



“COMING SOON”

2023 ADVENT DEVOTIONALS



GRACE COVENANT
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

ADVENT

We often hear that spending a few minutes each day working on a goal can bring about growth. The same can be said about our spiritual lives. Both at Advent and Lent if not at other times during the year, reading and reflection can help with personal growth.

In this Advent season, these daily devotions are intended to stimulate thought about God's word. They are written from a layman's perspective with little more training than what many experience in their religious lives. They are offered with love and with hope, that by reading them, you will be motivated to think more about God, to pray more to God, and to draw closer to your loved ones. Based on the Common Lectionary of Year C, the devotions continue through Christmas and into Christmastide then end at Epiphany. The writings are paired with a piece of visual artwork and a bit of music, most recorded on YouTube.

My hope is that your day will be better for spending a few minutes each day.

—Harold Frye, Ed.D.



Sunday, December 3, Advent Sunday by Harold Frye

Isaiah 64:3 “When you accomplished wonders beyond all our expectations; when you came down, mountains quaked before you.”

Several years ago, when I was in graduate school, my faculty advisor asked if I had started a curriculum vitae, or CV for short. I hadn't even thought about it and had secretly laughed at the idea of putting down on paper that I had attended a local Lions Club meeting (something my advisor had done). Years later when I entered the ranks of university faculty myself and was required to present my CV as part of my annual performance review, I too fell victim to the “more is better” philosophy. I am proud to say that my CV is a full 15 pages in length, capturing even the most insignificant activities sorted out under the big 3: Teaching, Research, and Service. Font size is reduced in the document to prevent it from being even more ridiculously long.

What would God's CV look like? Would there be enough paper to print it? How would it be organized? If accomplishments were sorted under Teaching, Research, and Service, which category would be the largest?

Certainly, not even the smallest clump of earth would move one iota in my presence. But you, my God, you have done wondrous things.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfQrnKPiAx0>



Monday, December 4 by Stephen Wing

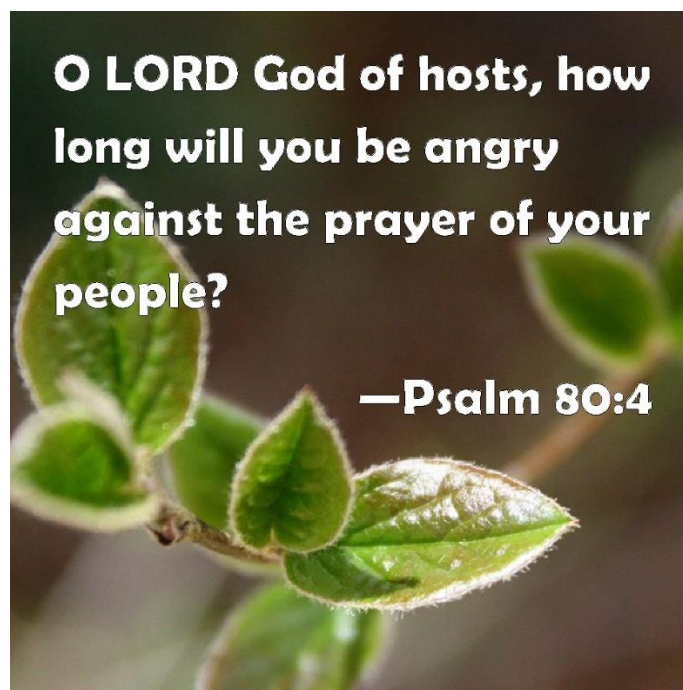
Psalm 80:4-5 “LORD God of Hosts, how long will you fume at your people’s prayer? You have made sorrow their daily bread and overflowing tears their drink.”

What do you expect when you pray? What do you think should happen? That God will listen? That God will pay attention? That God will do something? But what if you experience none of that? What do you assume? What do you think is going on out there in the ether, where it seems your prayers are not landing on anyone’s ears, but are floating around? That you must be doing this prayer thing wrong? That you did not say the right words in the right way? Or that it really has nothing to do with you, but with God? That God is asleep on the job? That God is busy with other, more important things than you? Or, that it is a mixture? That God is angry with you? That you did something wrong, or that God thinks you are a bad person? That God is teaching you a lesson by intentionally not listening to you when you pray? And how long must this go on—this dreadful silence, this anger, this whatever it is? Are you thinking that if you just said more prayers, or better prayers, or different prayers, that you will get the outcome you want? Is it not enough to make you wonder what this prayer thing is all about? To wonder why praying is so difficult and frustrating? And how aggravated you get when others tell you about their wonderful experiences when they pray? How God tells them this and that, and how God answers in amazing ways? Blah, blah, blah? Why is it that praying only brings sorrow, and causes more tears to flow? It is not supposed to work that way!

Advent is a time to pray. To pray no matter what. To keep praying no matter how little or silent the response. Make your tears heard by God.

Prayer: God, I am going to keep at it. I am going to keep coming at You. Just letting You know I am not giving up. Amen and Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0sO_9F4JL0



Tuesday, December 5 by Nancy Kalesz

1 Corinthians 3:9 We are God's co-workers, and you are God's field, God's building.

I am planting beans in August. Watering them every day and wondering if they will ever bear fruit. To ever have a chance, they must be nourished by the One (God) who plants and provides water and the one gardener who plants and waits and tends what has been set before us. (Sounds confusing? Looks like I switched from God's tending to our tending in one sentence.) I did.

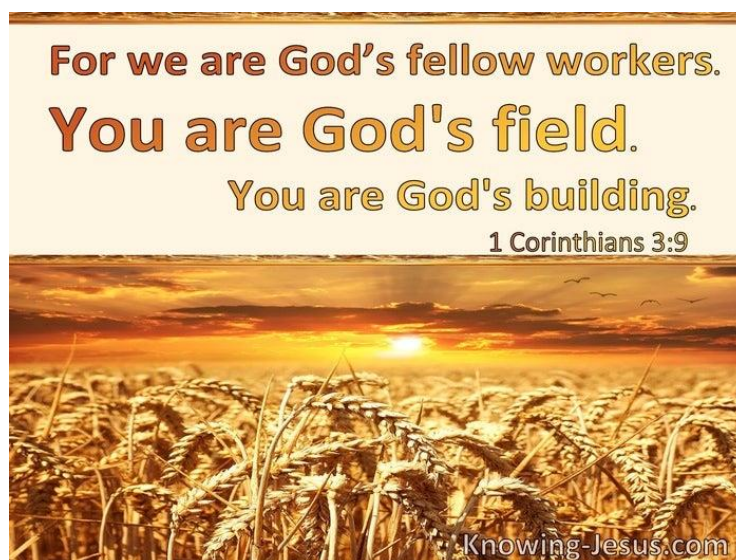
During Advent, as we prepare for Christ's coming, our need to tend that what God has planted in our hearts and minds is not just according to our needs. Rather, God has planted Love, which we must take care of, again not only for ourselves but for the world. That is the message Advent brings. Be ready to take care of the gift that is coming into the world. That Love must be cared for and nourished. To help the world we have been instructed to care for one another. Be a good steward of the Love God has given us, working together to increase the yield in all creation. Water what God has planted in your heart and share the good that Love will bring.

I prayed for God to heal the world of all the current madness. I cried out, "God! Save us!" Over and over, I have prayed this, countless times until one day the answer came: "I have given you all the tools you need, work together for good, according to my purposes." Plant Love—nurture it—be patient—Believe! The God who gives us life will also water our work according to his plan.

Creator, redeemer, sustainer. Plant in our hearts and minds the love that Christ brings to the world. Open our lives to care for all creation. Let this great gift we await in Advent be the healer of this time and of all time.

Peace and Grace.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skqlfXLfrWs>



Wednesday, December 6 by Harold Frye

Mark 13:34 “It is as if someone took a trip, left the household behind, and put the servants in charge, giving each one a job to do, and told the doorkeeper to stay alert.”

In my days as an elementary principal in Kansas City, Kansas, a story went around that was most likely true. At another school in the district, if a supervisor from the district offices showed up, the school secretary grabbed a student, handed the student a plastic rose that was kept on her desk, and told the student to quickly walk throughout the building, carrying the rose. That was the signal to put away the cards, stash the coffee cups, and look busy.

When will Jesus return? No one knows. What will happen on that day? Jesus will gather around him his chosen people. Heaven and earth will be no more, but his chosen people will be saved.

The sign won't be a plastic rose...stay alert!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14_FqbhbiHo



Thursday, December 7 by Stephen Wing

Psalm 80:17-19 “Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself.”

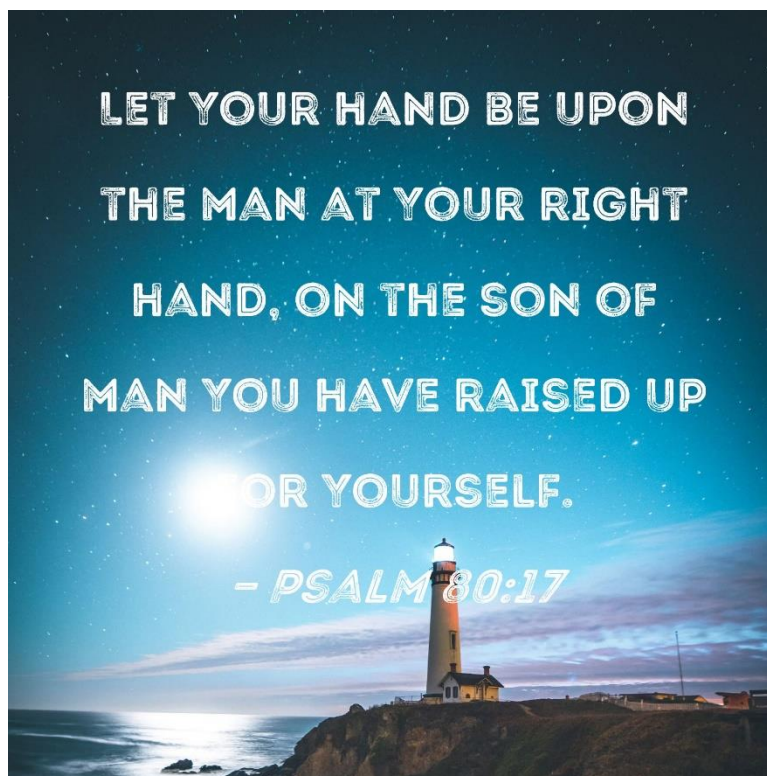
Henri Nouwen wrote a book, titled, *With Open Hands*. It is a book about prayer. About how we approach God in prayer. That your hands, during prayer, may say a lot about how you are praying—your attitude of prayer. You can pray with open hands, welcoming hands, receptive hands. Or you can pray with closed fists, fighting and abrasive hands, unreceptive hands.

The Psalmist asks God to put a hand “upon the son of man.” This word “hand” is more literally “an open hand”: “Let your (open) hand be upon the man of Your right hand...” An open hand signified the giving of power and strength. An open hand was a giving hand. An open hand is what God uses to pour out blessings upon people; at Christmas, specifically upon the Savior.

Advent is a time of pondering the open hands of God. The many ways God opens those hands of blessings, through the Savior, and pours that into your living. Then as you open your fists to receive from God, keep your hands open to pour what you have received on to another.

Prayer: God, I confess there are times I do not expect much, from You or anyone else. But can You see the quiver in my fingers as I expectantly risk opening up? Amen and Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 2ZOfuO-z_o



Friday, December 8 by Cindy Schendel

Hebrews 4:14-16 “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

This passage gets at the mystery of Christ being both human and God. Have you ever thought about what it would have been like to know Christ when he was in human form? Think of a friend you know now. Can you see them in your mind’s eye? What they look like, what makes them laugh, what they like to eat? Can you recall times you have spent together, confidences you’ve shared, support you’ve given each other in times of difficulty? The disciples had that experience with Jesus, he was their good friend whom they loved but they also knew the power of his divinity.

Jesus experienced being human for 33 years with all of its vulnerabilities and temptations. He grew up in a human family, he went to school, he learned a trade. He had friends disappoint, betray, and ultimately desert him. His own mother thought he was crazy and tried to bring him home. He got tired and needed rest, hungry and needed food. He suffered a brutal, prolonged death at the hands of some of those he came to save. Whatever we’re going through Jesus can not only understand but he can truly empathize with us. His willingness to live in human skin and experience human death for our sake assures us beyond any doubt that we will receive mercy and find grace when we approach God’s throne. Thank you Jesus!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sP8_XHzODI



Saturday, December 9 by Don Wilson

Colossians 1:15-20 “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the one who is first over all creation. Because all things were created by him: both the heavens and on the earth, the things that are visible and the things that are invisible. Whether they are thrones or powers, or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

He existed before all things, and all things are held together in him.

He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the one who is firstborn from among the dead so that he might occupy the first place in everything.

Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him, and he reconciled all things to himself through him—whether things on earth or in the heavens. He brought peace through the blood of his cross.”

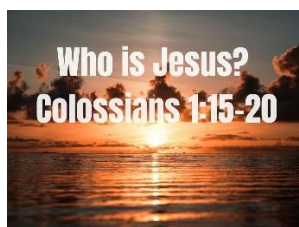
Advent is a season of anticipation. We await the celebration of the birth of Jesus the Christ.

For many of us, the faith of our childhood led us to think of Jesus and the Christ as the same. Perhaps we have thought of the Christ as present only in the approximately 30 years that Jesus was on earth. I invite you to read through Colossians, Chapter 1, verses 15-20. There is so much in these 6 verses to ponder as we think about Christ. I want to touch on only a small part of the richness of the passage. Looking at the opening words: “He is the image of the invisible God..” In our present time and culture, the word “image” is often used to refer to a picture or even a photo. God becomes visible in Jesus. Many would say Jesus in our “picture of God.” To read on in the passage, we see the words: “...in him all things in heaven and on earth were created.” This suggests that the Christ was present from the very beginning, even an active participant in creation. Those words remind us of certain other scripture passages. In the first Genesis creation story are the familiar words “Then God said, ‘Let US create humankind in OUR image, according to OUR likeness;’”(Gen. 1:26) Clearly this suggests God was not all alone in that process. Consider also the opening words in the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” The Christ has been in this from the very beginning! To state it another way: The Christ was around long before Jesus.

Verse 19 of today’s passage amplifies the reference to “the image of God” in the opening words in verse 1: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell....” One way to think of Jesus is as “the Christ-bearer,” or the “God bearer.” Jesus’ knowledge of God was grounded in an intimate connectedness. His references to the Father reflected this intimacy. I think of it also as revealing the authenticity of Jesus’ teachings. Finally, Verse 20 reminds us that through the Christ God brought reconciliation. For me, this is the hope I cherish most, the hope that God will indeed bring reconciliation to our divided, war-torn world.

May it be so!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tuRKalc7So>



Sunday, December 10 by Kevin Johnson

Isaiah 40:1-11

Sometimes the bible is poetic. These verses that announce to captive Israel its release from bondage are beautiful. I read these in both the NIV and the King James versions. Both carry form and beauty that are hard to beat.

NIV:

3 A voice of one calling:

“In the wilderness prepare
the way for the LORD;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.

4

Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.

King James:

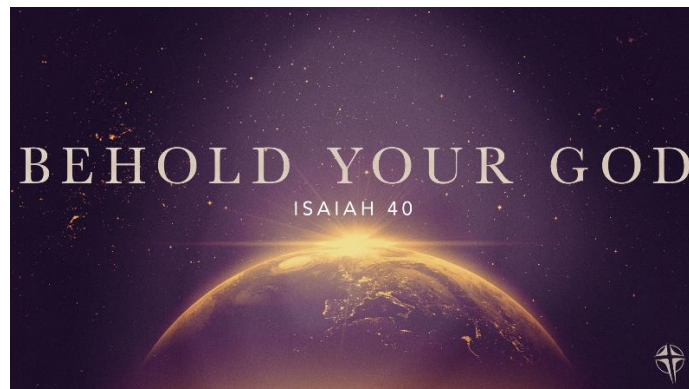
3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

God’s message in these verses from Isaiah is that we are like grass or flowers. Our beauty is there but eventually fades and dies. In years to come what we find important disappears in anonymity. But our joy comes from preparing the way of the LORD. And our true happiness lives only in the eternal love of God’s presence in our hearts and our sharing and showing that love with others.

Prayer: Creator God, let us hunt fervently for your presence among us. Let us open the gates of our hearts in preparation for your coming. Let the joy of the glory of your presence find us and fill us all.
AMEN!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hc54E2MA5pg>



Monday, December 11 by Stephen Wing

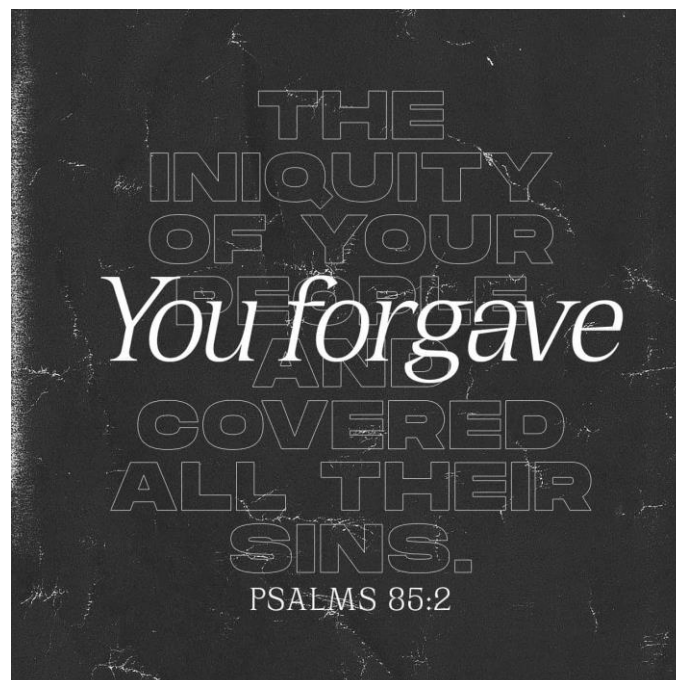
Psalm 85:1-2 “Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin...”

In a church I served in a small town in Nebraska, the church bought the old house next door. We sold the house to be moved off the property. Then the foundation was bulldozed so we could have additional parking for the church. In the process of doing that, a hole, about three feet in diameter, opened up in the yard of that house. Looking down into the hole, we discovered it was very deep. We soon realized it was an old, hand dug, well. It was in the shape of a bottle, and had bricked walls. It was probably 15 to 20 feet deep, and maybe 10 feet wide at the bottom. In order to keep it from becoming a hazard, we brought in a couple of huge loads of fill dirt, rock, and sand and filled up that old well. We let it settle, then kept filling it until it was packed in.

That is actually what this word “covered” means in Psalm 85:2. It literally means “to fill up the hollows.” It does not take much to remember the times and ways life has “hollowed” me out. Most of the time it has not been an experience that just came at me out of the blue. It was the result of some bad choice, something that happened because I was not paying attention, or following some fantasy, or succumbing to closed-loop thinking. All it does is create a hollow—a hollow I am not sure how to fill or repair by myself. Thankfully, at those times, the Holy Spirit backed up a dump truck and filled up my hollow with a load of God. And that empty place lost its ability to remain a danger to me or anyone around me. Advent is a time when you take stock of where your empty places are, and opening them up to the Savior who fills to overflowing.

Prayer: God, do You hear that echo? Your Voice reverberating around in my empty places? Fill me up, Lord; fill me up. Amen and Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cfo-toNbaTM>



Tuesday, December 12 by Kevin Johnson

2 Peter 3:8-15 “Don’t let it escape your notice, dear friends, that with the Lord a single day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a single day. The Lord isn’t slow to keep his promise, as some think of slowness, but he is patient toward you, not wanting anyone to perish but all to change their hearts and lives. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will pass away with a dreadful noise, the elements will be consumed like fire, and the earth and all the works done on it will be exposed. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be? You must live holy and godly lives, waiting for and hastening the coming day of God. Because of that day, the heavens will be destroyed by fire and the elements will melt away in the flames. But according to his promise we are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found by him in peace—pure and faultless. Consider the patience of our Lord to be salvation, just as our dear friend and brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him, speaking of these things in all his letters. Some of his remarks are hard to understand, and people who are ignorant and whose faith is weak twist them to their own destruction, just as they do the other scriptures.”

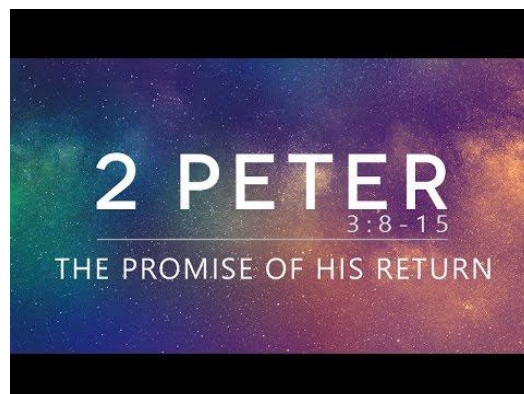
Advent is considered a time of preparation. But what should that preparation look like?

We prepare for the coming of salvation into our lives. Reading 2 Peter 3: 8-15 I believe there is an important message being conveyed. Why does Peter start this message stating that for God a thousand years is as a day and a day is as a thousand years? I think Peter is introducing the idea that God is timeless. That our preparation should not be in anticipation and waiting (both time-bound concepts) but instead we need to step into immediate expectation. The difference being that the Kingdom of God is now at hand. Our preparation entails stepping into that Kingdom... into at-one-ment with God now.

Because the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, we can’t just decide to start preparing for it. We need to be there now. Peter is saying, “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” Not getting ready to be in peace at some future date, but to be found now in peace.

Prayer: Dear Lord, you showed us the way, the truth and the light. Help us step into your presence. Help us put on the clothes of Christ and enter our true home in the Kingdom of God. AMEN!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x39Shlkn1oI>



Wednesday, December 13 by Eileen Thomson

Mark 1:7-8 John the Baptist shares the message “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Despite his popularity, John the Baptist was a humble man. He ate and dressed simply and focused only on Jesus who he knew to be greater than himself. John the Baptist offered a future of reassurance and love through baptism with the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist shares the Good News that there is a new beginning, a new spiritual birth for each of us to experience, an optimistic and hopeful outlook.

What can this passage mean for us in this moment in our lives?

Despite not having a pastor, (at the time I write this) I believe most of us here at GCPC feel quite hopeful about the future in the life of our church. We have been without a pastor before, and we are moving toward the future with confidence.

As individuals, we recognize that not all periods of change are met with such self-assuredness. Uncertainty, loss, change, illness can create fear about the future and diminish any sense of hopefulness. During such challenging times, we need to be reminded that the Holy Spirit is present in our lives to support us and lift us up.

This passage and this season of Advent as we await the birth of Baby Jesus, hold up that element of joy and amazement for the future. What an amazing gift this sense of hopefulness is for each of us!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-Wh-A20dSg>



Thursday, December 14 by Stephen Wing

Psalm 85:8-13 “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed.” (v. 10, King James Version)

There were a number of times, when I was leading a counseling session, you might hear these words coming out of my mouth: “Do you want to be right, or do you want the relationship? Which is more important to you?” It was usually about some division between spouses, or between parents and children. One always felt they were “right” and it was important to them to make sure the other knew that. But being right often gets in the way of mercy—of healing some rift in the relationship.

In dealing with God, we know who is always right. There is no contest there. No matter how many times you plead “not guilty”, it does not go that way. Each time you think you know it all, you find out you actually do not. There is always more to the story. But the amazing thing about Jesus is that he seldom pushed what was right. He always leaned heavily on mercy. On the embrace. On leaving each person with some kind of kiss of love and forgiveness. It is all about the relationship, for Jesus.

Prayer: God, the times I think I am most right, I find out I am mostly wrong. I end up being humbled—and sometimes humiliated. I want to remember those times, so that I remember what is most important. Help me limp along towards Your kiss. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZK79GwIXsn8>

LOVE &
♥ *FAITHFULNESS*
meet together;

righteousness & peace
kiss each other.

-Psalm 85:10



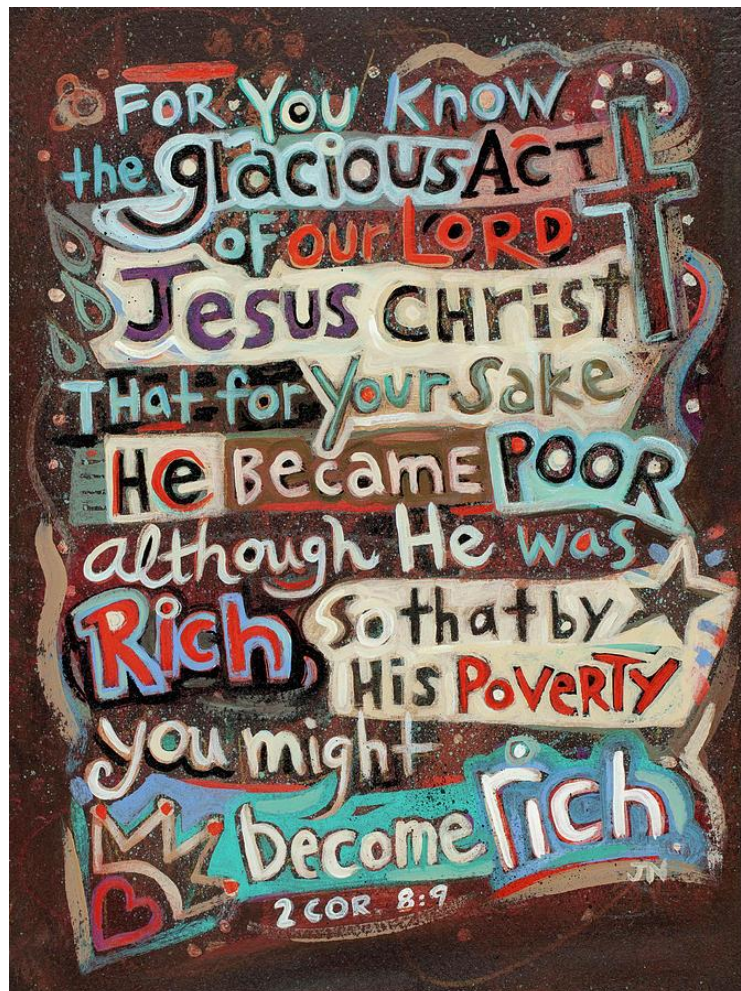
PsalmsQuotes.com

Friday, December 15 by Kristy Shaw

2 Corinthians 8:9 “For you know the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes, he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

Many years ago, our family was getting ready to go to the Christmas Eve Children’s Service at Grace Covenant. Our daughter, Sophie, wasn’t feeling well, so we decided to stay home. Her symptoms continued to get worse as the evening progressed. After relying on my good friend Google for medical advice, we decided to take her to the emergency room. Several hours later, the doctor discovered that her appendix was about to burst. They transferred her to Children’s Mercy Hospital for emergency surgery. We all had a whirlwind of emotions, but through it all, we felt the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ holding us up. We saw examples of God’s Grace from the Doctor who kept running tests to discover a diagnosis to the ambulance drivers who took such good care of our little girl. From a jolly visit by Santa Claus to a family that was serving a Christmas meal to everyone at the Hospital. Jesus met us in a low point filled with fear and worry and he held us up high. Sophie’s surgery and recovery went well. Because of Jesus’ sacrifices, we were showered with God’s Grace. Even though it was Jesus’ birthday, it was our family that was filled with riches and joy that Christmas.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZofkgFC4s0o>



Saturday, December 16 by Nancy Kalesz

Isaiah 40:1–11 “Comfort, comfort my people! Says your God. Speak compassionately to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her compulsory service has ended, that her penalty has been paid, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins!

A voice is crying out: Clear the Lord’s way in the desert! Make a level highway in the wilderness for our God! Every valley will be raised up, and every mountain and hill will be flattened. Uneven ground will become level, and rough terrain a valley plain. The Lord’s glory will appear, and all humanity will see it together; the Lord’s mouth has commanded it.

A voice was saying: ‘Call out!’ All flesh is grass; all its loyalty is like the flowers of the field. The grass dies up; the flowers wither, but our God’s word will exist forever.

Go up on a high mountain, messenger Zion! Raise your voice and shout, messenger Jerusalem! Raise it; don’t be afraid; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Here is your God, coming with strength, with a triumphant arm, bringing his reward with him and his payment before him. Like a shepherd, God will tend the flock; he will gather lambs in his arms and lift them onto his lap. He will gently guide the nursing ewes.’”

Today’s scripture is a long one, but worth reading, especially in these days of brokenness across all the earth. The main theme is Restoration: the mending of a nation (and across the world) that is broken and divided. Jesus the Lord’s anointed is coming to save us through Grace.

This Isaiah passage is the calling out—the foretelling to the people. It, like most of the book of Isaiah, is a call to Jerusalem and to all ... to wake up! pay attention! ... something new is coming from God. There is a time of Restoration and healing, which will be for all people. For every person, family, tribe, and nation. This new thing God is giving is coming to the world through the saving Grace of God’s own son—our Lord—Jesus. His call to be aware pertains to us in these times the same as it was in Isaiah’s time. Restoration and healing are constantly hoped for and prayed for and worked for by those yearning to see the promise of God fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

Be aware that God is doing a marvelous thing. Can you see it? Can you wrap your mind around the amazing power that came down to dwell amongst us, with all the Grace, Power, and Glory of God? The light of the world came for all to see. If only we will. If only we will welcome it into our lives and as partners with Christ bring peace on earth.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihcWsjf9EXc>



Sunday, December 17 by David Pack

Isaiah 61:1 – The Lord God’s spirit is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim release for captives, and liberation for prisoners. (CEB)

The Book of Isaiah recounts the life and teachings of Isaiah who lived in the Kingdom of Judah in the 8th century BCE. Most of the book is believed to have been written between 740 and 700 BCE. One might tend to assume that the “me” referenced in Isaiah 61:1 is Isaiah himself.

Yet, in about 30 CE, we find Jesus reading from a scroll in a synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:18) and saying “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed.” Then Jesus says “Today this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it.” (Luke 4:21)

So we might understand Isaiah 61:1 as prophesying Jesus’ coming. We should also see it and Jesus’ words in Luke as suggesting actions that should be part of living our lives as the Lord God would have us live them.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ba8NdhdK3hQ>



Monday, December 18 by Stephen Wing

Psalm 126 “How we laughed, how we sang for joy!” (v. 2, Good News Translation)

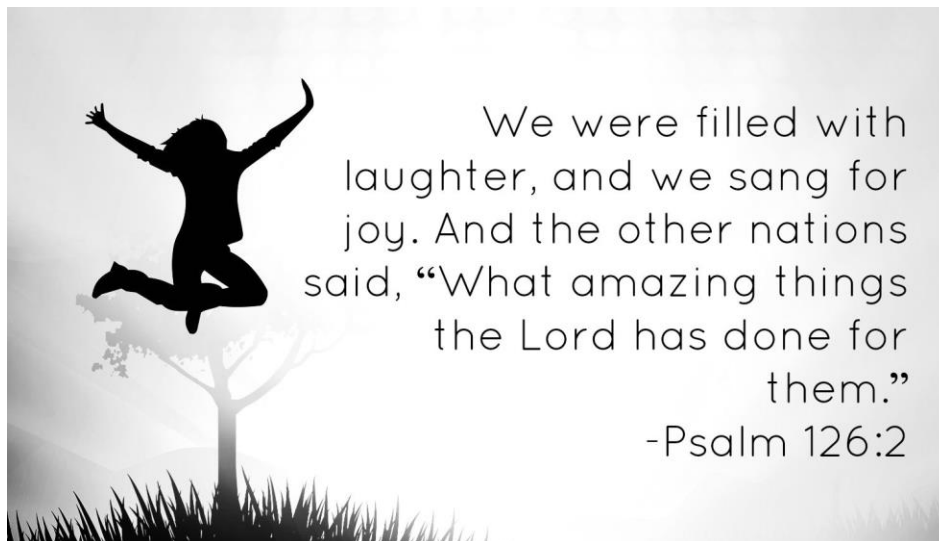
At the church I was serving before I retired, on Sunday morning, I would sit in the sanctuary and listen to the Praise Team rehearse. Two of the members were hilarious, and the back-and-forth would make me laugh so hard. (They were guitar players, and guitar players are almost always funny, in an off-the-wall sort of way.) Sitting there, listening and laughing got me so ready for worship. By the time the service was ready to roll, so was I.

How we prepare for worship is almost as important as how we worship. This Psalm is called a Psalm of Ascent. Psalms 120 through 134 are all Psalms of Ascent. On high, holy festival days, the people would congregate at the base of the hill below Jerusalem. Then they would start making their ascent up the hill. Along the way, they chanted and/or sang this group of Psalms, preparing themselves for going into the Temple for worship. Their approach to worship was just as important as entering the Temple and worshipping. There were some Sunday mornings I did not feel like going to worship (and I was the Pastor!). Or I did not feel like leading worship. I just wanted to sit in the pew and let someone else be in charge. My attitude—my spirit—was not right. But when I went into the sanctuary ahead of time and went through the hilarity of the Praise Team rehearsal, I was ready. My spirit was right. I was ready to worship, to sing for joy, to laugh.

Advent is a time to prepare yourself for God. To get yourself ready, and in a right attitude, for the coming God. It is that preparation that puts you on tip-toe, so you can look over all the clutter for the God who is here, ready to be worshipped!

Prayer: God, I am outside the sanctuary. I am looking at the doors. I am wondering if I am ready—ready to worship, to be caught up in Your laughter. I smile and reach for the door pull... Amen and Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMEAFKuJ70>



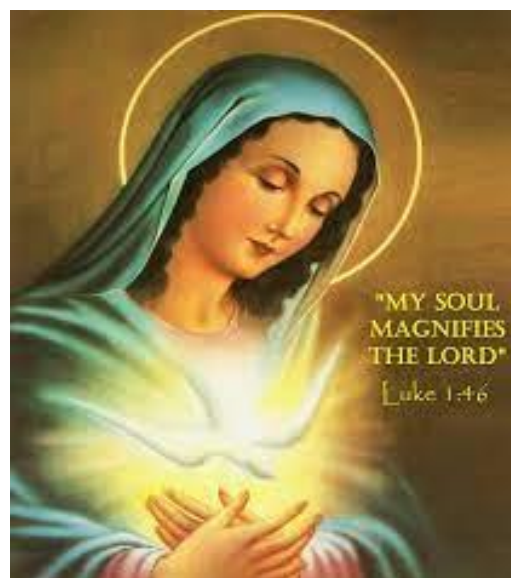
Tuesday, December 19 by Cindy Schendel

Luke 1:46-55 “And Mary said: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.’”

Young girls in Jesus’ time would have been betrothed as early as age 12 so Mary was probably between 12 and 16 when she became pregnant with Jesus. What would her dreams have been at that age? To make a good marriage and have a son would surely have been her goal since that was how a woman gained security and standing in the community, I know I had such dreams as a young teen. Maybe she dreamt of her son becoming a respected and prosperous leader. So when the angel Gabriel told her “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to call him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:31-33) she must have been thrilled! When she questioned Gabriel about how this could happen and was told the Holy Spirit would come upon her to make her pregnant, she accepted this explanation without further concern and replied “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.”

The Magnificat praises God for choosing her, a humble young girl, to carry his Son. She notes how God has brought down the mighty and elevated the lowly throughout the history of her people. Her complete faith in God’s mercy and power is what makes her worthy of this honor. Even though she did not know how she would be protected as a woman pregnant by someone other than her betrothed she trusted God completely. May we pray for this kind of faith as we face seemingly impossible circumstances in our own lives.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n61KEDPoLuo>



Wednesday, December 20 by Cheryl Johnson

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.” (NRSVU)

Rejoice always. That’s a tall order, isn’t it? Some days don’t really seem like a time to rejoice, do they? The day your car has a flat tire, or you lock yourself out of the house. There’s a traffic jam and you’re late for an appointment. Not typically a time when I find myself saying “Isn’t this a great day?” (Well, not without being sarcastic.) I know, I know, these are definitely first world problems, right?

Almost a decade ago, I was leaving a medical appointment which had raised some serious concerns. Of course, more tests were scheduled to find out if the issue was this scary thing or that distressing thing or this other really devastating thing. As I drove out of the parking lot, verse 18 from this passage popped into my head (a different translation)—in all things give thanks. I actually said out loud, “Really?” So, I thought about what I was thankful for in this situation—good medical care and the means to pay for all these tests, friends and family to listen to my concerns, feeling the presence of God even, maybe especially, when we’re scared. Pray without ceasing and give thanks in all circumstances. I’ll keep trying.

Prayer: Lord, help us to remember you are always with us, no matter what. We are grateful for the blessings you give so freely. Today, I’m thankful for _____. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JlthKHoimzA>



Thursday, December 21 by Nancy Kalesz

John 1:6–8 “A man named John was sent from God. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light. He himself wasn’t the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light.”

The verses in John, Chapter 1, are some of my very favorite, because they are for me another creation story that tells us several things.

The chapter begins with the declaration that God’s son has always been: in the beginning of all things, as co-creator of all things. John tells us that this “word” or light is available to all and is so powerful that no darkness can overcome it. These first verses are very powerful and so awesome!

The next verses tell us who has been chosen to announce who this great light/co-creator is. John, of all people, a scruffy wild man!

In our church in Indianapolis, one of the teenage boys stood in the balcony and called out each Sunday in Advent,

“Prepare ye the way of the Lord; Prepare ye the way of the Lord,” over and over, alerting us to get ready. The light of this world is coming—be ready—something awe-inspiring is happening.

Today the caller is a teenager, a beggar, a woman, or a wild man like John—going around calling out, “God is doing a great thing—wake up! The Savior is coming—the long-awaited—prepare!

God is doing a great thing—wake up! Over and over. Can you hear it?

Verses 10-13 fill out the message John proclaimed and should be included in your reading.

Wild and untamed, John proclaimed to the world that the Savior of the world has come and through him all sin is forgiven and by his coming, we have received Grace upon Grace.

John, the most unlikely of all messengers—wild and strange, talking crazy talk about things the world was longing to hear. The world might have expected to hear this salvation message from a priest or scholar or king—but not from a scruffy wild man—someone not like you—and yet he was the chosen proclaimer of God’s gift of salvation.

Prepare ye the way—be ready—stop, look, and listen for the voice we least expect to be the announcer of God’s greatest gift. The word—the light—the son—the Savior.

Prepare ye the way.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVy0dYXVnk4>



Friday, December 22 by Cheryl Johnson

John 1:19-28 “This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed and did not deny it, but he confessed, ‘I am not the Messiah.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the prophet?’ He answered, ‘No.’ Then they said to him, ‘Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?’ He said, ‘I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, ‘Why, then, are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?’ John answered them, ‘I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal.’ This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.” (NRSVU)

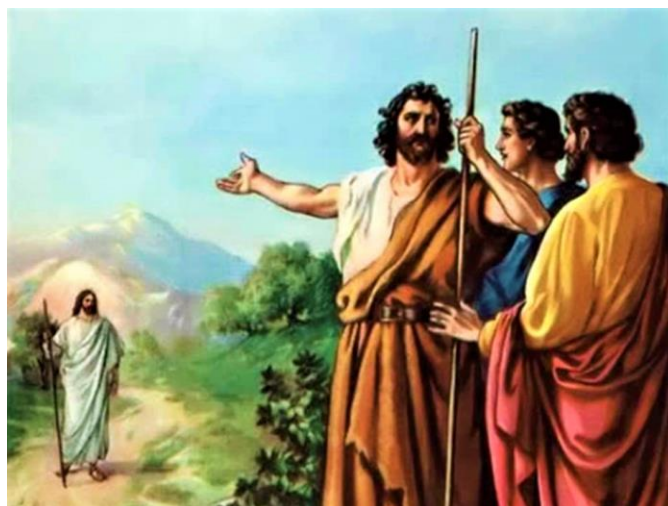
There is a Jewish tradition called a mikvah which involves immersion in a pool of living, or flowing, water. Like many actions commanded by the Pharisees, the process had a series of prescribed steps to be strictly observed as a cleansing ritual to be followed after an activity that might have rendered someone 'unclean,' like touching a corpse.

John's actions in baptizing people and calling them to repentance added a new dimension. His baptism was to encourage people to change their lives. After they'd washed away the sins of their old life, the idea was that they would change their ways, repent of their sins and live the way God wanted them to. He's trying to get the world ready for Christ's message.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, are there things we need to leave behind so that we are ready for Him? It's tempting to regard Christmas as a long To Do List of shopping, decorating, cooking and socializing—rather than examining our lives for ways to prepare our hearts to receive Christ's message.

Prayer: Lord, free us of the busyness the world has built around your birth. Help us to take the time to receive the true gift of love into our hearts. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FurrRFxGYHY>



Saturday, December 23 by Harold Frye

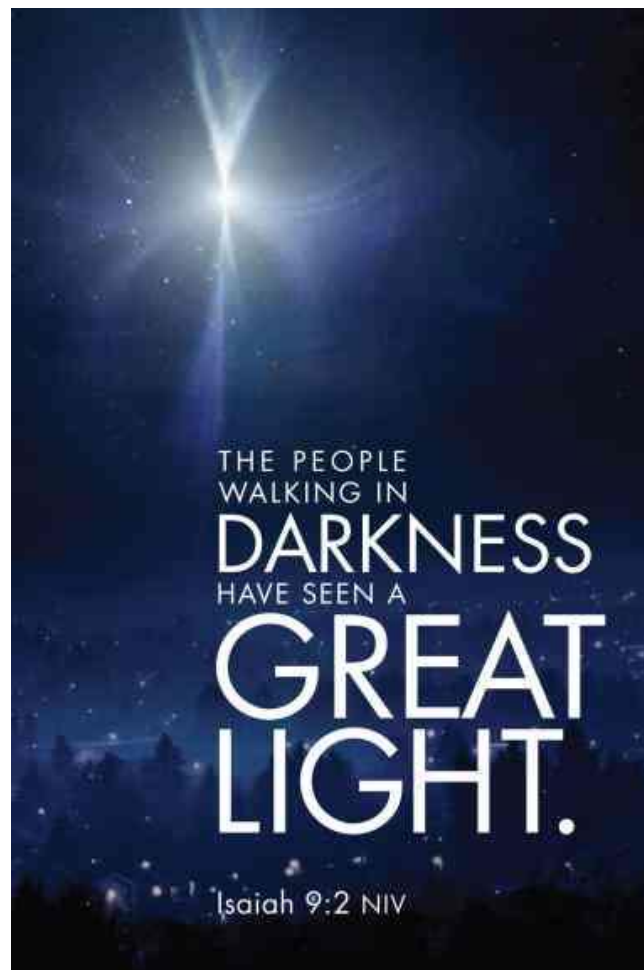
Isaiah 9:2 “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned.”

Not long ago, I traveled to Fort Carson, Colorado, to deliver a load of guitars for a program there for traumatically injured soldiers. You may have traveled in that space between Hays, Kansas and Colorado Springs where there seems to be a vast desert of nothingness. If you have been in that region at night, you know that the seemingly desolate land is even more so. On this trip and unlike previous times, something new came up on the horizon. At first, I couldn't tell what these blinking red lights might be, but as our car moved on, these markers stood still. It didn't take long for one of my passengers to tell me that those were the warning lights on wind turbines. Taken all together, they weren't a great light...just enough to let pilots know they were there.

Jesus is the light. Isaiah foretold of his coming, to bring salvation to the people.

Our celebration of his birth reminds us that, without him, we live in darkness. Let the light shine!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfBc-0HvE2s>



Sunday, December 24 by David Pack

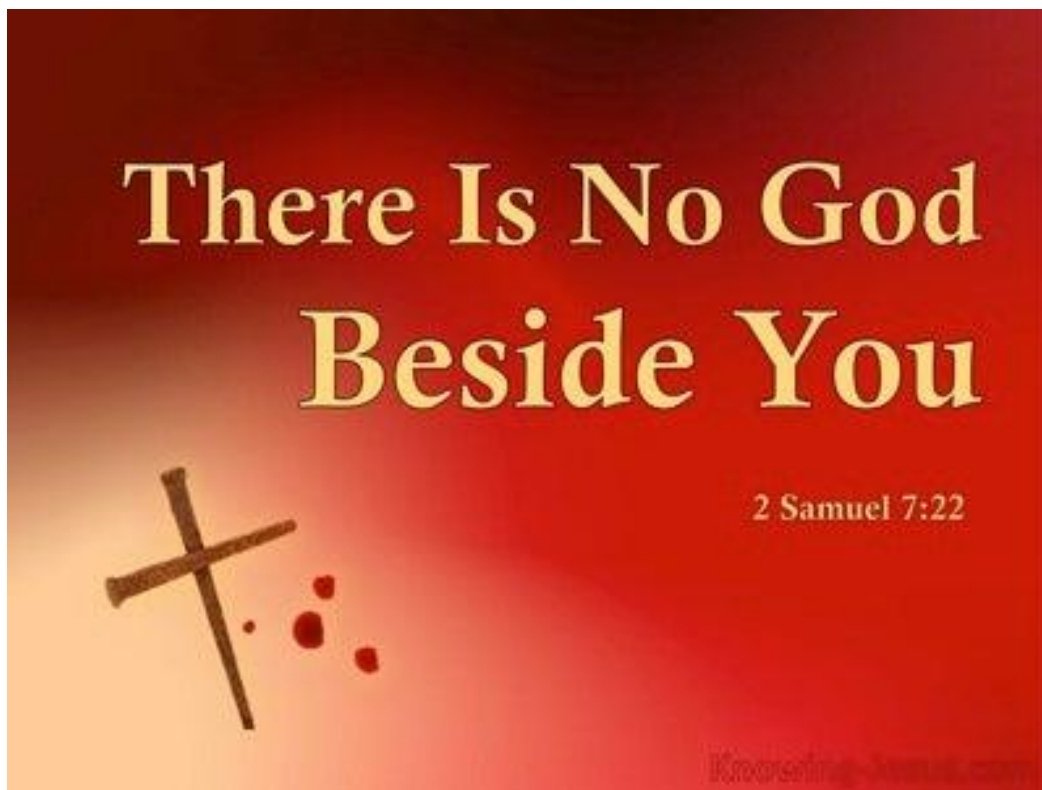
2 Samuel 7:8-9 – So then, say this to my servant David: This is what the Lord of heavenly forces says: I took you from the pasture, from following the flock, to be leader over my people Israel. I've been with you wherever you've gone, and I have eliminated all your enemies before you. Now I will make your name great – like the name of the greatest people on earth. (CEB)

My first name is "David," coming directly from my mother's brother David Young, but presumably indirectly from the King David who flourished in 1000 BCE. My middle name is "Joseph," coming directly from my father's sister's husband, but presumably indirectly from Biblical Josephs. I never knew either one of my uncles to be particularly religious.

In 2 Samuel 7 David hears God's great promises to him and looks forward to a wonderful future. However, by 2 Samuel 11-12 David has committed terrible sin through his adultery with Bathsheba and arranging the death in battle of her husband Uriah. The son born of David and Bathsheba's adultery dies per God's displeasure.

We are reminded that we are all sinners and that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Thanks be to God!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yImbRHFPSHk>



Monday, December 25 by Stephen Wing

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 “Then You spoke in a vision to Your holy one, And said: ‘I have given help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people.’” (Psalm 89:19, New King James Version)

If you are enamored by the multiverse of superheroes from comic books, graphic novels and the big screen, you learn the backstory of all those characters. Superman came from another planet. Spiderman was bit by a radioactive spider. Wonder Woman came from an uncharted island inhabited by all female warriors. The Black Panther came from a hidden enclave of African people called Waconda, who discovered the substance vibranium—a limitless energy source.

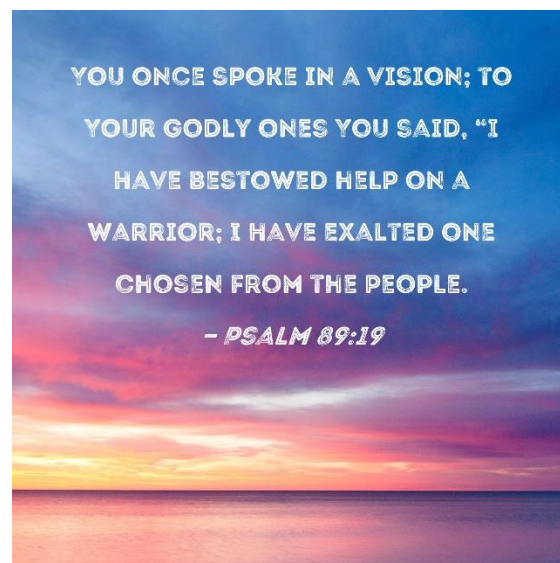
All of these characters and their stories capture people’s attention. The whole mythology built up by and within these superhero stories seem to underline one theme: We cannot do it on our own. We cannot fight or overcome evil on our own. We need someone—someone special—to appear in our world and make things right. Someone who is human, but at the same time is more than human. Someone who is more powerful than evil. Someone who is smarter than evil.

But the characters that artists and authors create are only a fantasy. Even though they tap into a real human desire and hope, they are not real. People may wish these superheroes would leap off the page and save us, but they will not and cannot.

Thanks be to God that just such a “superhero” has come into our world. A Savior. “One who is mighty” but at the same time, “chosen from the people.” One who embodies the power of God, while at the same time is just a human like us. In Jesus is that unique and real combination of divine humanity who overcomes the evil that so often beats us down.

Prayer: God, I cannot do it on my own. I cannot hold back the chaos by myself. I need another. I need the Savior, the One You have chosen. To Him I give myself. Amen and Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbDVfOhcfs0>



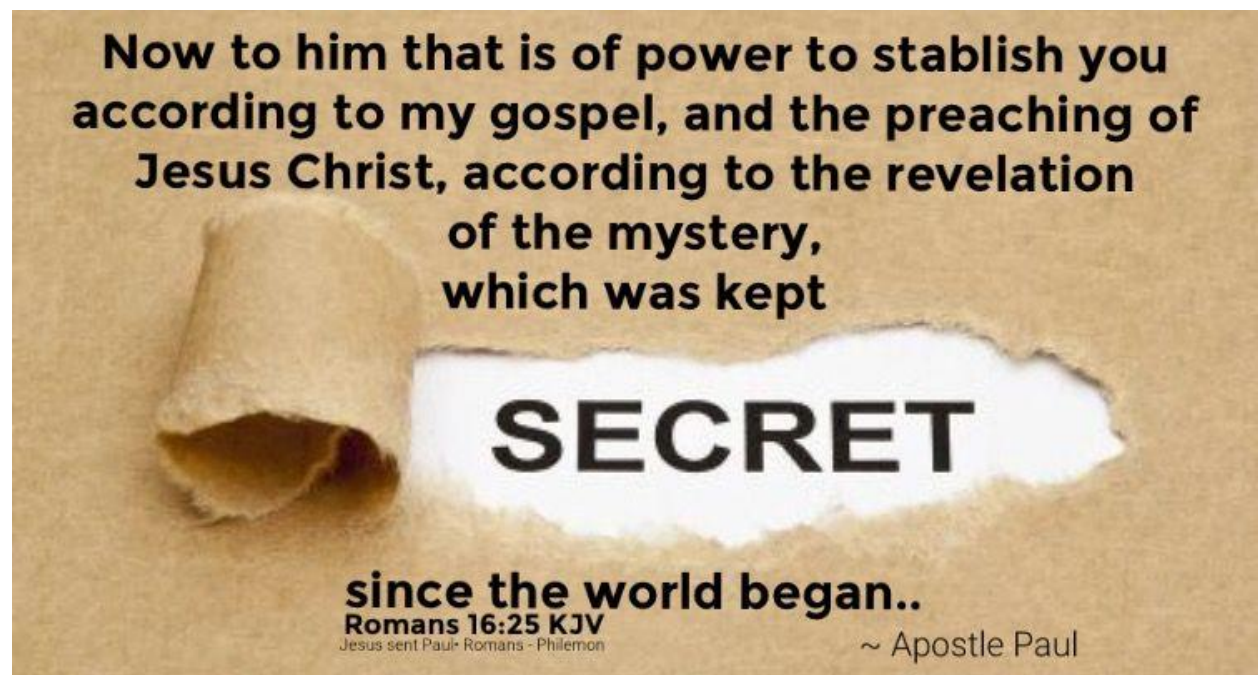
Tuesday, December 26 by Harold Frye

Romans 16:25 “He can strengthen you with the announcement of the secret that was kept quiet for a long time.”

Even though we celebrated Jesus’ birth yesterday, what comes to my mind when I read this scripture is about all those gender reveal parties. They are certainly something done more recently as we didn’t announce to anyone (and many don’t even want to know themselves). The gender of our newborns was, in our times in the ‘70s and ‘80s more of a secret. Some Bible versions use the word “mystery” which, prior to sonograms, better describes what expecting parents experienced.

Paul now reflects on what the revelation of Jesus’ birth means to followers. For years, even centuries, prophets had promised that something or someone would come to rescue them. As those centuries passed and Jesus hadn’t appeared, the secret remained only that...a mystery to all. Paul reminds people that now the secret is revealed. Jesus lives!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzh-XAABPeg>



Wednesday, December 27 by Harold Frye

Luke 1:26-38 (excerpts) “Don’t be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you...You will conceive and give birth...How will this be?...The Holy Spirit will come over you...the power of the Most High will overshadow you...Nothing is impossible for God.”

In the 1966-67 and 1967-68 school years, I taught 5th and 6th grades in a small school in Kansas City, Kansas. The school was small enough that there was only one class per grade except for a few in which a “split class” was created. Our principal was also assigned as principal of a neighboring school that was equally small. In both schools, I was the only male faculty member. Part of the springtime curriculum was the dreaded “coming of age” unit when boys and girls were separated. My assignment was to present the material to the boys in both schools. The material consisted of a filmstrip with accompanying record. Talk about basic! There was always a bit of an argument about who would get to turn the knob on the filmstrip machine at the sound of a bell on the recording. Any one of the 11 and 12-year-old boys likely could have written the script and, especially today thanks to the Internet, the filmstrip was basic and dull. I didn’t look forward to this at all. Fortunately, only once did one of the boys raise a question to which I really believe he already knew the answer. “How does the sperm get to the egg?” I recall that my response was something along the lines of “Ask your parents.” (a real chickenhearted answer!)

So Mary was visited by angel Gabriel—that’s weird alone.

So Mary will experience the Holy Spirit coming over her—check, Mary hasn’t objected yet.

So Mary accepts this earth-shattering news with the calming words—“Nothing is impossible for God.”

Let me go back to the 6th-grade boys.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJFB0UK2FFY>



Thursday, December 28 by Cheryl Johnson

Luke 2:22-40 “And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, ‘This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul, too.’” (NRSVU)

I can only imagine what Mary must have felt when she heard Simeon’s words. I’m afraid my first reaction would have been, “Yikes! No, thank you.” Who would want to be told that your precious baby boy was the catalyst to bring about the rising and falling of many in Israel? Of course, Mary had already had a visit from an angel when she was pregnant telling her that this child would be special so she had an inkling that he wasn’t going to sell used camels or something. Her strong faith and absolute trust in God allowed her to praise God even though the situation would have been extremely dangerous for her.

Mary didn’t step away from the role she’d been thrust into. And Jesus was faithful to God right up to his death on the cross. Their brave examples of faith should shine through the ages and lead us to ponder our own actions. What is God calling us to do to bring about His kingdom?

Prayer: Lord, help me to do your will today. Make my thoughts, words and actions acceptable in your sight. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfZsL5EYW3E>



Friday, December 29 by Stephen Wing

Psalm 148 “He set them in place from all time to eternity; He gave his orders, and that's it!” (v. 6, The Message)

In a sermon I heard long ago about Genesis 1, the minister started out by saying: “One of the main themes of Genesis 1 and 2 is an answer to the question: ‘To whom does the earth belong?’ If you get the answer to that question wrong from the start, you will be messed up forever after.”

When I was reading through a book based on the journals of Lewis and Clark on their great expedition, there was one main idea the indigenous people of the plains could not wrap their heads around: ownership. They did not understand how settlers could push their way into the land and claim it for their very own. It was like saying you could own the rain or the air. The land was for all, a gift from Wakan Tanka—the Great Mystery.

As we move toward the New Year this Psalm, at the very end of the book of Psalms, tries to make sure we have the right answer to the Genesis 1 thematic question—that all there is, is not to be owned, but to be enjoyed as a gift from God. All that is, flora and fauna, human and beast, has one purpose: to praise the Owner. To give thanks to the Owner. To make sure we know exactly to whom it is that all of this belongs.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGhQARQwKYE>



Saturday, December 30 by Kevin Johnson

Galatians 4:4-7 “But when the fulfillment of the time came, God sent his Son, born through a woman, and born under the Law. This was so he could be adopted. Because you are sons and daughters, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son or daughter, and if you are his child, then you are also an heir through God.”

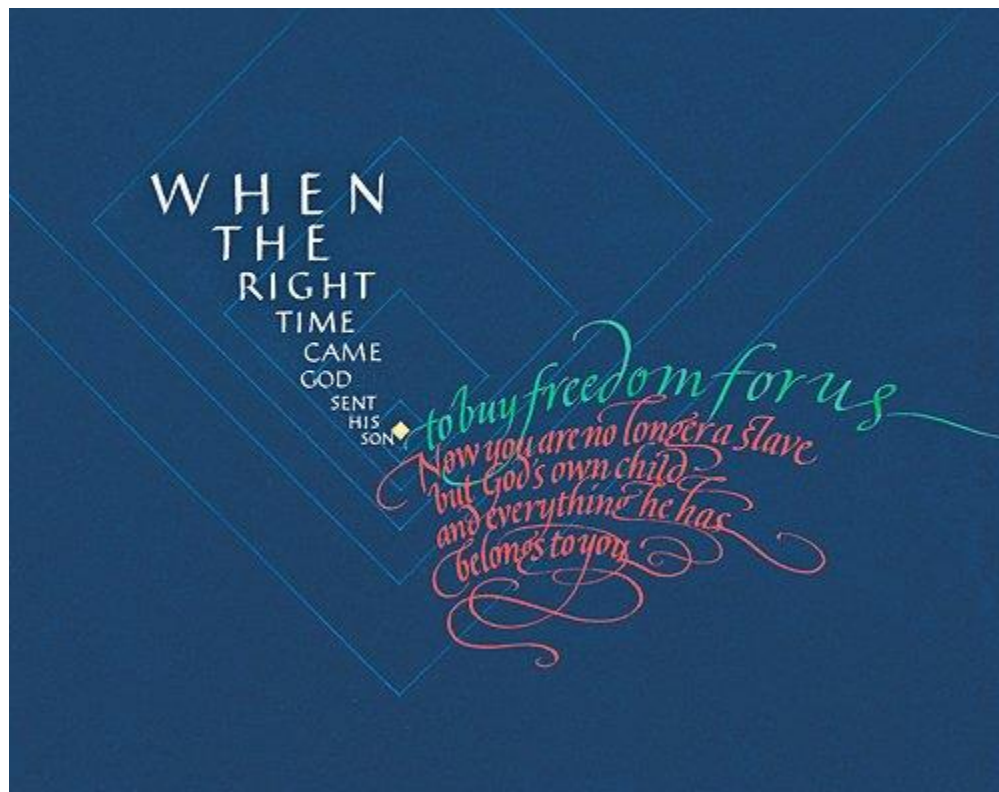
The world and all of the things we “need” to do it will easily consume our lives. During Advent we take pause. We stop and breathe. We are called to rest and find the peace and quiet existence in God’s presence can bring to us. This is often hard to do.

In these verses, I hear Paul chiding the Christians in Galatia for forgetting to do this. He points out that allowing the world to control us makes us slaves to the world. God does not want that to happen. Paul’s message to us is that with Christ’s coming we are no longer slaves to the world. Christ calls us to wake up to the presence of God’s love, grace, and mercy in our lives.

Furthermore, God sends the Holy Spirit to help us wake up. The Holy Spirit reminds us that we are no longer slaves to the world, but instead children of God. And being God’s children, we inherit a new world in God’s Kingdom.

Prayer: Heavenly Father send your Holy Spirit into our hearts and help us awaken to wonder of your presence in our lives. Help us to take pause and open our hearts to your Love. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0ojLkIOthg>



Sunday, December 31 by Harold Frye

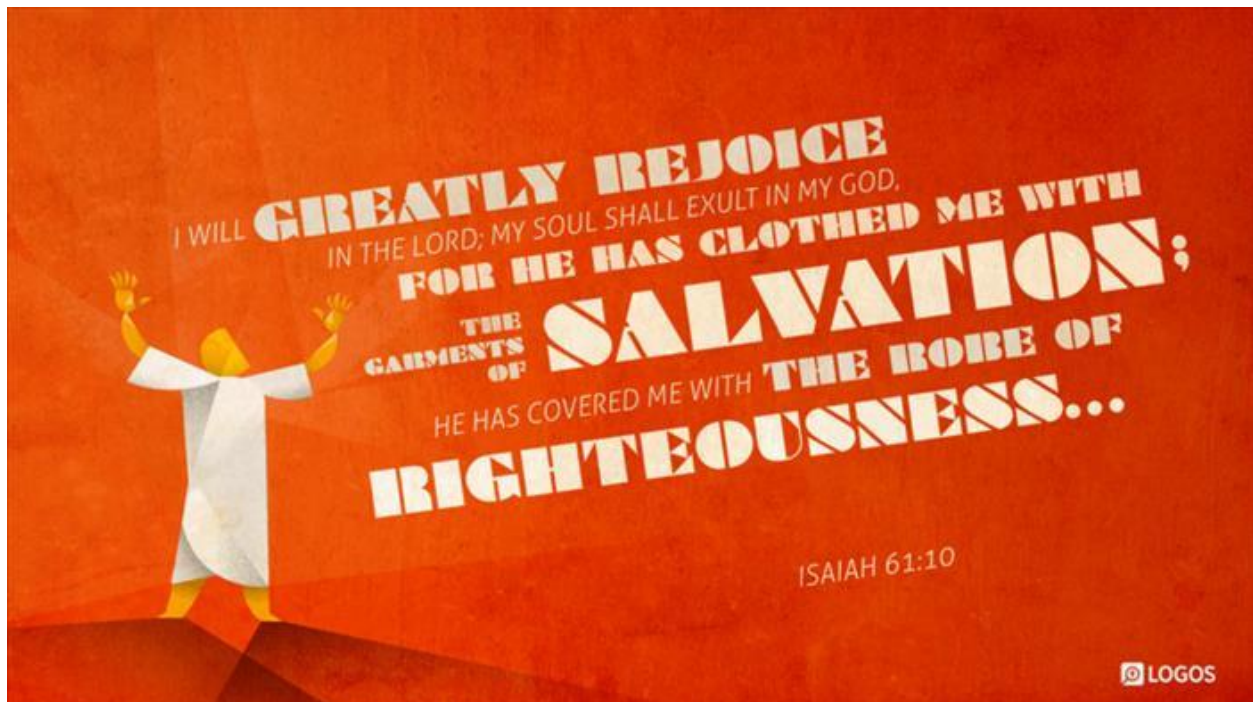
Isaiah 61:10 “I surely rejoice in the Lord; my heart is joyful because of my God, because he has clothed me with clothes of victory, wrapped me in a robe of righteousness like a bridegroom in a priestly crown, and like a bride adorned in jewelry.”

After my wife passed away almost four years ago, I began to rummage around the house looking for things to discard or pass on to others. I found her wedding gown in the cedar chest where it had been for fifty years. Recalling the love and care my mother-in-law put into that dress, all the hand beading she had added to it (the dress was beautiful and didn't cost thousands of dollars like they do today), I searched online for sources for donating the dress. I ran across an organization that created burial clothing for newborns who don't survive. What a wonderful idea! In most cases, parents of newborns who die in or shortly after childbirth are completely wrapped up in grief and haven't thought about such things. When I contacted the organization, I sadly learned that only wedding gowns less than a few years old were accepted. Consequently, the wedding dress still sits in the cedar chest.

Jesus came into the world as a newborn and survived. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. His parents had no need for fancy clothing. His job was to provide each of us with robes of righteousness and crowns and jewels through his sacrifice for our salvation.

Victory is ours!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyU3o0WFO7g>



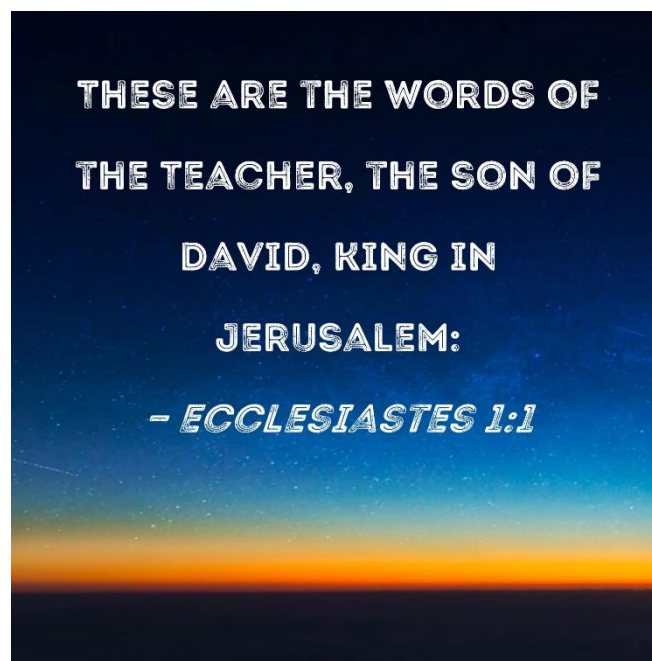
Monday, January 1 by Stephen Wing

Ecclesiastes 1:1-13 “These are the words of the Quester...” (Ecclesiastes 1:1, The Message)

I once asked a friend of mine what he was giving up for Lent. He replied, “My New Year's Resolutions.” Usually, you may find you do not even make it to Lent before your New Year's Resolutions swirl around the drain. New Year's Day comes on the heels (just one week following) of Christmas. We move so quickly from all the Christmas preparation and anxiety about putting all the decorations away, to a new year, a new start. Some of the questions you may find yourself asking at New Year's are not inappropriate for just coming off Christmas. One of which is, “Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” Another way of asking this is, “What does the coming of Jesus have to do with “your one wild and precious life?” Or, maybe, another way to simplify this is just ask what Jesus asked of some would-be disciples: “What are you looking for?” (John 1:38). I like how The Message translation of the Bible uses the title “Quester” here in Ecclesiastes 1. A lot of people do not like this book in the Bible. Too negative, they say. Too down on life. But the book was written by someone who had the ways and means to do it all, to try it all. He was on a quest to find out the meaning of life—to find meaning for his life. And as just mentioned, the Quester did it all—but so much of it come up wanting. He left no stone unturned in that quest for what it means to be an authentic human being, but was frustrated with what he found out there in the world. That is what coming off of Christmas and entering into a new year is all about. The coming of Jesus into the world demands we ask ourselves those kinds of questions—to be a Quester of authentic humanity in the light of the Savior. That is what turning the corner of New Year is all about—becoming a Quester who searches for authentic, self-reflective answers to the question, “What are you looking for?”

Prayer: God, I am not sure what it is I am looking for. Do You have an answer? Do you have a direction my quest should take? I am ready! Amen and Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXi7L0nKcOU>



Tuesday, January 2 by Stephen Wing

Psalm 8 "I look up at your macro-skies, dark and enormous, your handmade sky-jewelry, Moon and stars mounted in their settings. Then I look at my micro-self and wonder, Why do you bother with us? Why take a second look our way? (Psalm 8:3-4, The Message)

During the summer of 2022, to celebrate my 70th birthday, my son and daughter-in-law took me on a trip to a place I had never been before: Hawaii. The "Big Island." One of the places my son wanted to visit was the planetarium on the campus of the University of Hawaii. We watched two shows, projected onto the domed ceiling of the planetarium. One of those was about the enormity of the cosmos. First, the earth was pictured. Then the camera pulled back and showed the earth in relation to the other known planets in our solar system. Then the camera pulled back again, and the earth disappeared as the tiniest of dots into that solar system. Then again, the camera pulls back and showed our solar system in relation to the Milky Way Galaxy, and our entire solar system became a tiny dot within the larger Galaxy. The Earth had become the tiniest of atoms on the larger body of the Galaxy. Then the camera pulled back yet again, and the Milky Way Galaxy itself became an atom-sized dot in the surrounding cosmos. Again, almost mercilessly, the camera continued to pull back showing gaseous clouds that were birthplaces of entire galaxies. Those "cloud wombs" were, themselves, billions of lightyears across and in-depth in size. The Earth became not worth mentioning by comparison to the unimaginable size and depth of the entire cosmos. It. Blew. Me. Away. Existential questions bombarded me. If God exists, and God is the God of this unfathomable cosmos, how large, how other, how unimaginable must this God be? What does this immense God care about a totally insignificant speck we call Earth, let alone even more insignificant specks called humans? How arrogant is anyone who says they know what this God is thinking? How bombastic is any of us who think this God gives individual messages to any one human being? To think that in this puny experiment called Earth, and we humans who inhabit it, imagine ourselves as the acme and apex of the entire created cosmos!?!? How ludicrous! And yet... This lull between Advent and Epiphany is a time to reflect, to look up at the night sky, and follow the signs, the leading, of God. To be full of awe at your smallness before this God.

Prayer: God, I feel small. Really small. Especially as I stand before You. Forgive my haughty arrogance, any delusional narcissism, as I bow before Your unimaginable greatness. Amen and Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oro8oPM09kw>



Wednesday, January 3 by Harold Frye

Revelation 21:4 “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore.”

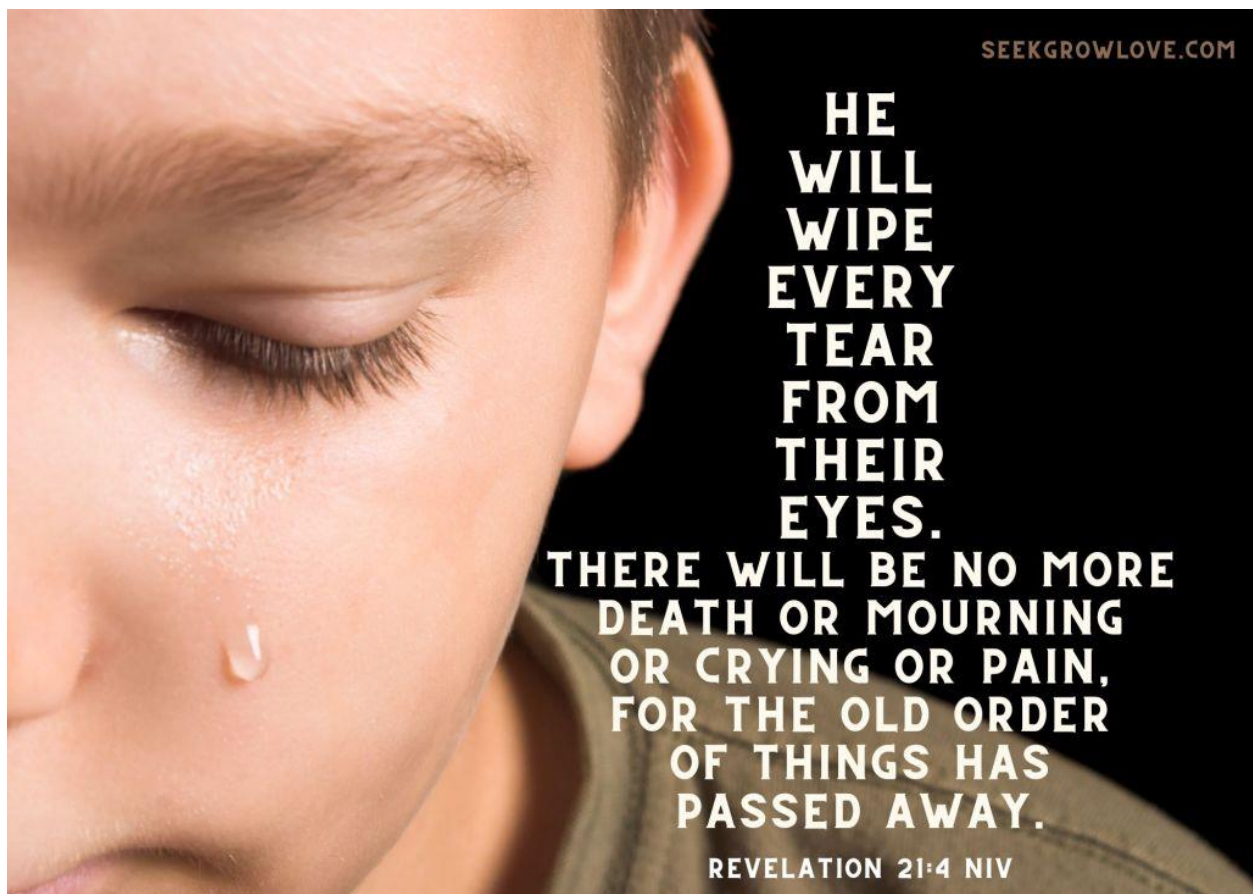
A 1936 song, “Pick Yourself Up,” sung and danced by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers featured the lyrics “Pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again.” The popularity of the song lasted for decades and even inspired my parents to encourage their children to get back on our feet after failing at something and moving forward. Interesting that the song was, at least for the United States, a pre-war melody that easily became the mantra of the American nation well into World War II and afterward.

I hear today’s parents often telling their children to get up after falling, saying “you’re okay.”

The end of times as foretold in the Bible chapter Revelation seems similar. Things will be okay...don’t mourn or cry or be in pain. “Pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again.”

(Click the link to Fred and Ginger’s rendition.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGUsRGuZb6k>



Thursday, January 4 by David Pack

Matthew 25:40 "And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'"

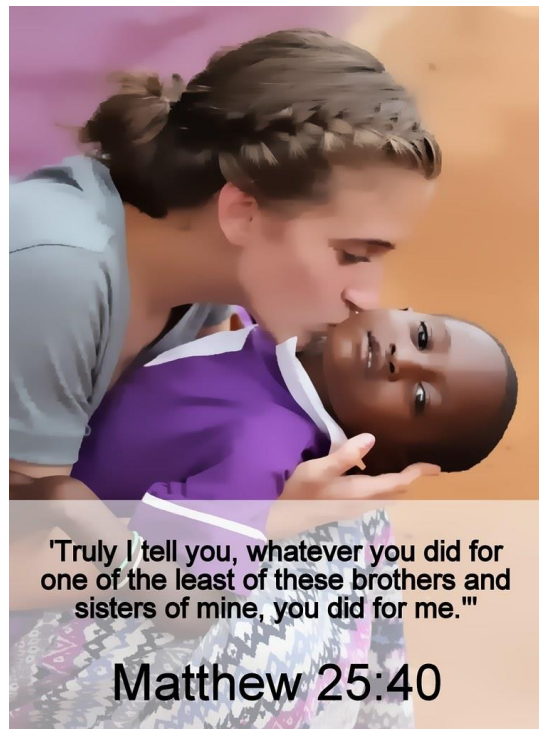
The scripture passage Matthew 25:31-46 has been a favorite of mine going back a number of years. I was promoting the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering at Grace Covenant using this passage with its references to feeding the hungry and welcoming the stranger.

In the early 1980s, a pastor in Tennessee introduced me to Sojourners magazine through a gift subscription. I have found the magazine to reflect a Christian sense that seems Biblically valid to me. Some months ago I agreed to receive daily emails from Sojourners called Verse and Voice. An email includes a verse, voice, and prayer of the day.

Recently the Verse and Voice included Matthew 25:40. The accompanying voice was Rev. Kelly Brown Douglas, saying "It cannot be said enough—there is no human being that is not worthy, worthy of being treated with divine dignity even as they are worthy of acting with divine dignity."

The prayer read "We are worthy. Caring God, you have created us with divine dignity. Open our eyes to see the divine dignity in others, in the poor and the rich, the weak and the strong, our friends and our enemies."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIZv632peBY>

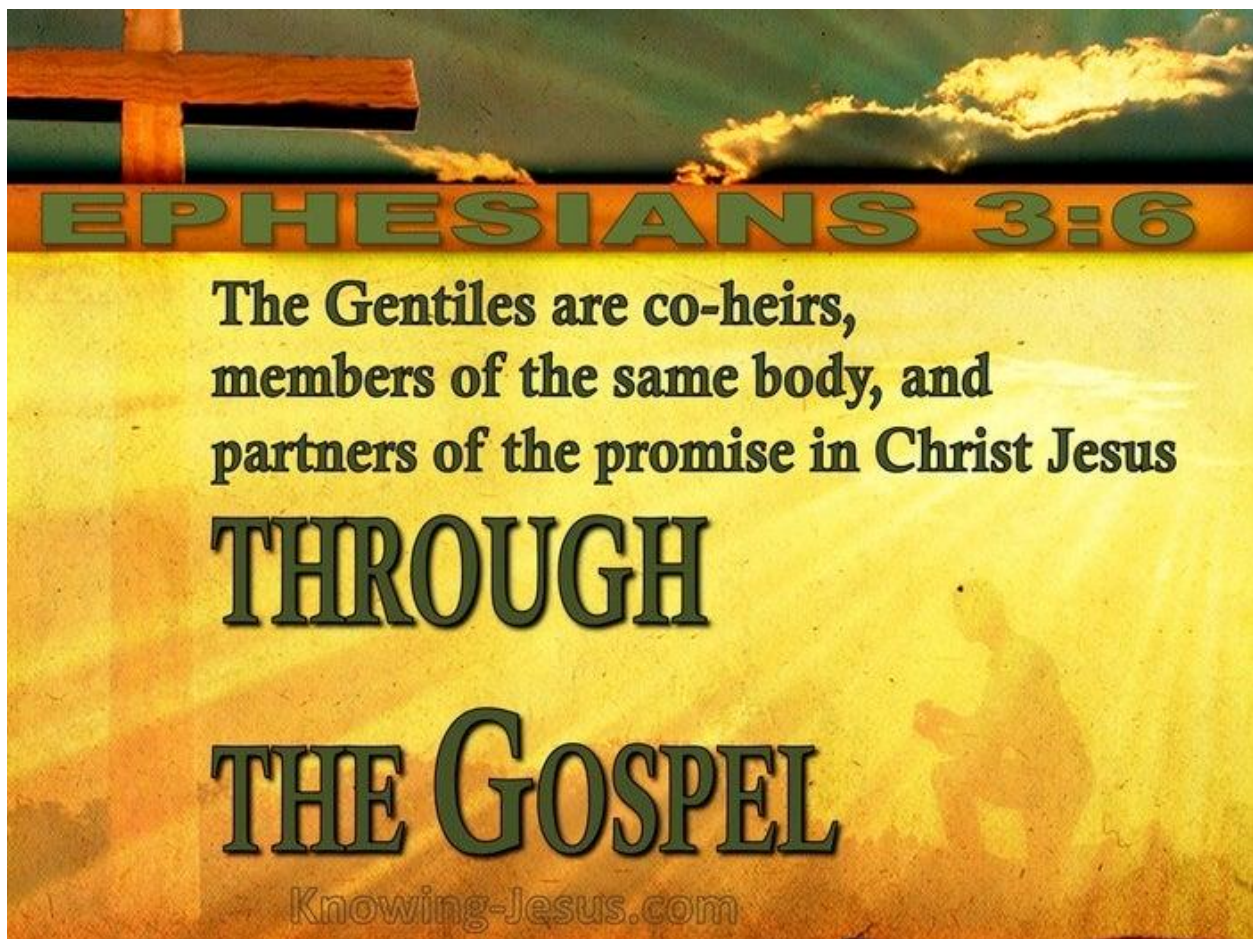


Friday, January 5 by Harold Frye

Ephesians 3:6 “This plan is that the Gentiles would be coheirs and parts of the same body, and that they would share with the Jews in the promises of God in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

The ongoing disasters have been a part of the Middle East for centuries. It seems they have been in conflict throughout our lifetimes since Israel was established in 1948. Considering this passage from Ephesians, those conflicts take on even greater significance for this Biblical reference written centuries before does not include Palestinians who are mostly Muslim. The “plan” notes that God has held this plan a secret until Jesus came into the world. The passage notes that Gentiles would be coheirs. Given that Gentiles are people who are not Jewish, there should be little doubt that Palestinians are among those who share with the Jews. Of course, politics being as they are, conflicts don’t acknowledge the Word of God. So much bloodshed could have been avoided otherwise.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sD-IBIEvWw>



Saturday, January 6 by Harold Frye

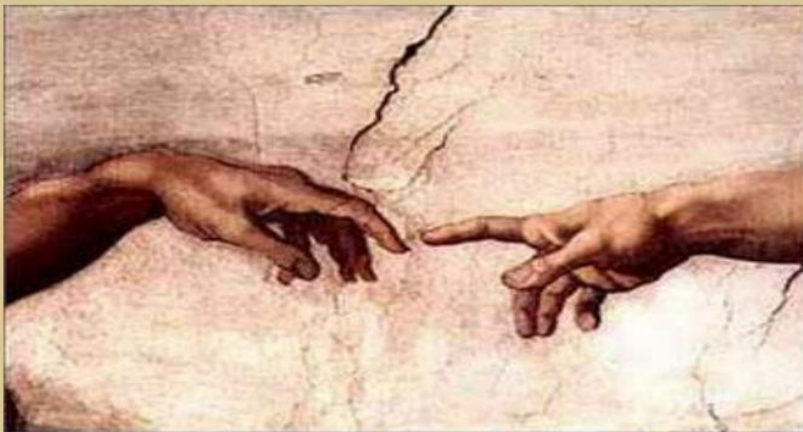
Acts 19:6 “When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them...”

The practice of laying on of hands is a tradition used in many churches. In our Presbyterian churches, it occurs most often during the ordination of pastors and elders. Likely not many know the tradition goes back as far as Paul or that it signifies a moment when the Holy Spirit is present. Earlier in this scripture, Paul learns from a few disciples that, although they were baptized by John, they were unaware that the Holy Spirit was present. It would seem that there was an acknowledgment by the disciples of this presence in the latter baptism but not in the former. If this is true, then those upon whom hands are being laid should acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit. During infant baptism, the parents are asked if they accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior and whether they will promise to raise their child in Christian love.

What significant events these are!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evhq0nus_HE

Acts 19:6



And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

Sunday, January 7 Epiphany by Nancy Kalesz

Isaiah 60:1–6 “Arise! Shine! Your light has come; the lord’s glory has shone upon you. Though darkness covers the earth and gloom the nations, the Lord will shine upon you; God’s glory will appear over you. Nations will come to your light and kings to your dawning radiance.

Lift up your eyes and look all around; they are all gathered; they have come to you. Your sons will come from far away, and your daughters on caregivers’ hips. Then you will see and be radiant; your heart will tremble and open wide, because the sea’s abundance will be turned over to you; the nation’s wealth will come to you. Countless camels will cover your land, young camels from Midian and Ephah. They will all come from Sheba carrying gold and incense, proclaiming the Lord’s praises.

It’s Epiphany (or Three Kings Day), the celebration of God doing a new thing. The celebration that Jesus came for all people, not a chosen few.

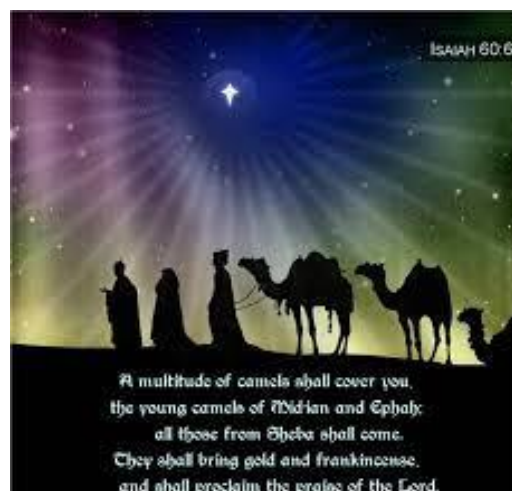
The Magi were not insiders; they were foreign seekers of signs that God was doing a marvelous thing. They came seeking a King who would bring peace to earth. Led by a star to a foreign land where they would find not an earthly King, but a small child (found in lowly surroundings) Imagine what a huge surprise it was to find this child of poverty instead of a rich human king.

Epiphany reminds us that the Christ Child was a gift to the world ... to all the world, not just a chosen few. His coming brought light to all, and the gift of Grace.

Think of these things today as you dismantle your Christmas decorations and put away your tree and gifts.

Jesus came for all peoples—everywhere for that time and for all time. Hold on to the magnitude of this special gift. It is for everyone; the ones you like, and, those you don’t care so much about. Because if you think or act like Christmas was/is only for a few, you have missed the whole point. This gift is meant to stay out all year—all the days of your life—and if you put it away in a closet—don’t—share it and cherish it. Jesus came for all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gpW1TRh7DQ>



“COMING SOON”

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