were allegories of the culture of the time. My visits to churches were dates - definitely, not worship. My personal plan was a career, marriage, and eventually children. The first time my plan failed me was when I became anxious about my pregnancy. I prayed. Jesus came to me in a dream; He told me all would be well. We joined a Baptist church, sent our daughter to a Christian school and got baptized, but this was still *my* plan. I cried almost every time I went to a worship service. I read the Bible sometimes. I thought maybe a different church would give me peace of mind. After visiting several different churches, I finally got the message in one of them. I felt an overwhelming need to profess my faith that Jesus Christ is *my* Lord and Savior. God put "good" people in our path - members, teachers, deacons, and pastor. Reading the Bible everyday made me realize that "All scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16a). When I became frustrated with not being able to understand on my own what some Scripture was saying, I prayed that He would send me a sign that I was making progress as I searched for Him. He did! When a crisis in the family occurred, we prayed and prayed. He sent help and hope. We have peace in this surreal COVID atmosphere because we know God has a plan. His will be done. *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"* (Phil.4:4 NIV)

I am the Lord's servant,
Kathy Fraley



Sunday, December 19, 2021

Journey to Bethlehem **LOVE: God's Gift of His Son JESUS**

We are nearing the Christmas season. Many, including my family, will be caught up in the hustle and bustle of putting up a Christmas tree, decorating the house, buying gifts, sending cards, and planning a family get-together. These things are not bad, but let us not forget the real reason for Christmas – the wonderful gift from our God – His Son **Jesus Christ**. The Bible foretold His birth in the Old Testament and told of His birth and life in the New Testament. It was God's **love for us** that led to the birth, life, and crucifixion of our Lord and Savior.

What does the Bible say about the LOVE of God?

The Bible has a great deal to say about love. In fact, the Bible says that **“love is of God” and “God is love” (1 John 4:7–8)**; in other words, love is a fundamental characteristic of who God is. Everything God does is impelled and influenced by His love.

John 3:16 – *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

The song **“The Love of God”** speaks of that **Love**:

*The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star,
And reaches to the lowest hell.
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave His Son to win.
His erring child He reconciled
And pardoned from his sin.*

*Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
Though stretched from sky to sky.*

*O love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure
The saints' and angels' song.*

Let us also not forget Jesus' words to His disciples in John 13:34-35. *“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”*

Each year as our family decorates for Christmas, the Nativity Scene handed down to us by my husband's parents is one of our favorites. As you are aware, there are many characters in that scene. There is Mary, Joseph, the Wise Men, Shepherds, cattle, sheep, but the most important character that gets special attention is a small baby in a manger. Baby Jesus is the child around whom the whole celebration revolves. Jesus is and was a very special child. Even our depiction of time includes His birth – B.C. and A.D.

GOD'S LOVE AND JESUS' BIRTH CHANGED THE WORLD FOREVER!

Mary Kleber

SPORTS AND JESUS: FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD...

“For God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son and that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

Back in the early 70's a trend started as one of the best witnesses to the Christian faith... Christians/sports fans with homemade posters bearing the verse John 3:16. Often the cameras focused on them and their signs televising the Gospel to millions of TV viewers to learn what the verse means. Even today, I love watching sports on TV, but love it more when I see a fan with a John 3:16 poster, banner, or something proclaiming the greatest love of all.

Though a hard-core fan of the Kentucky Wildcats (and love the Cards, too), I have admiration for the University of Florida's QB Tim Tebow who painted John 3:16 under his eyes during the 2009 college football national championship. 94 million people have googled the verse during time. Tim was not just the football champion and MVP, but was truly a MVP witness for Christ.

It's hard to imagine how much college fans love their sports and sports teams. The dedication to make it to games, home and away, no matter how far or bad the team has been for years. Traveling long hours, spending money, weathering cold and hot weather just to cheer on their team and bask in the glory of hopefully a championship that they've been waiting for many years!

But then I think of God and His Love. God always has had the long game in mind. From the start of time, Jesus was the Word and the Word was with God. Throughout the Old Testament, God dropped at least 55 hints of sending His Son. God always had a plan and knew it meant sending Him to us as Immanuel (God with us), humbling His Son to serve us, and eventually allowing the sacrifice of His Son on the cross to save us from our sins because *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son...”* I can't think of a greater love than that. Sports are fun, but the Love of our Savior is far greater!

Chris Towles



Tuesday, December 21, 2021

LOVE

"...because there was no room for them in the inn." Luke 2:7b

Just ten of the 783,137 words in the Bible...
Stories have been written about these words.
Plays have been written about these words.
Books have been written about these ten words.
One half of a sentence, yet we can gather so much from the words in 2021.

We don't know if the innkeeper was young or a grandparent. Did he have a wife and children or not? Was he a newbie at running an inn or a third generation innkeeper? Business was booming during these census days. He could have rented a dozen more rooms if he'd had them. So he had to say *no* to this young man and his very pregnant wife. Now everyone knows about him. Children have robed up and played his part in countless Christmas plays across the countries and years.

Every day we have to make our choices.
Do we open our home to invite new neighbors to dinner?
Do we find a new pair of shoes for the boy whose shoes are barely hanging together?
Do we share our blessings?
Do we love the unlovely?

Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus is the only way to make the best choices.
Love is always the most excellent way!

Karen Love



LOVE LIES IN A MANGER BENEATH THE SHADOW OF A CROSS

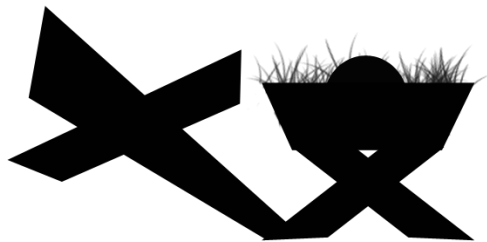
Tiptoe to the manger,
See the Holy Baby sleep,
While angels raise a great amen
And shepherds watch their sheep.
“Please read that story one more time,”
I hear the children say,
So we open up God’s Word to find
The Love of Christmas Day.

“Did He get any presents?”
Says a tiny voice to me,
This child so full of wondr’ing eyes
Who tugs upon my sleeve.
“Yes, wise men brought Him precious gifts,”
I say with a smile,
“But there’s something special you can give:
It’s the heart of a child.”

“Where’s the Baby Jesus?”
The children want to know
As I turn through God’s Story Book
To Calv’ry long ago:
A cross, a hill, a child grown up
Who soon would have to die.
But He flees the tomb and He still lives!
His love is still alive!

Love lies in a manger
Beneath the shadow of a cross
And we must come as children
To Him who seeks the lost.

By Connie Carlisle Polley
2016



Thursday, December 23, 2021

LOVE

Love is patient and kind. I Corinthians 13:4

He was a scrawny boy...about eight years old who lived with a younger boy and his parents a little ways down the street. Our sons were about eight years older, in high school at the time - but often the doorbell would ring after school, "Can Drew and Caleb play?"

Usually they were at after school ball practices, and playing with a six and eight year old wasn't at the top of their agendas, but occasionally it happened.

We invited them over one Saturday morning in December. We had some Christmas eats and a couple crafts and activities they could do. It was nothing fancy. I told the Christmas story; they ate and we talked.

Then D. said, "You all are the nicest family I have ever met!" (Now the tears start.)

....because I wonder how much or little love he had received from those around him.

....because he and his brother moved away before long.

....because he is grown now. Did he have other nice families he got to know later?

....does he know Jesus as more than a baby, but a Savior today?

I'll probably never see D. here on earth again. I wish I could tell him how his open heart opened my heart to every other child along my path. Be ready for the child you can bless and be blessed by!

Karen Love



LOVE

Christmas Eve reminds me of my Meme. Her house was usually the first stop of the Christmas festivities. We kicked things off with lunch and then presents. As a kid it was the beginning of a whirlwind merry tour between two Memes and home and more presents than any kid needed. After getting married there wasn't much difference, two Memes, a GMa, and two parents' houses. But Meme's usual stayed the first stop until a couple of years ago. She was the last grandparent to die.

Meme and I made candy every year. Let me tell you, candy is a labor of love. She told my dad and uncles several years before she passed, that they better be good to me because when something happened to her, the candy making would fall to me. I quickly replied, "When something happens to you, there won't be any more candy." Well...there is still candy. Not as much or as many varieties, but there is still candy, in Meme's honor and remembrance.

But we know Christmas isn't about candy, or presents, or even family. Christmas is about the celebration of Jesus' birth, the remembrance of God sending His one and only Son to be born in a lowly stable in Bethlehem to a willing servant, Mary. We remember the love Mary had for this sweet child as she cradled Him tenderly in that little town they had traveled to so many miles away from their home. We remember the love Joseph had...Both for Mary, who had been found with child before they had been married and for a child which wasn't his, Jesus, but he would raise Him as if He were. Then we remember Jesus and how He grew up and loved the world so much He was willing to die for it.

We use love in so many ways to describe things, but this Christmas, I hope you remember the pure love Jesus showed us when He died for our sins. Jesus tells us in John 15:12-13, "*This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*" That is exactly what Christ did for us. He gave up His life so that we could have eternal life with Him and His Father if we only ask for forgiveness of our sins and accept his immeasurable grace.

Melissa Logsdon-Young



Saturday, December 25, 2021

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Christmas Day has finally arrived! For the past several weeks all the radio stations have played Mariah Carey's rendition of "All I Want for Christmas" till it is worn out in our minds. Hallmark has been running their "warm and fuzzy" Christmas movies since JULY! We have been bombarded with everything from "Black Friday" to "pre-After Christmas" sales. It's like the world has conspired to remove the real meaning of Christmas from us.

The media does its best to downplay the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas season. They play up Santa, Gifts, Holiday Celebrations, and direct your attention to "bigger and better" in the shopping arena as the important things in the season.

They have missed the point. The world emphasis is on today, but we really need to journey back... back to Bethlehem...to the night when Christ was born. The Son, who left His place of majesty to become a tiny babe, to grow up as one of us, to be tempted yet remain sinless, and to die an agonizing death of the cross for our sins. He is the point!

Let us go back to a place just outside Jerusalem. Shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks, when an Angel of the Lord appeared to them: ... "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in clothes and lying in a manger."

Did the shepherds just sit there? No, they immediately got up and went into Bethlehem and sought out God's gift to mankind. After they had found Him, the shepherds then went out and spread the word about the Messiah's arrival...**the Savior is born!**

Love was born that night in Bethlehem. Hope was born. Joy was born. Peace was born. Jesus is God's gift to us making it possible to be born again...to receive eternal life and to live an abundant life while we are on the earth. Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father except through me*".

Matthew tells us that sometime later three Magi came out of the east. We commonly call the Magi "wise men". Wise people still seek Him. God through Jesus Christ offers us an eternal gift.

Jesus' story didn't end in Bethlehem. It didn't end on the cross at Calvary. Jesus was resurrected after His death on the cross and He is alive today. Peace, Joy, Love, and Hope all come from a relationship with Him. It starts with asking Him to be your personal Lord and Savior. Keeping this thought above all others about the Christmas season will ensure you really are "Merry" this Christmas. Putting your attention anywhere else will let you down.

During this Christmas season, don't keep God's gift to yourself. Share Jesus with all you know...share the real reason for the season.

Phil Shewmaker

JOY

Joy is one of the blessings of Christmas. It shows up Christmas at with beautiful greenery, music, and crispness of the air. Joy is in the giving and receiving presents. Joy can be evident in reconnecting with family and friends. True joy is not dependent on circumstances, but is a gift from God even when times are tough.

Joy can be contagious.

One December when a small group caroled at the Adult Day Center, I noticed most of the participants joined in the singing while a couple did not. One man frowned through every song. No hint of a smile at all! His face was down cast and his eyes sad. When asked if he would join in the singing, he shook his head. He didn't move away from us, but remained near us. Soon his lips formed the words of a familiar carol. "I thought you weren't going to sing," I said. "It was too hard to not do it", he replied. As much as he tried, he couldn't resist it. His eyes grew a little brighter with the power of Christmas Joy.

Joy comes from God. The angels proclaimed: *"Do not be afraid. I bring you **good news of great joy** that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."* Luke 2:10-11

Their message brought the joy of salvation.

*Joy to the world! The Lord has come!
Let earth receive her king! Let every heart prepare Him room.*

Look in the manger to see the good news of great joy – a Savior has been born. May you share the Joy of Christmas all year through!

Renee Bryant



Monday, December 27, 2021

THE JOURNEY

*“And at the end of the **journey** we’ll surely rest with God.
So let’s keep at it...” Hebrews 4:9-11 MSG*

We are all on a journey. From the time we are born to the time that we die, we are on a journey. Where has your journey taken you?

We all make mistakes from time to time and there are bumps on the road. Has your journey been fruitful? Did your journey lead you to Bethlehem?

Most of us know the story of the baby born in a manger. It begins with a woman blessed by God, the Father and Maker of this vast universe, whose Son, Jesus, is the Savior of the world. Angels appeared to some shepherds in the fields and sent them on a journey to Bethlehem where Jesus was born. Wise Men followed a star that led them on a journey to Bethlehem.

But the story of Jesus does not end there. His birth would be the beginning the journey He took to the cross of Calvary where He died for the sins of all mankind. But the story does end there either. The grave could not hold Jesus. He walked out of that tomb, ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God.

When we are taking a trip in a car we make a plan on how to get where we are going. Without a plan we are most likely to get lost. That’s when we need help to find our way. At a time like that without help we would fail. Are you lost or have you found your way to Jesus?

We all need help to get back on the right road. The Bible gives us the directions we need to stay on the path that leads to Bethlehem. I ask this question again, “Where is your journey taking you?”

Bud Purnell



GOD'S GREAT LOVE

Love

We all want it.

We seek it daily.

We look in high places and lowly places.

We try to earn it.

We try to find it.

We try to hold on to it.

We see it as the answer to all our dreams.

We see it as our hope for tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

We search passionately for it.

BUT, it is ours if we will just accept it.

Love was freely given.

We accept the statement that there is no greater love than to give your life for your brother.

God has already done that for us.

He gave His only Son.

"For God loved the world so much that he gave His only Son so that anyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

All we have to do to receive this love is to accept it.

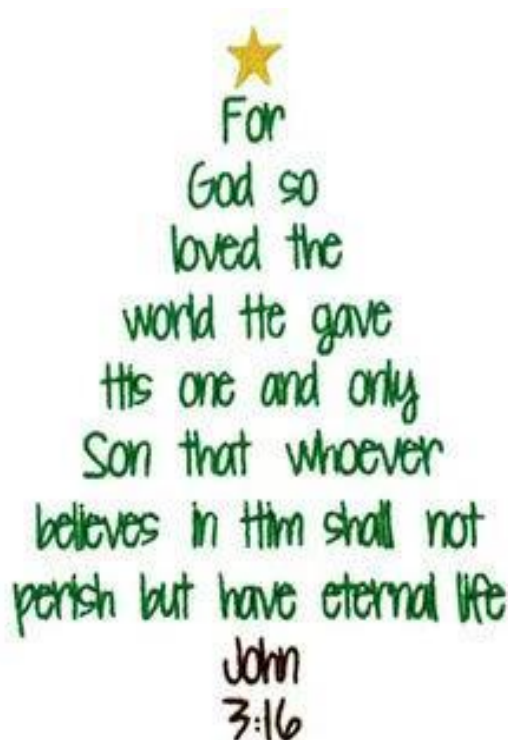
When we accept it fully and completely, we receive it and the peace that accompanies it.

No more searching.

No more seeking.

Just freely accept God's great love as it was freely given.

Carolyn Simpson



Wednesday, December 29, 2021

A WORLD WITHOUT BETHLEHEM

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.” Revelation 11:15

What would this world be like if there had been no Bethlehem, no Christianity? There would not be churches on every corner. But government of the people, by the people and for the people would probably not exist, either. Instead the elite, tyrants, and dictators would rule the world. For the common man there would only be work, forced labor, and oppression.

Human life would be a cheap commodity. Instead of football on Saturday afternoon we might see an arena where people would be fighting for their lives. Education as we know it today would not exist for the common man. Learning would be for the elite and powerful.

There would be few if any hospitals for the poor. Healthcare would only be for the wealthy. For the common man it would be ‘heal yourself or die’.

The list could go on and on, but do you get the picture?

Jesus’ coming changed the world. Jesus was a man for all people, not just the rich, the powerful, and the healthy. Everybody was important to Jesus: the oppressed, the poor, the sick, women, and even children. He taught that we should treat other people the way we want to be treated. Simply put, we are to love our neighbors, not mistreat or take advantage of them.

The world is a better place because of Bethlehem. Jesus was born there. Angels, shepherds and wise men worshipped Him as the Messiah, Son of God, and King of Kings.

Jesus spent the last three years of his life teaching and healing, but the religious leaders of His day were afraid of Him and plotted to have Him killed. They succeeded with their plan. Jesus was arrested on trumped up charges, brutally beaten, forced to carry His own cross to Calvary and then crucified. His body was placed in a stone cold tomb where He lay for three days. But He walked out of that tomb, said good-bye to a few friends, rose into heaven, and is now seated at the right hand of God.

For Jesus every person had dignity and worth. He died for all of us and told us to show love, peace, and compassion to everyone, but especially to the poor, oppressed, and needy.

Do you know this man called Jesus? He is waiting at your door and wants to come in. It is up to you to open that door and invite Him in.

Bud Purnell



CHILDLIKE FAITH

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” Mark 10:14-15

Childhood is a time of wonder and innocence. A child’s heart is open to learning new things and exploring the world. Children love completely, without reservations. They readily accept the beauty of creation and every day is a new and joyful adventure.

In my own life, Jesus spoke to my heart as a child of 11 years old. I remember everything about that moment. I felt His Holy Spirit speaking to me and asking me to let Him enter my heart. I knew I was being asked to make a choice in my own life, to accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior or to turn away. I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my heart, to forgive me of my sins, to be my Lord and Savior. I knew I didn’t know all that I should about being a Christian, but I did know that loving Jesus was what mattered! There are no words to express the joy I felt in that moment. Jesus loved me! He spoke to my heart!

Somehow, even as a child, I knew He would never leave me. I knew that He would always be with me in good times and bad. He would be my friend, my Comforter, my teacher, my joy. I knew I could take all my needs to Him in prayer and that I would always find forgiveness and love at His feet. I knew, that because of His death and resurrection, I would spend eternity with Him. I knew He would help me learn and grow as a Christian and draw me nearer to Him. I knew my life had been forever changed. How I love Him!

Jesus said everyone must come to Him in childlike faith. It is so simple. If you don’t know Him, won’t you give Him your heart as we approach this New Year? It doesn’t take fancy words or an eloquent speech, only your willingness to offer Him your heart. He is waiting to love and forgive you just as you are. Won’t you acknowledge Him as God’s Son who gave His life on Calvary’s Cross in payment for your sins? Won’t you ask Him to forgive you of your sins and to come into your heart? Your life will be forever changed and what joy you will know in your soul! This is my New Year’s wish for you.

Nancy Shewmaker



Friday, December 31, 2021

LIGHTS OUT

What would our Christmas be like if we turned all the lights off? Imagine trees standing at attention, dressed in shiny bulbs and sparkling up-and-downers, but we don't see or pay attention to any of them because they stand dark. Even though our charge cards are at the ready to charge those "perfect" gifts, stores that usually clamor about low, lower, lowest prices are dark without electricity. And forget a holiday meal -- no ovens to turn on! No brown, juicy turkey for sandwiches on Christmas Day and the refrigerators? Let's not even go there! They have no power, we have no cranberry salads. How could we have Christmas in the dark? How could we allow the lights to be out, especially during the holidays? How can we get the light turned back on? (*"I am the light of the world."* John 8:12).

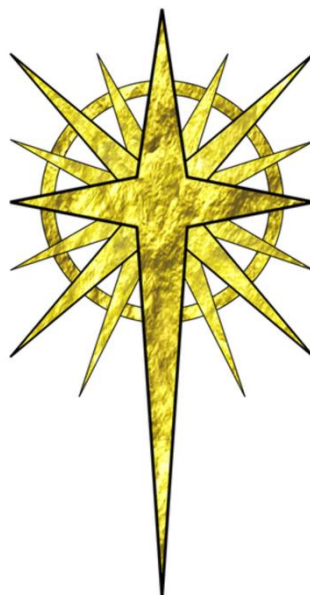
Our lives -- all of them -- can be switched back on by opening our eyes to see the Christmas trees glowing and the stores bustling and the appliances cooking/refrigerating. Problem solved, right? Well, if we choose this route, we might see a flicker of *peace* here and a spark of *hope* and *joy* there, but without love, no light, no electricity can ever be sustained in our lives. We can open our eyes and still not see the light.

We too often forget our forever light was born on Christmas Day. Our forever light radiates joy and peace and hope and especially love, God's love for us shining through His Son, Christ Jesus. (*"For God so love the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."* John 3:16).

A new year begins tomorrow and we'll have a choice as to how we view our lives. Sparks and flickers of peace, hope, joy, and love will allow us a ho-hum existence, a life unfulfilled, self-shaded, unable to see. But if we fully open our eyes to God's gift of forever light, forever *life*, heaven on earth will be our reality, the sight He wants us to gift to everyone we see.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:13

Happy New Year!
Ann Abney



WHAT NEW THING DOES GOD WANT TO DO WITH YOU?

The theme verses for both our Deacons' Retreat and Staff Retreat a few months ago are from Isaiah 43:18-19: *"Forget, the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland."* As the staff and deacons have been challenged to allow God to do this new thing in them, will you do the same?

Do you ever feel like your life is going nowhere? Do you ever think that life is never going to be normal again? Do you feel stuck in a day-to-day routine of the same old thing over and over? Do you feel like you are living in a dry desert?

In the midst of these circumstances, there is good news! God wants to do something new in your life! That's what God told the people of Israel when they were in Babylonian captivity. These people certainly could not imagine a new thing that God wanted to do with them. Actually, life seemed to be hopeless and even coming to an end for them. Maybe you have had similar feelings during these past two years of uncertainty, pandemic, meanness, unrest, tension, division, death, and violence. Can God really do something new in the midst of such circumstances? YES, HE CAN!!

The prophet told Israel, *"These days will end; the future is brighter."* The prophet spoke of Israel's liberation from exile as a new exodus – a new journey. Your future journey can also be brighter! There are better days ahead for you, but it is up to you for this to be reality. God wants to do a new thing in your life today! Will you choose for Him to do so?

In order for God to do this new thing, you must follow the words of the prophet and focus in the right direction. The right direction is forward and not backward. Do not dwell on the past! If you keep looking back you will never see where you are going. Do not dwell on past sin, past failures, past circumstances, or even past glories.

These passages remind us of where our focus should be:

- *"But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."* Philippians 3:13b-14
- *"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."* Hebrews 12:2

What new thing does God want to do in your life?

- If you do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, the first new thing is to begin that relationship today. He wants to come into your life. Will you welcome Him in?
- If you are a Christian, the devil does not want God to do a new thing in your life. The devil wants you to stay stuck in a rut, to retreat, or to give up. But we serve a God who says, *"I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly."* (John 10:10b)

The only way that you can know this abundant life is to totally surrender to Jesus and let His will be done in your life. Then you will be ready for the new thing He has for you!

Linda Barnes Popham

Sunday, January 2, 2022

DURING THIS NEW YEAR

“So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt.” Matthew 2:14

One sentence, but I honestly had never thought of all its ramifications.

Joseph and Mary wouldn't have had a child yet if God had not intervened in their lives.

This leaving everything and everyone would have not been necessary.

They moved to a whole new country, not just a different village.

They had to learn a new language. Joseph had to find a way to make a living to support his wife and son.

It makes me think of all the refugees from Afghanistan in our country. They are having to learn so much and make so many adaptations.

“Learn so much and make so many adaptations.”

How many of us are facing this very thing in the New Year.

- caring for our loved one in a newly diagnosed illness
- facing major changes in the workplace or a totally new job
- moving into new housing or taking in family in our home
- continuing to work our way through figuring out how to do so many things online
- being bombarded by endless news that seems to be ever-changing

Malachi 3:6 tells us that God can be our rock solid foundation in the midst of all life throws us. *“For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”*

A line in a song we used to going in college had the line, “Praise the Lord, He never changes!”

That was true then, it is true now as we have entered 2022, and it will forever be true.

Karen Love



Monday, January 3, 2022

WILL YOU COMMIT YOUR LIFE TO HIM?

I always believed that God was with me. I was raised Catholic and went to a Catholic grade school. It seemed I spent a lot of my free time at church, helping or serving where I could. I found a peace there. I was that kid that would go to service even when my parents didn't. At about the age of 16, I stopped going to church.

God protected me through my really "stupid" years!!

In my early twenties, I found myself with three children and on marriage number two. There was a hole in my life.

Sam and I both felt it. We decided we needed to be in church and raise the girls in the church. We began attending St Stephen Martyr Church. Sam and the girls were baptized and we became very active members. In 1993 we moved to Indiana for several years and, again, stopped going to church.

There were some very turbulent storms in our life. I still somehow knew we would survive because I knew God was with us. It turns out God's promises are true. He was always with us even when we were not with Him.

When we moved back to Louisville, Nancy McCune (my lifetime friend) kept inviting us to events going on at Fern Creek Baptist Church. Then it was how about coming to a Bible class being taught on the Book of Revelation (taught by a certain Mary Berridge). This seemed interesting to me. Next thing I knew Nancy had me coming to Sunday morning service. It seemed that every sermon I heard was sent straight to my heart. How could this Pastor Linda know what was there???? The Holy Spirit began speaking to me in a way I had never heard or felt before. One Sunday during "Amazing Grace" the Holy Spirit told me it was time to let God lead me. It was no longer good enough that I knew He walked with me, He HAD to lead. I became a committed Christian that day. I was baptized a few weeks later on Easter Sunday. I had finally found peace. There is a peace that comes when we turn our lives over to Him. There is a joy in knowing this. I trust Him with all of the things this life can throw at us. I don't understand a love so strong that God sent His Son to be born to this world and to die for me. God loves us all this much!!!!!!

I pray that if you have not committed yourself to God, don't waste another minute. He is waiting to wrap you in His loving arms!!!!

Becky Frizzell



Tuesday, January 4, 2022

GOTTA HAVE HOPE EVEN IN TOUGH TIMES

Christmas is a joyful, happy time, right? Yeah, it is. There are many things that people like about the holidays such as Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day. It's a lot more difficult to lose someone in a pandemic. But one thing that people have lost is their hope. If anything people have lost their trust in others because they don't have God or hope. In Psalm 42: 5 and 9 both say, *"Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."* Take a minute to think about what it means to you. It means to me that whenever you have troubles give it to God because He will help you and will take care of it in His own time.

For me, I have hope in God that He can do marvelous things for anyone. Though sometimes we lose someone we love, God is still there. I know that losing someone that you love can be hard because life is different without them. For some people, losing someone makes a big difference in their lives. For instance, some grieve while others don't come outside. We can't let that stop us from loving the Lord. Even when we turn Him away He is still right next to us.

Hope is described in the dictionary as a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen. But in the Bible, I believe that Elizabeth and her husband, Zechariah, had hope because Elizabeth couldn't have a child at her old age and so when she figured out she was expecting she was probably surprised. Back then it wasn't uncommon to have that happen, but when you think about it you're like "what?" Imagine the older ladies having a child in their seventies and eighties! One thing I admire most is that Elizabeth put her hope in God that maybe one day they would have a child. God was faithful to them and gave them a child. So even in tough times, we should put our hope in God.

Emma Towles



MY JOURNEY OF FAITH

As a thirteen-year-old boy at a week-long revival at Tillman Baptist Church in Tillman, South Carolina, I began to feel God tugging at my heart. I had grown up in a Christian home and spent much time in church, so I clearly recognized that it was God who was talking to me. On the evening before the last day of revival, my sister, Joyce, and I both expressed to our parents that we felt God calling us to open our hearts to Him. Our parents encouraged us both to follow God's leading.

On that last morning of revival, my sister and I went forward during the invitation song to talk with our pastor. As we talked with him, he guided us and led us to pray and invite Jesus to come into our hearts. My sister and I both did that and were baptized several weeks later in First Baptist Church, Ridgeland, because our little church did not have a baptistry.

After inviting Jesus into my heart, I had a new hope and peace that I had never experienced before that time. I began to spend much time in prayer and started a regular time of reading His Word. Jesus compelled me to start serving in the church. As a high school boy I taught Royal Ambassadors and did whatever I could to serve.

After high school, I strayed from God, but He never left me. Upon moving to Louisville in 1970, I joined and became active in Walnut Street Baptist Church. When I joined Fern Creek Baptist Church in 1987, I really began to grow in my faith. I learned that being a Christian is more than going to a church building and sitting in a pew. Becoming a deacon made me more aware of all the service and ministry needs around me.

Today, I am absolutely positive that God is with me and will never leave me. Even though I am facing some physical difficulties and trying situations right now, I seek Him daily and He is always faithful. One of my favorite scriptures that I live by each day, regardless of my circumstances, is Deuteronomy 31:6 which says, *"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."*

That same promise can be yours if you will only give your life to Him. Let Jesus be your Savior today! His salvation is the greatest gift you can ever receive.

George Popham



Thursday, January 6, 2022

GIVE HIM YOUR HEART!

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. Matthew 2:11

Christmas is often seen as that time of year for the giving of gifts. We are not sure of the origin of the gift giving tradition in our culture; some say it began with Saint Nicholas from Turkey who gave generous gifts to all of the children. Or, did it begin before that? Even a little while after His birth, Jesus Christ was associated with gift giving. The Wise Men brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the newborn Babe to honor Him.

January 6 (the twelfth day of Christmas) is called the Day of Epiphany. This day marks the official end to the joyous season of Christmas. The word “Epiphany” comes from a Greek word meaning manifestation. Epiphany celebrates the revelation of God in His incarnate Son. Epiphany is the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi or Wise Men. It is a time when we, like the Magi who followed a distant star, are reminded of the fullest meaning of the gift of Jesus Christ.

On this Day of Epiphany, we celebrate the gift of Jesus. Jesus is obviously the greatest gift that has ever been given. He is the gift greater than money could purchase. He is the gift that is beyond description. He is the gift that changed the course of history. He is the gift that is greater than any person on this earth. He is the gift that brings salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life. He is God’s gift to us. John 3:16 says: *“God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

Yes, the greatest gift has already been given to us. The problem is that some people have not opened the gift. Some have opened the gift and put it back in the box. Some have opened the gift, but only glance at the gift once in a while. Some have received the gift and are living abundant lives because of the Gift.

As we reflect upon the gifts given to Jesus by the Wise Men, we must be challenged about our gifts to Him. Christina Rossetti, an English poet, wrote:

*What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
Yet, what I can I give Him: Give my heart.*

What will you give Him on this Day of Epiphany? What will you give the Lord Jesus Christ this New Year? Will you give Him your heart – your life – your all? That’s the gift He desires from us! I pray that you will not leave this “gift-giving season” without giving your heart to Jesus!

Celebrating the Indescribable Gift of Jesus!
Linda Barnes Popham