

***Advent / Christmas Worship  
2022 - 2023***

***“The Light of the World is Jesus”***



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

# Advent/Christmas Worship

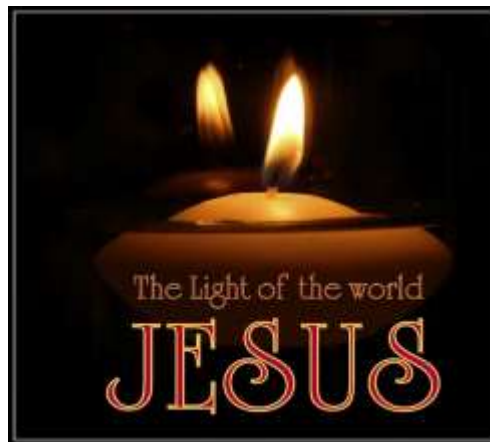
Our theme for this Advent / Christmas season is *“The Light of the World is Jesus”*. In John 8:12, Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* As these devotionals point us to the Light of Jesus, our prayer is that you will truly experience the hope, peace, joy, and love found only in Jesus Christ. Members and friends 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. These 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 the Light of the World warm your hearts as you radiate His Light to the world! May you worship Him with gladness during this holy season!

Merry Christmas!  
Linda Barnes Popham



## **Church Ministerial Staff**

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

## **Support Staff**

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Karen Love, Pianist 239-0316  
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## *ADVENT/CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SERVICES*

### ***November 27: The First Sunday of Advent***

10:45 a.m. – Lighting of the Candle of Hope  
6:00 p.m. – “Hanging of the Greens”

### ***December 4: 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 11: The Third Sunday of Advent***

10:45 a.m. – Lighting of the Candle of Joy  
6:00 p.m. – Children / Youth Christmas Program

### ***December 13***

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

### ***December 15***

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

### ***December 18: The Fourth Sunday of Advent***

10:45 a.m. – Lighting of the Candle of Love  
Adult Choir Christmas Cantata – “Welcome to Our World!”  
6:00 p.m. – Service of Comfort and Hope

### ***December 24: Christmas Eve***

11:00 a.m. – Christmas Eve Service  
Lighting of the Christ Candle

### ***December 25: 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](http://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 true 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 mostly 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 27, 2022

## HOPE

A small four-letter word, yet it means so much.

Hope gets us through troubled times. It encourages us to believe. It gives us excitement for the future.

*“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” (Romans 5:5)*

A four-letter word that we use every day.

We hope we get somewhere on time.

We hope someone feels better.

We hope we can get everything done.

We hope for many things, but we have assurance from an eternal life, if we accept Jesus.

*“A faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before the beginning of time.” (Titus 1:2)*

I hope as you read these devotionals you find Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

Glenda Coddington



Monday, November 28, 2022

## HOPE

*“There’s the root of our ancestor Jesse,  
breaking through the earth and growing tree tall,  
Tall enough for everyone everywhere to see and take hope.”*

Romans 15:12 (The Message)

Have you ever felt hopeless? Bereft of any silver lining in the clouds that hang so heavily above you? Blank on any ideas to improve your situation? Clueless of anyone to give you any sort of aid? I think each of us have had a day(s) that fit that description.

Some people in the Bible who could be included in that scenario:

Moses as he tended sheep in the desert.

Joseph as he was sold to slave traders by his brothers.

Ruth and Naomi as they moved to Bethlehem.

David as he went into survival mode when King Saul was attacking him.

Esther when the King ordered all the Jews killed.

Peter when he heard the cock crowing

Can you just feel their hopelessness?

People today:

- when dismissed from their job,
- when their electricity is cut off and no resources are available,
- when the diagnosis a nightmare,
- when their marriage is shattered,
- when the bills are insurmountable,
- when another heartbreaking miscarriage comes

Let's go back to the time before the Bethlehem miracle.

How many, many generations had been waiting for the Messiah...

“Tears are falling, hearts are breaking, how we need to hear from God. You’ve been promised, we’ve been waiting...” (Opening lyrics from “Welcome to Our World”)

Then Hope comes....

- in a Burning Bush
- as Joseph becomes second in command in Egypt
- as Boaz shows his favor
- as God gives his protection to David
- as King Xerxes extends his scepter to Esther
- as Jesus asks Peter to feed His sheep

*“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

Hope has a name, and His Name Is Jesus!

May we overflow with His hope so the world will know!

Karen Love

## JESUS CHRIST IS HOPE

*And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him." Romans 15:12*

Hope! What is it? Billy Graham once said, "*Perhaps the greatest psychological, spiritual, and medical need people have is the need for hope.*" It has also been said: "*We can live forty days without food, eight days without water, four minutes without air, but only a few seconds without hope.*" Hope is obviously necessary for life.

Hope is actually one of the most misunderstood words in our language today. For most it is merely wishful thinking; however, the hope talked about in God's Word is closer to the word *assurance* in our language. Ray Pritchard says, "*Hope is to wait on something because you know that the thing you are waiting for will happen because the person you are waiting for is trustworthy*".

One day long ago at the time appointed by God, the awaited Hope was born. The Root of Jesse ushered in a new beginning. The Root of Jesse is Jesus Christ – the Baby born in Bethlehem – the Light of the world – the Redeemer crucified for our sins – the Savior who rose from the grave – the Lord who still reigns and is coming again!

Only Jesus Christ brings the hope we need to live in this world. Without Jesus, all is dark and hopeless. In Christ, the hopeless find hope! Do you know Him? Is your hope in Him? Do you need a new beginning of hope?

- Hope wants to bring light to the dark areas of your life.
- Hope wants to turn your despair into joy.
- Hope wants to shine through you.
- Hope wants to bring peace to your world of chaos and confusion.
- Hope wants to give you faith in your times of doubt.
- Hope wants to enter your places of pain, failure, and discouragement.
- Hope wants to give you newness of life.
- Hope wants to give you peace.
- Hope wants to live in you.
- Hope wants to encourage and comfort you.
- Hope wants to turn your mourning into rejoicing.
- Hope wants to replace your doubt with faith.
- Hope wants to embrace you with love.
- Hope wants to give you a new beginning.

Hope is a reality! Jesus Christ is HOPE! No matter what your circumstances are, no matter how hopeless everything seems, no matter how desolate your surroundings, no matter how you feel, there is hope. May the hope of Jesus Christ be born anew in you!

*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*

Linda Barnes Popham

Wednesday, November 30, 2022

## ADVENT ALL AROUND ME

*From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the LORD is to be praised! Psalm 113:3*

The last several weeks of November and the first few of December are my favorite time of year. The lawn is littered with dry leaves and the sky is usually gray. When the sun is up, it is barely up, and the angle at which its light pours in through my window keeps narrowing a little more each day. It is that ever-declining angle that tells me winter is almost here.

Because the sun is coming closer to the earth now, it is at half strength, making the air crisp and cold. Some mornings, tiny pinnacles of frost form on the grass and paint the roofs white; and when I exhale my breath hangs like a cloud in the air.

What I see all around me reminds me that it is Advent. Advent is a time to prepare for Christmas. Just as the sun comes closer to the earth at this time of year than at any other, I am reminded during this season of how God came so close to humankind that we could touch him. Then beyond that, the first coming of God in Jesus reminds me that the Lord wants to draw a little closer to me each day.

Jesus said that to know Him well we have to die to ourselves. Because Advent coincides with the dying of the year I am reminded by what I see around me that I need to do some dying. The trees shed their leaves, and like them, I need to drop from my life the habits and attachments that keep me from giving more of myself to the Lord. The branches of the trees look barren etched against the sky, but they are not. They are waiting, stripped down to just what's necessary, so that someday soon spring can surge through them and fill them with new life. If I wait before Jesus the same way, I believe a surge of new life will fill me, too.

Seeing my breath in the cold reminds me that I need Jesus as much as I need the air I breathe. How still the Advent air is reminds me, too, of just how still I need to be as I wait for the Lord to fill me. Occasionally, the sky parts on a cold, gray day and I remember then that no sadness, no grief or loss is ever permanent, and that I have only to wait confidently in the Lord's presence, as emptied of myself as possible, to be graced with more of Him.

Karen Purnell



## JESUS IS THE LIGHT!

*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12*

I wrote the following quote down, but didn't write down who said it:

*When the world gets dark, you have to hold on to any bit of light you can find.*

The world was dark when Jesus entered it as a baby.

The world was dark when you were born.

The world around us seems very dark today.

BUT:

*The Light of the World is Jesus! (John 8:12)*

*Whoever believes in Him will may not remain in darkness. (John 12:46)*

*Let your light shine before others. (Matthew 5:16)*

*God is light and in Him is so darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)*

*God said, "Let there be light!" And there was. (Genesis 1:3)*

*You are the light of the world. (Matthew 5:14)*

The references to God and His Son being light go on and on in the Bible.

That's where our hope is found. He is the light, He created the light, and He wants us to carry His light and shine out His light in our very dark world. People are gravitating to every little bit of light they can find, but only His light can change their lives.

*Hide it under a bushel, no! I'm gonna let it shine!*

Karen Love



Friday, December 2, 2022

## HOPE

What is hope? The American Heritage dictionary defines hope in several ways.

- 1) A wish or desire accompanied by confident expectation of its fulfillment.
- 2) One that is a source for hope “the team’s only hope for victory”.

The Holman Bible Dictionary has a lot on the subject of hope:

“Trustful expectation, particularly with reference to the fulfillment of God’s promises. Biblical hope is the anticipation of a favorable outcome under God’s guidance.”

The word “hope” is used lightly in everyday life. “We hope the family will all be together this year.” “I hope I get what I want for Christmas.”

The scripture has much to say about hope. In my NIV Study Bible, the concordance lists 33 scriptures on hope. There are probably many more.

Job 13:15

*Though he slay me, yet will I hope in Him.* Job had a lot of reasons to lose hope.

Psalms 42:5

*Why, my soul are you downcast, why so disturbed with in? Put your hope in God.*

Romans 8:25

*But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

I Corinthians 13:13

*And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love.*

Abraham never lost hope that he would have an heir. God kept His promise. In Genesis 12:2 God told Abram, “*I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.*”

The real reason we have hope is that God is His wonderful wisdom made a way for us to have hope. Our hope is in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. May we remember to thank God each time we pray. Thank Him for sending His Son to save us from our sins.

“God bless us each and every one” as we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Love in Christ,  
Mary Robinson

P.S. I stole Tiny Tim’s blessing.



Saturday, December 3, 2022

## THE SHEPHERDS AND THE ANGELS LUKE 2:8-20

*“And hope does not disappoint us...”* Romans 5:5a

Thinking back to the birth of Jesus....was anyone disappointed the night of Jesus' birth as they beheld the King of Glory?

Mary and Joseph? The Angels? The Shepherds? The Wise Men?

They were overjoyed, singing their hearts out, running to tell the news, and bringing the most exquisite gifts available!

Sometimes we simply have to look farther than that night to get the picture and begin to glimpse what Jesus' birth meant in the long run.

*“They do not fear bad news. They confidently trust in the Lord to care for them.”* Psalm 112:7

We all know too well the disappointment that comes through people, places, and things daily in our lives. Just this week of writing devotionals, we've seen a beautiful wife and mother die as her tiny twins were born; we've heard of political leaders failing; we've been helplessly watching marriages crumble; we've seen a forced retirement implemented; and we've heard of abuse of precious children.

And then someone crosses our path in what seems a hopeless situation, yet we are astounded by the person's hope...the hope Jesus alone gives.

After all the excitement that night in Bethlehem...real life returned...a stable for their temporary home, taxes to be paid, Herod's wrath to avoid.

*“O Little Town of Bethlehem”* ends with what we need to carry with us: *“The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight.”*

There were hopes and fears that night in Bethlehem.

All of us have hopes and fears on December 3, 2022.

His hope will **NOT** disappoint us when all is said and done. **TRUTH!**

Karen Love



Sunday, December 4, 2022

## THE SINGING CHRISTMAS TREE

*“You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.”* Isaiah 55:12

For twenty years I served as a part-time Minister of Music in and around the Louisville area. This is a story about what happened in one of those churches.

The Church had been without a music leader for some time when I got there in November and the choir was not functioning. There wasn't going to be time to put together much of a program for Thanksgiving or Christmas. I managed to get a small choir together for Thanksgiving and turned my attention to Christmas. There wasn't time to do a cantata, so I put together a few songs and some narration and it went well.

I had occasion to talk to some of the men in the choir about what direction they wanted to see the choir go in the future. In the course of that conversation, I found out that they had done a singing Christmas tree some years back and had the frame of the tree in storage.

A Singing Christmas Tree is a specially constructed series of risers built in the shape of a Christmas tree that is decorated with garland and lights. Choir members stand on the tree like ornaments and sing songs that celebrate the season. This tree had six tiers: it could hold 35 singers and was so tall that the star at the top almost touched the ceiling.

I suggested we get it out and see what shape it was in. When we did, we found out the tree was sturdy and safe, so we made plans to set it up and use it the next Christmas. Twenty-nine choir members sang on the tree that first year, but the sound of their voices filled the sanctuary.

Someone from another Baptist Church in the area heard the program and asked if we were going to use the tree again the following year. They were without a music director and suggested we do a joint program with them in which we would sing one night at their church and one night on the tree.

We did, and that year we had almost fifty singers. Since all the singers wouldn't fit on the tree some of the choir members stood beside the tree. We decided they were the tree's bushes. The sound produced by so many voices celebrating together was truly wonderful.

I remember that Christmas because of how well we all worked together. It was a season of peace that led to a time of great joy.

Bud Purnell



## LIVE IN PEACE

**Hebrews 12:14-15** *Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. NIV*

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

**Philippians 4:9** *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. NIV*

**I Thessalonians 5:23** *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. NIV*

*“Peace is not absence of conflict; it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.”*  
President Ronald Reagan

*“Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.”*  
Albert Einstein

Peace has two aspects: external and internal. External peace is living in harmony with others and respecting the differences. Internal peace is much more elusive. Peace is one of the characteristics Paul included in the “Fruit of the Spirit”. (Gal 5:22) Being a characteristic of the Holy Spirit means we will not have it in our lives without the presence of the Holy Spirit. And we will not have the presence of the Holy Spirit without choosing Jesus Christ as Lord!

Living in peace with others is the point made by Ronald Reagan and Albert Einstein, It is possible to accomplish it, for a time, without the guidance and strength of God. But, as we have seen many times, it eventually fails.

The internal peace that God desires for us, and with the presence of the Holy Spirit who is within us, provides the ability to be at peace with ourselves personally. That is the key to lasting peace with others.

Peace, combined with all the other aspects of the Fruit of the Spirit, gives us the ability to live a life that is beyond our ability. The Holy Spirit provides the ability, but we have a part, also. In addition to the presence of the Holy Spirit, it takes time, study, prayer, and devotion to Jesus to grow spiritually and truly experience the “peace that transcends understanding”. (Philippians 4:7)

*Seek the Lord with all your heart* (Jeremiah 29:13) *and lean not on you own understanding.* (Proverbs 3:5) *Love the Lord with all of your being* (Matthew 22:37), and the Holy Spirit will provide you with the ability to live in peace, both with yourself and among others.

Rick Pryor



Tuesday, December 6, 2022

## MY TESTIMONY

*“Carrying his own cross, he (Jesus) went to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).” John 19:17*

As a young child I was always very inquisitive. I often found myself asking about the creatures on earth and how they all got here. Since I grew up on a farm, I was always asking how the calves got here. My father finally sat me down and had a talk with me trying to explain in a way I could understand. While dad was explaining I looked up and saw a calf being born. I saw that as a miracle from God and from then on started going to church. My grandma explained to me that God created all creatures and all things on earth. Soon, I started going to Fisherville Baptist Church. After going there a few years, I learned about Jesus from the Bible and then joined the church. I read the Bible while at Fisherville, but really didn't understand much. Now as an adult, I have learned so much from studying with Norma Routt and our Sunday School class at Fern Creek Baptist Church.

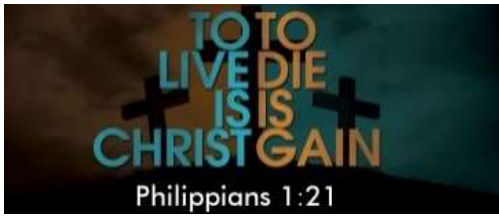
When I was about 17 years old my mom asked me to help her take a family tombstone to Hazard, Kentucky. My mom, uncle, and I carried the tombstone up a mountain with a two-wheeler. Halfway up the mountain I passed out and my mom tried to talk to me to keep me awake. While unconscious, I began talking and heard someone comforting me and telling me, “You will be OK.”

When I awoke, we continued on up the mountain and put the tombstone in place on the grave. I asked my uncle if he was the one that had been talking to me when I was unconscious. He said *no* that he was not talking. The next morning was Sunday morning and when the choir sang “The Old Rugged Cross”, I could visualize that cross on the hill far away and I was so emotional and feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit that I had to leave the service and stand outside until the song was finished. At the end of the service, I went forward and gave my heart to God. After days of thinking about the voice I had heard on that mountain, I finally realized it was the voice of God speaking to me and I knew I would be OK. Jesus was now truly my Savior!

Now when you see me get emotional and leave the service when we sing “The Old Rugged Cross” you will know why. I have peace today because of what Jesus did on “The Old Rugged Cross”. Do you have that peace?



## DO YOU WANT SUCH PEACE?



Nancy Shewmaker signed up to write today's devotional; however, if you are a part of the Fern Creek Baptist Church family you know that our precious friend is very ill. Early on when doctors were not sure if she would live, Nancy looked up and said with peace and assurance, ***"Either way, I win"***. What powerful words! She has repeated those words several times since then because she truly understands what the Apostle Paul meant when he said to the church at Philippi, *"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain"* (Philippians 1:21). The Apostle Paul was saying that regardless of whether the verdict for him was life or death, he would continue to be faithful to God.

How can Nancy, at a time when she does not know if she will live or die, say such words?

### ***"For to me, to live is Christ..."***

Choosing to live for Christ's glory is a wonderful way to live; it's actually the only way to live an abundant life. Nancy seeks to live a life that exalts Christ whether that means living or dying. What about you? Are you doing the same?

Paul knew that it would be beneficial for the church for him to keep living. He could keep serving, preaching the gospel, and being a blessing to so many people. Even though Paul was in prison and facing many challenges when writing this letter, he loved living for Christ as he boldly shared the gospel. He understood Jesus' words in John 10:10b, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly."*

If Nancy lives, she wins, because she loves serving God and delights in loving and serving people. When one of the doctors asked her for a goal on her journey to getting well, she said, "I want to be well enough to teach the youth at our church." That's living for Christ!

### ***"...and to die is gain."***

Dying in Christ is even better than living for Him on this earth. For the Christian, death is not an ending; it is a beginning of a marvelous life in heaven that knows no end.

If Nancy dies, she wins, because she then really begins living. Jesus says, in John 14:1-6: *"Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas said unto him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus said unto him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes unto the Father, but by me.'"*

If you want that peace that comes from knowing that "you win", either in life or death, accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior today and spend your life on this earth loving and serving God and people. You will then know such peace that passes any human understanding!

Linda Barnes Popham

Thursday, December 8, 2022

**PEACE**  
**John 16:33**

He is often referred to “as man of peace”. Jesus spoke of peace in the New Testament. He implores us to be peaceful. *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for ours is the kingdom of heaven.”* He taught us to go the extra mile. Be peaceful. When He came into the world He was the reason used by King Herod for the death of many babies under two years of age. The king was looking for that new king which he was told by the Wise Men had been born. Jesus was forced into exile.

His life was tested many times by the church. He was questioned by His friends. He was despised by His neighbors because of His perceived sin! “Is this not He, son of Mary?” I’m sure this is what they would say!! Even in His last hours He was punished. He was whipped and abused by a crown of thorns. I know this was very painful.

His clothing was taken and He died naked and was nailed on a cross between two gangsters!

A storm came across the area as He was dying and darkness covered the area. Is this peaceful?

He asked for water because He was thirsty. He was given vinegar to drink...an insult to Him!

How did He react to all of these things? Did He curse His tormenters? No...He prayed for them. He asked GOD to forgive them *“for they do not know what they are doing”*. How would we react to such treatment? “Please come, Father, and destroy them”, we might say!

Jesus was full of compassion and love. This is the only way to overcome hate. Pray for those who use you. You can’t pray and hate at the same time. He looked on Jerusalem and wept over them. *“How often would I take you in my arms?”* It seems that the worse He was treated the more He loved.

The world was not a peaceful place for Jesus! It isn’t always peaceful for us. To live in peace we must love those who aren’t always loveable. This is always hard to do. We need the same spirit Jesus had. Love is the only antidote for hate. “Come, Lord Jesus”, is my prayer for you and me.

May you have a peaceful Christmas...Earl Cantrell



## THE AGE TO COME

*“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,  
making the best use of the time....” Ephesians 5:15*

The fact that Jesus is coming again is the first message of Advent. Before He comes again, Jesus said that there would be “signs in the sun, moon, and stars”, and that on earth nations would “be in dismay”. In spite of the turmoil, though, people will be going about their business as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening. “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man,” Jesus said. People were “eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark”.

The Bible says that when Jesus comes again, he will come suddenly, like a bolt of lightning. Everyone will see him because he will come “on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”. He will “send out his angels and gather His elect from the four winds”, and then begin to reign over a forever kingdom in which the promise of peace on earth will finally be fulfilled.

It is not only when Jesus comes on the clouds, though, that He will come for us. He promised to come for each of us who have loved and served him at the end of our days. “I go to prepare a place for you”, he said, “and I will come again to take you to myself, so that where I am, you may be also.” So whether Jesus returns, or simply comes for you and me, we know that if we are His we will experience God in a place of perfect peace and contentment someday, beyond all sorrow and pain.

How can we make ourselves ready for such a gift? Certainly, we must be in Christ, but we are also called to serve Him as well as we can here and now. In the days we have left on this earth, whether we can anticipate those days stretching into decades, or being only a few, we can abide in His Spirit, grow in holiness, work for justice, tend the sick, and care for the needy. We can love God and one another, and if we are not physically able to demonstrate our love in deeds, we can pray.

It is a certainty that one day we will see the Lord. The King will come, either in glory or when our life on earth nears its end. Whenever and however, He comes then, may He find we have been using our time wisely and are ready to hear Him say, *“Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master.”*

*Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit  
and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I Thessalonians 5:23

Karen Purnell



Saturday, December 10, 2022

## WHAT INDESCRIBABLE JOY!

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”* II Corinthians 5:17

“Your floor really looks nice,” my father said.

He was standing in my kitchen and we were getting ready to eat dinner.

I mumbled something about, “Well, thank you! It’s had its share of spills the past 15 years!”

Later that night, I looked back on the conversation as I was cleaning the kitchen floor.

There were scuff marks over here, water stains over there, dings from cans, plates, and cups dropped through the years...you name it! If you got real close, it was an absolute mess!

Somehow, my mind went to God, and the amazing/miraculous thing that happens when He looks at my life. Any other human that has watched my life for the past 63 years could make a long list of all my sins, mistakes, errors, selfish actions, cutting words, and moments that I’d just as soon forget.

But God created each of us. His Son, Jesus gave His very life to rescue us from our sinfulness. Because I’ve put my faith in His Son, God looks at my life and sees Jesus! What an unspeakable joy that is to my heart. Instead of seeing me and all my failings, He sees His Son in all His glory...

*“For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.”* Colossians 3:3  
My old life is hidden, and God only sees Jesus...what indescribable joy!

...and all it took was a worn hardwood floor to remind me of that.

Karen Love



## THE JOY OF GIVING

*“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”* II Corinthians 9:15

### What is God’s Gift to us?

The answer to this question is quite simple. God sent His one and only Son Jesus Christ to earth to be the final sacrifice for our sins. I don’t know about you, but to me, that is the most special gift I have ever received.

Let’s break down II Corinthians 9:15 for a moment to really understand what Paul is trying to share with us. “Thanks be to God...”, Here we read that Paul burst out in an exclamation of appreciation to God. “...for His indescribable...” The Greek word for indescribable is not used anywhere else in the New Testament and is translated as “unutterable.” This means that words cannot describe, and no human can fully appreciate the magnitude of the gift.

Gift giving is something that I love to do; gift giving brings joy to my heart. Seeing the other person open their gift from me, and seeing their reaction warms my heart with joy. I know gift giving isn’t everyone’s “cup of tea” and that’s ok. Jesus and His sacrifice is the most indescribable gift we could receive. Christmas time can be stressful, but it can also be a joyous time. While you are gift shopping this season, remember God who gave the most incredible gift to each one of us and maybe this year gift giving will be a little more joyous for you. I can’t begin to imagine how God feels each time someone accepts His gift of Christ.

Blessings,  
Kayla Hass

Dear God,  
We thank you for giving the gift of grace. For giving us the opportunity of receiving a relationship with you. As we move into the Christmas season this year, let us remember all you have done for us and continue to do. Let us not get wrapped up in the gifts, but rather focus on You and the gift You have given us. Amen.



Monday, December 12, 2022

## JOY

*His anger lasts a moment; his favor lasts for life! Weeping may go on all night,  
but in the morning, there is joy. Psalm 30:5 (TLB)*

Experiencing “joy in pain”... what a difficult concept to understand. James wrote about it when he told us to “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds” (James 1:2 NIV). James went on to explain that trials lead to perseverance and perseverance to hope. “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (I Peter 1:8 NIV).

How can we possibly live up to the standards laid out for us in the Bible? If it means we must face pain to know joy, is it worth knowing? If I have to suffer to experience the joy that Jesus offers maybe I would rather pass it by! If you have ever asked yourself these questions or wondered whether the benefit is worth the effort, consider this: There is no way to avoid pain in this life. No one has lived any length of time in this world and not faced trials, felt pain, or been in distress. The real question is not whether experiencing joy is worth the presence of pain; we all **will** face trials and pain. The question is whether we choose to face the pain and distress **WITHOUT** experiencing the JOY! Look again at I Peter 1:8. The Joy is already within us; we need only let it out.

The Psalmist says *weeping may last all night, but there is joy in the morning* (Ps. 30:5). What is it that ‘morning’ represents? A time to wake-up! You may choose to live your life in the ‘night’ and know nothing but pain and distress with only the occasional feeling of happiness. Or, you may choose to WAKE UP! And experience the joy that comes from feeling the presence and power of Christ in your life.

What is joy? Joy is the power to feel, to know, the presence of the Christ in your life no matter what circumstances you may be experiencing. Joy is experienced in the midst of pain, not in its absence. Remember, God’s power is made perfect in our weakness (II Corinthians 12:9).

Rick Pryor



Tuesday, December 13, 2022

## HALFWAY TO CHRISTMAS DAY

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son... Galatians 4:4*

It's a busy time of year. Most of us are already exhausted and we still have 12 more shopping days to go before Christmas (counting today) --- not to mention the wrapping, the baking, and the parties. Added to the busyness is the stress of thinking there won't be enough time to get it all done.

We turn on the TV, hoping for relief from the frenzy, and there are the Christmas shows, which all tend to be built around one of three themes:

- #1 – what matters in life are the simple things, especially family
- #2 – the way to be happy is to help other people
- #3 – believe, and amazing things will happen

From animated specials to feature-length films the messages roll off the screen and into our living rooms.

It's easy to get confused. Does it matter what we believe in, or that we just believe? Is believing in the spirit of giving, for instance, as life-sustaining as believing in God? And the truth about helping others is that it doesn't always make us happy. When it doesn't, do we just quit? And have you noticed that the people who discover the value of simple things in the made-for-TV movies all seem to have plenty of money?

But if what's on TV isn't the message of Christmas, what is? What exactly are we preparing with such fervor to celebrate?

It's all about Jesus, of course. It's about who He is, and that's more than a baby born in a manger. Jesus is God "veiled in flesh" as one of the carols we sing says. He is the co-creator of the universe, the immortal, immutable King of Kings and Lord of Lords, humbling Himself to become one of us. He didn't have to. He chose to, and He chose to because He, like the Father and the Spirit with whom He is one, loves us.

And that's it. Christmas is about being loved more and beyond anything we could ever imagine --- loved by God, and loved enough for Him to be with us in our busyness, stress and confusion. But God's display of profound humility for the sake of love matters only if we let it matter; if we respond to it and let it change us.

Jesus came to us so we could come to Him --- and as often as we come, we discover He really is with us. "And that, Charlie Brown," is what Christmas is *really* all about.

Karen Purnell



Wednesday, December 14, 2022

## **THANK HIM OVER AND OVER AND OVER!**

“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.” II Corinthians 9:15. (And His ever-giving heart)

There is always, always, always something to be thankful for.

During Mary’s pregnancy, she had no one to confide in, BUT:  
God provided a lengthy visit with Elizabeth.

Near the end of Mary’s pregnancy, they had to go to Bethlehem, BUT:  
There was a donkey for Mary to ride on.

At Bethlehem there were no rooms to be found, BUT:  
God found a spot for Mary to give birth.

There were no close friends to bring them a casserole, BUT:  
God led a rag-tag bunch of shepherds to welcome the baby Jesus.

There was no announcement of the Savior’s birth on billboards, newspaper headlines, Facebook, or  
Twitter, BUT:  
God placed a brilliant star in the sky to announce Jesus’ birth.

Now it’s your turn. In the week ahead, you are bound to be bombarded with unexpected and  
challenging circumstances.

Look for God’s Grace winks as my friend calls them – Ways He brings a smile instead of a frown.

Ways He shows up in the most inopportune moments and places.

Ways He makes a way when there seems to be no way.

Ways He lets you know He will never leave you nor forsake you.

Ways He reminds you that your life is in His hands.

Then thank Him...over and over and over and over again.

Karen Love



Thursday, December 15, 2022

## THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH

*Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. Nehemiah 8:10b*

I found this poem by Margaret Cagle and was granted permission to share it with you. I hope that these words will shed His light to you during the Advent journey.

*When you are sad and feeling blue  
And really don't know what to do,  
Open God's Word, and you can read  
Scriptures to give you the strength you need.*

*"The joy of the Lord is your strength."  
God's joy can end depression's length,  
So don't mope around with a long, sad face  
If you have accepted God's merciful grace.*

*There's not a problem that God cannot solve.  
In our hearts, we should resolve  
To take our problems to Him in prayer,  
Give Him the burden, and leave it there.*

*I know it's easier said than done,  
But was it easy when God gave His own Son  
To die for our sins on a cruel tree  
To give eternal life to you and me?*

*If we can trust Him to save our souls,  
We can trust Him with problems that take their tolls  
And steal our joy that we need to display  
To others that we meet along life's way.*

Thank You, Lord, for sending Your precious Son to bear our sins and save us. May the light of Jesus Christ be your joy and strength this holy season and always!

Renee Bryant



Friday, December 16, 2022

## **JOY TO THE WORLD THE LORD IS COME! LET EARTH RECEIVE HER KING!**

What a scene that must have been, in the fields among the shepherds when the angels came to announce the birth of the Son of God.

*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*  
Luke 2:8-11 (KJV)

Many people spend their entire lives trying to make, buy, steal, even borrow a little joy that they may experience in their lives. But the truth is that joy can be experienced only from the presence of the Holy Spirit of God. The world tries to convince us that we can find it in other ways, but the most anyone can have, outside of the presence of God, is fleeting happiness. The joy that is a fruit of the Holy Spirit is not something that can be obtained from this world; but it can be experienced while in this world.

The gift that God sent to us on that Christmas night when the angel appeared to the shepherds was the beginning of hope. Jesus was born to bring us hope for the future and joy for today. When the shepherds saw those heavenly messengers, the scripture says they were “afraid”, but what a surprise they received because the first thing they heard was a message that would change, not only their lives but, the future of the entire world.

I have often felt that the autumn season is representative of the condition of the world just prior to the birth of Jesus Christ. The changing colors of the leaves that signal their coming death and with that death the way they fall from the tree that gives them life. The world was facing the same fate; lost and turning further away from God’s will, caught up in the yoke of ritual and religious oppression. They needed to experience true joy, to understand how much God loved them for who they were, not for any actions they might make. God loved them and He loves us because we are His creation. We have the opportunity to be the children of God (Galatians 3:26), but without the gift that was sent to us on that night there would be no opportunity, no hope, no joy!

Then our Saviour came into the world. The angel delivered to those who were present in the field that night the most important message the world will ever hear; “I bring you tidings of great joy...” because on that day “*a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord*” brought to us the understanding that we may have a personal relationship with the same God that sent Him into the world. But only through Jesus Christ is the chance to be one of God’s children possible.

Take the time during this Christmas to thank God for the gift He sent to us. Be intentional to thank Jesus for the sacrifice He was willing to make so that we may know the experience of “GREAT JOY”!!!!

Rick Pryor





## “WELCOME TO OUR WORLD!”

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. John 1:14a*

*While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:7-8*

Chris Rice wrote “Welcome to Our World” in 1995. This five-stanza hymn sets the tone for the themes of Advent – darkness, waiting, and anticipating the light of the Promised One. Meditate upon these lyrics:

*Tears are falling, hearts are breaking; how we need to hear from God.  
You’ve been promised, we’ve been waiting, welcome, holy Child, welcome holy Child.*

*Hope that you don’t mind our manger, how I wish we would have known.  
But the long-awaited holy Stranger, make Yourself at home, oh, please make Yourself at home.*

*Bring Your peace into our violence, bid our hungry souls be filled.  
Word now breaking heaven’s silence, welcome to our world, welcome to our world.*

*Fragile finger sent to heal us, tender brow prepared for thorn.  
Tiny heart whose blood will save us, unto us is born, unto us is born.  
So wrap our injured flesh around you, breathe our air and walk our sod.  
Rob our sin and make us holy, perfect Son of God, perfect Son of God.*

*Welcome to our world. Welcome to our world.*

### ***Welcome to Our World!***

He left the comfort of His heavenly home to come to our world; the world that He created; the world that He created for the earthly home of His creation. And what did His creation do after living in the perfection of the garden? After walking and conversing with God on a daily basis? We sinned! We crossed over the one line that God asked man to never cross. Man ate of the forbidden fruit, and our world changed! It was no longer perfect!

### ***Welcome to Our World!***

In order to right all of the wrongs of this world, the gift of Jesus, God's Son, was sent to love, minister, and give His life for the sins of God’s creation! The first Christmas!

### ***Welcome to Our World!***

*“Hope that you don’t mind our manger, how I wish we would have known. But the long-awaited holy Stranger, make Yourself at home. Oh, please make Yourself at home.”*

We hope that the gift of Christ will be yours today if you do not know Him as your personal Savior. May you *Welcome Him to Your World!*

We hope you will join us tomorrow at 10:45 a.m. as the Adult Choir presents “Welcome to our World!”

Gene and Joanna Wright

Sunday, December 18, 2022

## **JESUS: THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD!**

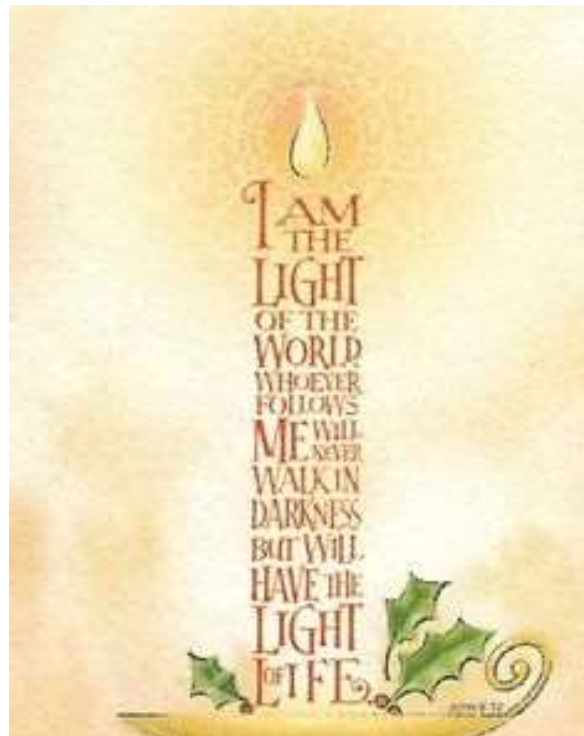
The first recorded words that God uttered were, “Let there be light.” He knew we needed light. Light is the contrast to darkness. In the beginning, there was nothing but darkness; then there was light. Since that time, we have discovered the importance of light. It brings comfort, security, safety, and an end to shadows and uncertainty. Light brings warmth and a source of energy. Light helps us in our daily tasks, making it easier to see which way to go and enables us to avoid problems and pitfalls. Without light, we would flounder and struggle through our days.

If you substitute the word “light” for Jesus, the previous paragraph would still be correct and true. Jesus came into this world to bring us light. Without Him, we would still be lost and in darkness. Jesus is light. He gives us comfort, security, safety, and puts an end to the shadows in our world and the uncertainty. Jesus’ love gives us a sense of warmth and is a source of energy to keep us going. He leads and guides us daily as we go about our days; and if we listen to Him, He’ll guide us around the pitfalls and through the problems.

Jesus will never steer you wrong, leave you, or forsake you. If you already have a relationship with Him, then you know this. If you’ve never thought about it, or had a conversation with Him, you need to step out of the darkness and into the light. Jesus really is the light in this dark world.

Genesis 1:1-4, John 8:12

Lesley Hass



Monday, December 19, 2022

## THE LOVE OF GOD

I heard a pastor recounting a story of a conversation he had with a person who thought that he did not love God enough. He told the man that it wasn't that he did not love God enough, it was that he didn't grasp how much God loves him.

Every Christian knows John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world (you and me) that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."* Sometimes I think we forget how much God truly loves us. I know I did. This especially happens during the "trials of many kinds" that we experience but we were told about in the book of James.

It is during the time of Advent and Christmas that we are to remember that God sent His Son to be born as a babe on earth, to live on this earth, to die on this earth, and to rise on this earth. This was all done out of pure love for our benefit. Then, so that we would not be alone on this earth He sent the Holy Spirit to be with us at all times. Also out of love, He gave us His living words in the form of the Bible. These words inspired by God Himself, and then written down, are meant to speak to our very souls when we take them in. God literally covered us with His love and saved us from being separated from Him here on earth and for eternity.

God loved us and He still loves us! This is true regardless of what trials we may experience here on earth. Those trials are meant to grow us, mature us in faith and perseverance, and to humble us to become more like Jesus. (James 1:1-4) Jeremiah 29:11 says *"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."* Now that future includes our walk here and heaven, as well. That my friends, is Love.

What does the Lord ask of us in return? *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself."* (Mathew 22:37-39) So just remember as we celebrate Christmas, that Love came into our world as a babe, walked, died, and rose again. The good news is if you are a Christian, then Love lives in you and is busting to get out. So love God and love on others.

Many Blessings,  
Danny Hass



Tuesday, December 20, 2022

## EYES THAT SEE

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* Matthew 5:8

No one has ever seen God, but people have seen His glory. According to the Bible what they usually see when they see the glory of God is light in some form. The Israelites saw God's glory as a consuming fire on Mt. Sinai. Ezekiel saw His glory as a gleaming figure seated on a sapphire throne. The night Jesus was born shepherds saw the glory of God as light shining all around them, and far to the east a brilliant star led wise men to Bethlehem where Jesus had been born.

But what the shepherds and wise men saw when they got to where they had been sent was not fire or a figure on a throne. They saw the glory of God wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. The glory was a child, and the glory was so well hidden in that child that almost no one knew it was there.

Jesus looked like an ordinary human being. For most of his life he lived the same kind of unassuming life other young men in Judea lived. On the surface there was nothing to indicate that he was the radiance of the Father, and Light of the World. If angels and a star hadn't pointed him out to the shepherds and wise men, would even they have noticed his birth? Probably not. Human beings tend to take a quick look at things, make decisions based on appearances and move on.

When Jesus grew up he talked about having "eyes that see". The eyes he was talking about are not the kind of eyes that take in light and send data to the brain. He was talking about the ability to see below the surface of things into what is hidden underneath. People who have those kind of eyes can see the glory of God in the face of Christ (II Corinthians 4:6). But they see even more than that. They see that every human being is more than he or she seems to be and that God is at work in the lives of us all.

People who have "eyes that see" notice God, too. They notice when he answers their prayers. They see him present in the circumstances of their everyday lives. They experience wonder and are in awe of his power.

Jesus once told some people who had perfectly good eyesight that they were blind. What he meant was that because they couldn't see past their preconceived notions, they couldn't see what God wanted them to show them. "Eyes that see" aren't like that. They want to see things the way God sees them, so instead of being quick to judge, they are ready to be shown.

We don't come by "eyes that see" naturally. To have them, we have to want them, and then ask for them. Have you asked God for "eyes that see"? If so, what is He showing you and where did you see His glory today?

Karen Purnell



## LOVE: God's Gift of His Son JESUS

What is Christmas? **Christmas is all about the good news that the angels announced to Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds: the birth of the Savior of the world.** The love of God is revealed through Jesus who existed as God from infinity, but laid aside His privileges and took on the form of a servant when He became a man.

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. It is not that these things are 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” (I 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.”*

Let us also not forget Jesus' words to His disciples: 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.”*

God IS Love, unchanging, everlasting, abounding, steadfast love that never ceases. Love beyond comprehension, enduring forever.

Corrie Ten Boom said, “Who can add to Christmas? The perfect motive is that God so loved the world. The perfect gift is that He gave His only Son. The only requirement is to believe in Him. The reward of faith is that you shall have everlasting life.”

Christmas is about love because God is love.

Mary Kleber



Thursday, December 22, 2022

## 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



Scripture References: Luke 2:7, Matthew 2:11, Luke 24:1-7, Matthew 18:3, Luke 19:10

## THAT EVERYWHERE AND EVERLASTING LOVE

*“I have loved you with an everlasting love.”* Jeremiah 31:3

And that love was exhibited to the world forever when Jesus was born, crucified, and resurrected.

The children were exiting Music Session on the final day of Terrific Tuesday this summer. We had been focusing on God’s power...that His strength is endless.... that He is with us wherever we go, etc.

As the precious first grader walked by me, she whispered to me, “I know Jesus is here with me, but He has other helpers in other states to take care of people there!”

There was not time for an in-depth conversation, just a moment to pass on a little love and continue to point a young heart to Jesus’ love. I don’t have a recording of what I said, but something like, “That’s what’s so incredible about our God! He’s big enough to be everywhere at the same time.”

Praying her childlike faith will grow, that she will someday fully take hold of Ephesians 3:18-19.

*“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure with all the fullness of God.”*

Then she will be confident of His love for her and His power to protect her and be with her in any state!

Karen Love



Saturday, December 24, 2022

## THE WORD BECAME FLESH

John 1:1-14

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14*

As a Baby born in a manger, Jesus came into His own created order. Mark introduces Jesus as a grown man. Matthew and Luke begin with His birth, both telling beautiful stories of the birth event. But John goes all the way back to a time before time. He tells of the preexistent Christ who was from eternity. John begins His prologue with, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”*. Jesus Christ was the Word. Jesus Christ is the Word. Jesus Christ has always been the Word.

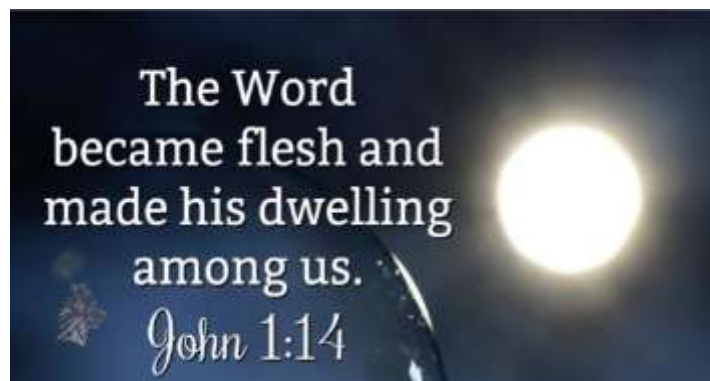
*“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”* He came to us in person. He did not just write us a letter. He did not just send us a representative. He did not just speak His laws from a mountain. He came to us as one of us. This divine and human Word lived among persons. The words “dwelt” or “lived among” are from a word translated to us as “tabernacled”. The tabernacle was a tent used for worship by the Hebrews on their wilderness wanderings. God pitched His tent among persons in Jesus Christ. The Message translates it this way: *“The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood”*.

Jesus came as the Light to shine in the darkness of the neighborhood – the darkness of the world. He stands here today in this dark world with the smile of love and arms extended with grace. He is the God who became real so that we could experience His transforming love. Jesus is not just a truth in which to believe; He is a person to be experienced.

On this Christmas Eve let us rejoice that the Light is here – Jesus is here. Let us not just celebrate the precious Babe in the manger because Jesus did not stay in the manger bed. He lived among people; He taught the truths of the kingdom of God; He performed miracle after miracle; He preached the good news; He comforted; He challenged; He healed; He died on a cross for you and me so that we might experience salvation and eternal life with Him if we choose.

Jesus came to give the opportunity for people to receive Him. Some recognized Him; others did not. Some followed Him; others followed anything and anyone but Him. Some came to know Him; others rejected Him. On this Christmas Eve, the best gift you can receive is the gift of Jesus Christ. Have you received Him as your Savior? That’s what Christmas is all about!

Merry Christmas!  
Linda Barnes Popham



Sunday, December 25, 2022

## RICH MAN'S CHRISTMAS

*“You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that by His poverty He could make you rich.” II Corinthians 8:9 NLT*

Christmas is a major holiday in the Philippines, my native country. Christmas songs are played on all major radio stations from September 1 to December 25. Malls, offices, churches, and homes are decorated lavishly in anticipation of the Day. Amidst poverty, Filipinos spare no expense to celebrate the birth of the Messiah. There are lots of foods, countless parties, and generous giving of gifts. At least once a year, on Christmas Day, we forget we are poor. Is not that the point of Christmas – Jesus becoming poor to make us rich (II Corinthians 8:9)?

Our wealth in Christ is not measured in terms of money in the bank, investments in the stock market, or having a secured portfolio. Rather, our wealth is measured in faith, hope, and love genuinely expressed in worship and generous giving. After you have sent your last package, mailed your last Christmas card, and cooked your Christmas meal, take a moment to sit down or kneel before the King who became poor to make your life rich. Then strive to enrich other people's lives through a life lived for Christ. Merry Christmas!

George Payocong, Jr.



Monday, December 26, 2022

## 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



Tuesday, December 27, 2022

## LIGHT-GIVING LIFE

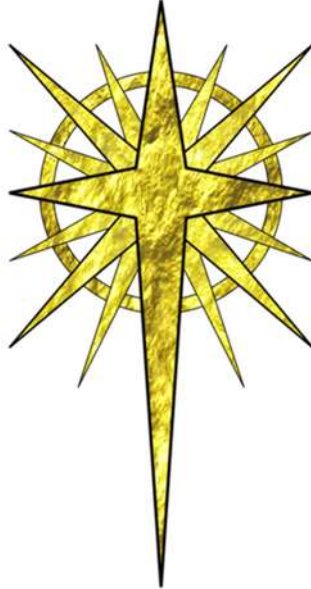
*In Him was life, and that light was the life of men (John 1:4 NIV)*

One of the things that reminds me of home during Christmas is the colorful lights that cover an entire house in our neighborhood. I enjoy driving around nearby neighborhoods and allow my eyes to feast on the beautiful lights that dance in sync with lively music. These lights make the house or the lawn alive. The colorful lights make the difference in a rather dull place.

Did you know that a “light is made up of little packets of energy called photons. Most of these photons are produced when the atoms in an object heat up. Heat ‘excites’ the electrons inside the atoms and they gain extra energy. This extra energy is then released as a photon. The hotter an object gets, the more photons it gives out.” So, to say that there is life in light is not just poetic, but also scientific. The passage cited above tells us it is also theological.

Since Christmas is about Christ, the spirit of Christmas then is to shine forth as lights of the world. Christ has given us eternal life to shine as lights to this world covered with darkness. Let your lights shine not just for a season, but for the rest of your life.

George Payocong, Jr.



Wednesday, December 28, 2022

## A MESSAGE FROM THE WORD

**H** *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. Jeremiah 29:11*

**O**  
**P** *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*

**E** *Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. Hebrews 10:23*

**P** *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 14:27*

**E**  
**A** *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7*

**C**  
**E** *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. Colossians 3:15*

*Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and be holy. Hebrews 12:14*

**J** *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. John 15:11*

**O**  
**Y** *The joy of the LORD is your strength. Nehemiah 8:10*

*He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him. Psalm 126:6*

**L** *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16*

**O**  
**V** *God is love. I John 4:8*

**E** *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13*

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you. John 13:34*

Bud Purnell

## CHOOSE PEACE

Isaiah 11:1-9



Isaiah described a day in which a coming king would bring about a radical transformation. He illustrated this coming day when predators, domesticated animals, and an innocent child would live peacefully together. The wolf would dwell graciously with the lamb. The leopard and the young goat would lie down willingly together. A young calf, a young lion, and a fattened bull would exist harmoniously together. The cow and the bear would graze serenely in the same pasture. The lion and the ox would tranquilly eat straw together. The child would hold a poisonous snake and not be harmed. This picture obviously symbolized something far greater than the animal kingdom.

This new age of which Isaiah spoke would be one in which the mighty would live peacefully with the weak. Exploiters of the poor and needy would change such evil habits. People of all races would live together with love and kindness. The vulnerable would be immune from danger. There would be no more ill-treatment, meanness, and corruption. People would live without fear. There would be peace and tranquility.

The day finally came! “Mary gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger” (Luke 2:7). The Prince of Peace was born. Peace came to the earth.

Then where is that picture of the lamb and the lion and all others living together peacefully in this world filled with social unrest, pandemics, bombings, shootings, terrorist attacks, abuse, lying, meanness, hatred, murder, trafficking, and persecution? We even see bloodshed in our churches...massacres at concerts...killings in schools...murders in homes! Where is that beautiful picture of world peace and that love and tranquility of which Isaiah spoke?

One day that peace will be reality. Complete peace will only be realized when Jesus comes again; however, that peace is not supposed to be so foreign right now as we live together on this earth. We are to live in peace with each other and even with people with whom we differ or disagree. Paul reminds us in Romans 12:18-21 that we are to live in peace with others as far as it depends on us. We can be at peace with others, but we can't make them be at peace with us.

So what can we do to usher in peace as far as it depends on us?

- We can choose to be at peace with God. Peace comes from fully trusting in the Prince of Peace who was born for each of us. Have you trusted Him as Savior and Lord?
- We can choose to be at peace with ourselves. We do this by focusing fully on Jesus. Are you seeking Him above all else?
- We can choose to be intentional about being peacemakers like Jesus told us to in the Sermon on the Mount. Are you actively working to reconcile people to God and people with each other?

Let us join together in bringing peace to the “corner of the world” in which we live! Let us choose peace. Let peace begin with you and me!

Praying for a Peaceful 2023!  
Linda Barnes Popham

Friday, December 30, 2022

## ARE YOU AT PEACE?

Praise ye the Lord, O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for His mercy endures forever.  
Psalm 106:1

Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool; for He is holy. Psalm 99:5

And He said, My Presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. Exodus 33:14

Commit thy ways unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. Psalm 37:5

Every word of God is pure: He is a shield to them that put their trust in Him. Proverbs 30:5

How can you have peace when the world is in chaos? We have just traversed two years of chaos and confusion with the pandemic. We see our country at odds. Many families are facing turmoil physically, financially, or emotionally. In the face of all this, can you still have Peace?

I found this acrostic poem using scripture. The more I read these scriptures, I am assured that it is truly the way to have peace as far as it depends on us. If we are praising God and worshiping Him, we are not focused on self or the chaos around us. By keeping our focus on God and truly worshiping Him we can make a difference in our lives and those around us. On a personal note, I find being in the fellowship and corporate worship truly fuels my feeling of peace and attitude throughout the week.

The next scripture talks about His presence is with us always. Let me repeat that His presence is with us always. We are not lost, forsaken, or uncared for. We just must look, listen, and focus on Him to find Him. The second part of this scripture states He will give us rest. If our focus is on God, He will give us what we need. Not what we want, but what we need! Committing our lives and actions to Him shows God we trust Him, but it also shows the world. We are to be His examples in this world.

The last scripture talks about the Word of the Lord. If we are in His Word and hide His Word in our hearts, He is our shield and protector. Will bad things still happen? Yes, but God will be with us through it all! In sending His Son, He provided a way for each of us to have a personal relationship.

I pray you find Peace and rest during this Advent Season and throughout our new year 2023.

Renee Bryant



## WALK IN THE LIGHT

The contrast of light and darkness is a theme throughout Scripture. We see the contrast clearly in I John 1:5-7: *“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”*

There are many similar references of that contrast in God’s Word. Some of those are:

- Psalm 18:28 - *My God turns my darkness into light.*
- Isaiah 9:2 - *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.*
- John 1:4-5 - *In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*
- John 8:12 – *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*

Light dispels darkness: Where there is light, darkness cannot exist. It is impossible for darkness to overcome light. Have you ever seen darkness take over a room where the lights are on?

Since God has no darkness in Him, neither should we. If we are Christians, Christ has rescued us from darkness and brought us into the light of His Son. For the Christian to walk in darkness would be like a person who has been saved from a burning building to decide to run right back into the burning building to stay. We have been rescued from the darkness of sin, so why should we want any part of living in it?

Let us make a commitment to walk in the light today and during the New Year of 2023 which is quickly approaching. Walking in the light means walking as Christ did as He walked while here on earth; walking in the light is seeking to imitate Him in all we do; walking in the light is seen in our love for others.

If you are not a Christian, will you make the decision to accept the Light into your life today? Jesus wants to be your Savior! He wants to bring you out of the darkness. Just ask Him!

If you are a Christian, will you let your light shine brightly so others can see the light of Jesus? (Matthew 5:16) Will you help dispel the darkness of this world? Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Treasure Island* and other books, recalled an experience when he was a young child. One evening he was looking out the front window of their house, fascinated by a lamplighter who was coming down the street, lighting the old-fashioned gas street lamps. He called to his grandmother, *“Nana! Come quickly! There’s a man coming down the street punching holes in the darkness!”* May our lives shine so brightly for Jesus that we will “punch holes” in the darkness of this world!



Linda Barnes Popham

Sunday, January 1, 2023

## ARISE AND SHINE IN 2023!

*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Isaiah 60:1-3*



When I was a young girl and participating in Girls' Auxiliary (now called Girls in Action) the GA watchword was, "*Arise, shine, for thy light is come*". This watchword, based on Isaiah 60:1a, was actually designated as the watchword in 1924. What a great reminder it was to us as young children to "shine for Jesus".

In this passage's context, we find that the people of Judah had been living in the darkness of bondage as they were in Babylonian captivity. As they were coming out of bondage, some were disillusioned because the jubilant expectations of the people of Israel had not come to pass. The prophet began to renew the promises of a new day for them. He assured the people that God had not forgotten them. Their mission as a light to the world had not changed. A new day was coming for God's people. These are words we need to hear, as well! A new day is coming!

Today is a new day! It is the beginning of a new year. I urge you on this new day to ***Arise! Shine!*** Darkness is thick and heavy in today's world, but the Light of Jesus Christ has come and is here to stay! ***Arise! Shine!*** What do those imperatives say to us?

***Arise!*** Get-up! Come out of the dark! Come to the Light! Some of you may need to come to Light and accept Jesus as Savior and Lord. Others may need to get out of the shadows and live completely in the light. Jesus is the light who changes things and transforms our lives! He is the light to guide us along life's journeys – even during pandemics – and even in the times that we seem to have more questions than answers. He is the light who dispels the darkness of sin and guilt with His forgiveness. Wherever there is darkness, Christ has come to shed light.

***Shine!*** The Lord's presence and glory were with His people. Thus, they were to reflect the light of His presence by shining in the world. We are to let the light of Christ shine through us so that the darkness of despair and hopelessness might be dispelled all around us. John 9:5 says, "*While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*" And now as Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, He says us, "*You are the light of the world*" (Matthew 5:13a).

As I go back to those GA days again in my mind, I recall the pledge we often recited that tells us what it looks like to ***Arise and Shine!***: *Knowing that countless people grope in darkness and giving attention to His commands, I assert my allegiance to Jesus Christ, to His church and its activities, attempting with God's help to abide in Him through prayer, to advance in wisdom by Bible study, to acknowledge my stewardship of time, money, and personality, to adorn myself with good works, and to accept the challenge of the Great Commission.*

And of course the first GA hymn, "We've a Story to Tell", surely reminds us of the need to ***Arise! Shine!*** *We've a story to tell to the nations... We've a song to be sung to the nations... We've a message to give to the nations... We've a Savior to show to the nations...*

Let's ***Arise! Shine!*** Together for Jesus in 2023!

Linda Barnes Popham

## THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

*You are the Light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people Light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on the stand, and it gives Light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your Light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16*

The Light of the world is Jesus! In John's gospel, we read that Jesus said:

- *While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world. John 9:5*
- *I am the Light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness. John 8:12*

Just as Jesus came to be the Light of the world, His followers are commanded by Him to be lights in this dark world. We are to be the light of the world. The moon has no light of its own; it reflects the light of the sun. In like manner, believers are to reflect the Light of Jesus Christ so that all people can see Jesus in us. The Light is evident to others by the good deeds we do in through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Tom Bodett, spokesperson for Motel 6 beginning in 1986, used the same tag line for the hotel chain's commercials for many years. Many of you have probably heard him use that phrase as he would invite sleepy travelers to stay at Motel 6: *"We'll leave the light on for you."*

To a world of people who desperately need to know the love and saving power of Jesus Christ, churches must say, *"We'll leave the Light on for you."* We must never turn our Lights off – not even during pandemics...not during social unrest...not during times of danger. For these are times, more than ever, that people need the Light of Jesus Christ.

The world needs to see Light. Others are to see Jesus in the lives of Christ's followers. We are to shine before all people. The Light is to be so obvious for all to see that people will leave the darkness and come into the Light.

People need Light as a guide. We are Light in the world, not calling attention to ourselves, but pointing the way to God through serving others, loving them, showing them the way to Jesus, and walking in the way of Christ with them. Our lives should be so radiant that they give testimony to our Lord and Savior and show others how to live.

Light makes the way clear in the dark. We live in a dark world in need of a Savior. Jesus is the only way to bring Light to that darkness. We must clearly show others that the Light of the World is Jesus.

May we sing with the hymn writer, Philip Bliss:

*The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin, The Light of the world is Jesus!  
Like sunshine at noonday, His glory shone in; The Light of the world is Jesus.  
Come to the Light, 'tis shining for thee; Sweetly the Light has dawned upon me;  
Once I was blind, but now I can see; The Light of the world is Jesus!*

Linda Barnes Popham



Tuesday, January 3, 2023

## SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS LOVE IN ACTION

Reference Scripture: Luke 2:41-52

Focal verse: Luke 2:51 “... *Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*” (NIV)

“The Longer I Serve Him” is a hymn I have heard most of my life. Sadly, the old hymns are often overlooked in contemporary worship. Life is ever changing, but not all change is growth. This hymn is a guiding light to Spiritual Growth.

*Since I started of his kingdom, Since my life He controls,  
Since I gave my Heart to Jesus, The longer I serve him the sweeter He grows.  
The longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows.  
The more that I love Him  
More love He bestows.  
Each day like heaven, my heart overflows.  
The longer I serve Him the sweeter He grows.  
Every need He's supplying, Plenty grace He bestows.  
Every day my way gets brighter, The longer I serve Him the sweeter He grows.*

I have seen many changes in the time I have been in this world, and I have learned many things. I, like all of us who are in this world long enough, have grown in stature. That is an unavoidable aspect of physical life, Jesus was no exception. Gaining favor among people is not a particularly easy task, yet Jesus “amazed them” (vs. 47). But growing in wisdom, and finding favor with God is, as they used to say, “A horse of a different color”.

The Scripture has very little information about Jesus before He began His ministry. His birth is well recorded, but we don't have anything else until Luke shares this ‘status report’. Jesus has grown. At twelve years old Jesus has come to the temple and is “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at His understanding and His answers.” (Lk 2:46-47) The Scripture points out two very interesting things: “*Jesus was listening and asking questions*”. But then apparently answering questions also, and “*..everyone who heard was amazed*” (Lk 2:47).

Spiritual growth is not like physical growth. It is a choice! Growing in wisdom requires help from God. Proverbs 1:6 says “*For the Lord gives wisdom and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.*” Paul tells us to “*..study to show yourself approved...rightly dividing [understanding] the word of truth*”. (I Timothy 2:15 KJV)

Spiritual growth requires wisdom. Wisdom is a combination of knowledge and understanding. And true wisdom comes only from God. Please choose to grow in spirit. Study to “show yourself approved” and seek wisdom from God. Seeking to know God better and grow closer to Him is the best way to show your love for Him. It is work, as is all growth, but the result will “amaze” you. You will find that “the longer you serve Him, the sweeter He grows”.

Rick Pryor

## GOD'S LOVE FOR US

*Dear friends, let us love with one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us. I John 4:7-12 (NIV)*

Christmas is a time that we celebrate the love of God through Jesus' birth. So many people came to show their love to Jesus when He was born, like the angels, shepherds, and wise men; but God's love is the greatest. During this time of the year, God's love is shown the most through Jesus' birth.

As John 3:16 says, *"For God so loved the world and gave his only Son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life."* It shows us that God gave us His only Son into this sinful world so that we could be able to one day go to heaven if we accept Jesus Savior. That's the best love anyone could ever give to us.

God loved His Son and gave us the gift of His Son, Jesus. Jesus chose to love us and came from heaven down to earth so that one day we may have eternal life in heaven.

Furthermore, Christmas is a glorious time to worship our Savior's birth, because of the greatness of our Father's love.

Emma Towles



Thursday, January 5, 2023

## 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



## WHAT WILL YOU GIVE?

*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

O. Henry (William Sydney Porter) wrote a moving story called “*The Gift of the Magi*”. Jim and Della, a young American couple, were very poor but so much in love. Each of them had one unique possession. Della’s beautiful long hair was her glory. When she let it down it covered her body like a glorious robe.

Jim had a gold watch which had come to him from his father and was his prized possession. On the day before Christmas, Della had exactly \$1.87 to buy Jim a present. She went out and sold her hair for \$20; and with the proceeds she bought a platinum fob for Jim’s precious watch.

When Jim came home that night and saw Della’s short hair, he was stunned. It was not that he did not like it or that he loved her any less. She was still beautiful. Slowly he handed her his gift; it was a set of expensive tortoise-shell combs with jeweled edges for her lovely long hair; he had sold his gold watch to buy them.

Jim and Della had each given the other all there was to give. Real love cannot think of any other way to give.

The Magi from the East followed the light of the star to find Jesus. When they found Him, they gave their precious gifts to Jesus – gold, incense, and myrrh. They gave out of their love and devotion, for they understood that this Baby was the real King of the Jews.

Read John 12:1-11. There you will find Mary graciously pouring her costly perfume on Jesus’ feet and then wiping His feet with her hair. She gave Him her most precious and extravagant possession. Mary poured out herself at His feet in worship and adoration. What an act of love!

In an even greater way, God gave us His most precious possession – HIS ONLY SON. The greatest expression of God’s love is in the death – the sacrifice – the gift – of His only Son. God so loved the world that HE GAVE.

*“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”.* John 3:16

What are you willing to give to God and others in response to God’s great love, not only on this day of Epiphany, but always?

Linda Barnes Popham

