

2022 Advent Devotionals

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.

November 27, 1st day of Advent

Isaiah 2:4 “Nation will not take up sword against nation; they will no longer learn how to make war.”

Beginning the Advent season with a devotion about war seems somewhat odd. Just how and where and when do we learn how to make war? I confess that I am a WWII buff, having watched nearly every movie about that conflict. Perhaps, my fascination comes from the fact that I was born into that conflict. As a very young grade school student, I lived through the Korean conflict; however, there was little daily news coverage, and I wasn't even old enough to see newsreels at the movie house. I suppose my real indoctrination into war-making came when I was plunged into the Vietnam war. While I watched it from a distance in its early days, I didn't think I would be involved as a participant until 1968 when President Lyndon Johnson declared a major increase in our country's involvement. I didn't volunteer and had to be forced into service, leaving my teaching career. My training required that I learn how to point a lethal weapon and fire at an imaginary human being. Fortunately, my journey through the war didn't require that I do so ever, and I am grateful for those who gave up their lives. But the question hasn't been settled: How do we learn how to make war? Anyone born after "my war" has no memory of what took place. From then until now, our youth have had more than their share of war from which to learn. At present, we see over and over the outcomes of man's hatred for his neighbors, his desire to dominate and control.

So, as we embark on the Advent season, take a few moments to reflect what Advent is about. The peace of God and the gift of His Son came to all that war would never again be waged, costing lives and devastation.

Prayer: Our heavenly Father, bring forth your Kingdom of peace. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYQ2OZtbXKI>



November 28, 2nd day of Advent

Isaiah 2:2 “In the days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house will be the highest of the mountains.”

On May 25, 2001, Erik Weihenmeyer reached the summit of Mount Everest. While others before had achieved this monumental feat, Erik was the first blind person to do so. His accomplishment can be placed into the context of his other accomplishments, that he reached the summit of the highest mountains on all seven continents. As miraculous as it is, Erik was unable to enjoy what most of us take for granted, to look out over the expanse of the world below. The level of trust Erik had was likely far beyond what others would embrace.

What is the Lord’s house and what makes it the highest of mountains? Surely, the birth of Jesus and the beginning of the church is the Lord’s house. Jesus is and will always be the most outstanding of all people on Earth. He will be the highest, the peak, the summit.

Prayer: My God, I give thanks for your gift of Jesus, the highest above all. Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vqS_V-iSGg



November 29, 3rd day of Advent

Psalm 122:7 “Let there be peace on your walls; let there be rest on your fortifications.”

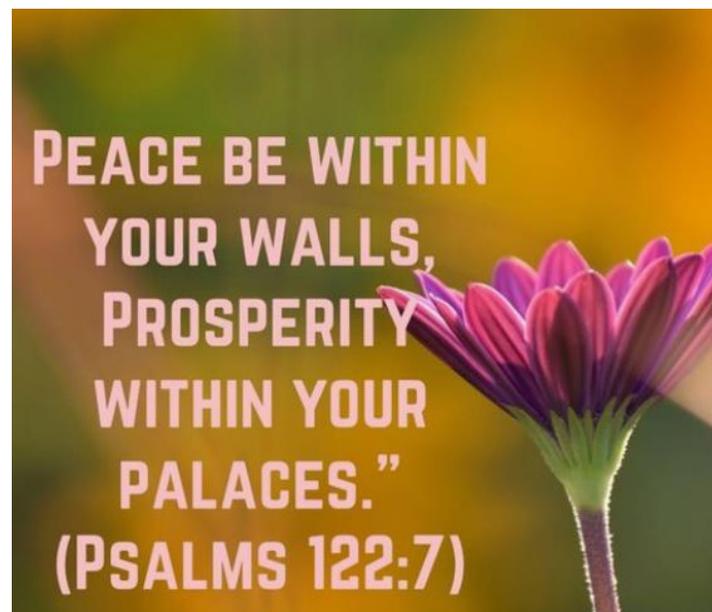
In the 2009 movie, “The Outlander,” alien soldier Kainan, played by James Caviezel, crashes in Norway and begins a battle with his mortal enemy, Moorwen. The Viking village becomes the setting for most of the drama and is constructed from timbers lined with walkways from which defenders can protect their homes. Once the villain monster is defeated and peace returns (as is the happy ending to movies), the fortifications seem less important.

Jerusalem and most cities were built with fortifications and walls. Even in modern times, some thought is given to protecting homes; however, as we have seen in places like Syria and Ukraine, no amount of physical fortifications can prevent bombs and missiles from destroying property and taking lives. I am reminded of that moment during WWI when both sides stopped shooting at one another and even came together to sing, to share, and to bring peace.

Advent is a time for peace. Advent is a call for rest.

Prayer: Fill me with the spirit of peace not only at Advent, but in all I do and say. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9D4GkVkmNkk>



November 30, 4th day of Advent

Romans 13:14 “Instead, dress yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ, and don’t plan to indulge your selfish desires.”

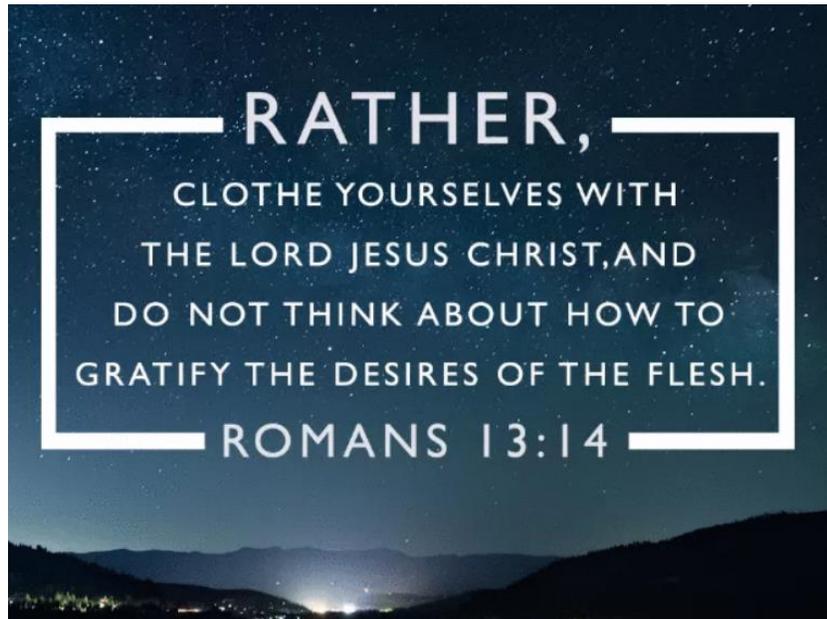
Not long ago, I heard someone give advice to her adult daughter regarding getting out of bed each morning. She told her daughter that, if she were to make her bed each morning, she would be giving herself a gift to unwrap each night when she returned to bed.

In this scripture from Romans, the Apostle Paul speaks of putting on “the weapons of light” and behaving appropriately as people “who live in the day.” Jesus, of course, is the light and as the celebration of His birth approaches, God’s greatest gift can be ours.

Dress yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ and also make your bed each morning.

Prayer: May I walk in the light. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhMdCy1x-gw>



December 1, 5th day of Advent

Matthew 24:40 “At that time there will be two men in the field. One will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill. One will be taken and the other left.”

The story is an old one and the setting varies with its telling. At freshman orientation, a wise professor takes the stage and says, “Look at the person to your left, now look at the person to your right. When graduation day comes, not all of you will be there.”

We often think that when the great flood occurred, only Noah’s family was saved; however, across the world, thousands upon thousands were spared. The author of these verses in Matthew knew that God’s gift had come. The gift had been given. Looking to the future of Humankind, now no one knows when God might bring about another event. Will it be when some are called to Heaven? Will it be when Jesus returns? We don’t know, but as we are warned, “stay alert!” Stay alert in daily living by following the Word of Christ.

Prayer: Only You know Your plan, my dear Lord. Help me live a worthy life.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ7XfzZUcJQ>



December 2, 6th day of Advent

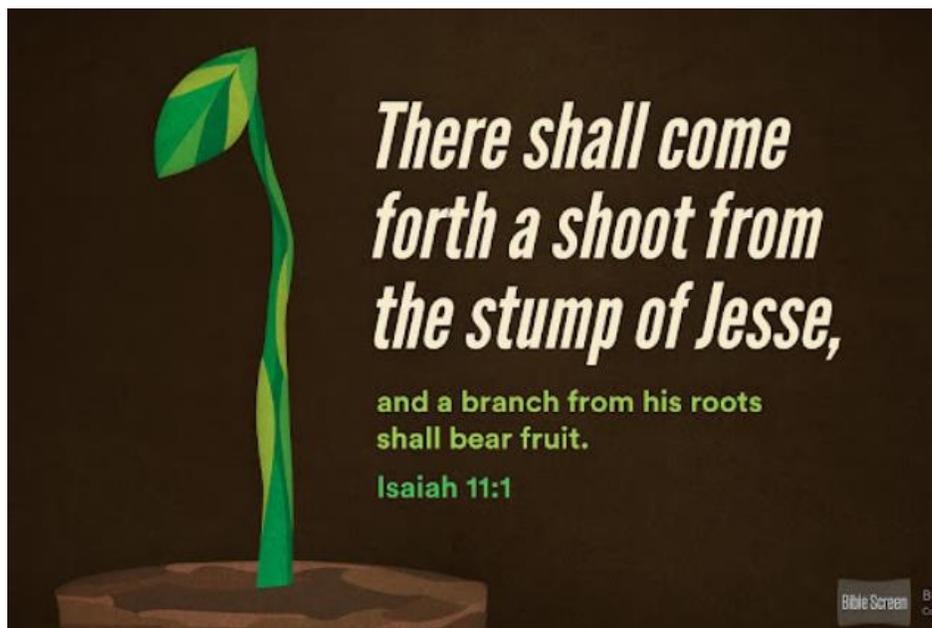
Isaiah 11:1 "A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse, a branch will sprout from his roots."

Several years ago, I had a tree company take down a particularly bothersome tree that almost straddled the line between my house and my neighbor's house in our backyards. Since the tree was nearly out of sight when removed, I decided to leave the stump of about two feet high. Through the ensuing years, shoots began to appear, so many that, as they lengthened, it appeared to be more of a bush than a tree. Out of interest, I have counted the number of shoots and found they number more than 100. Now the stump is a point of pride from which I take joy.

Prophet Isaiah predicted the birth of Jesus. From the lineage of Jesse, Jesus would come as God's gift. Let us anticipate the joy.

Prayer: Thank you, my God, for your gift.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFgXg1R05D8>



December 3, 7th day of Advent

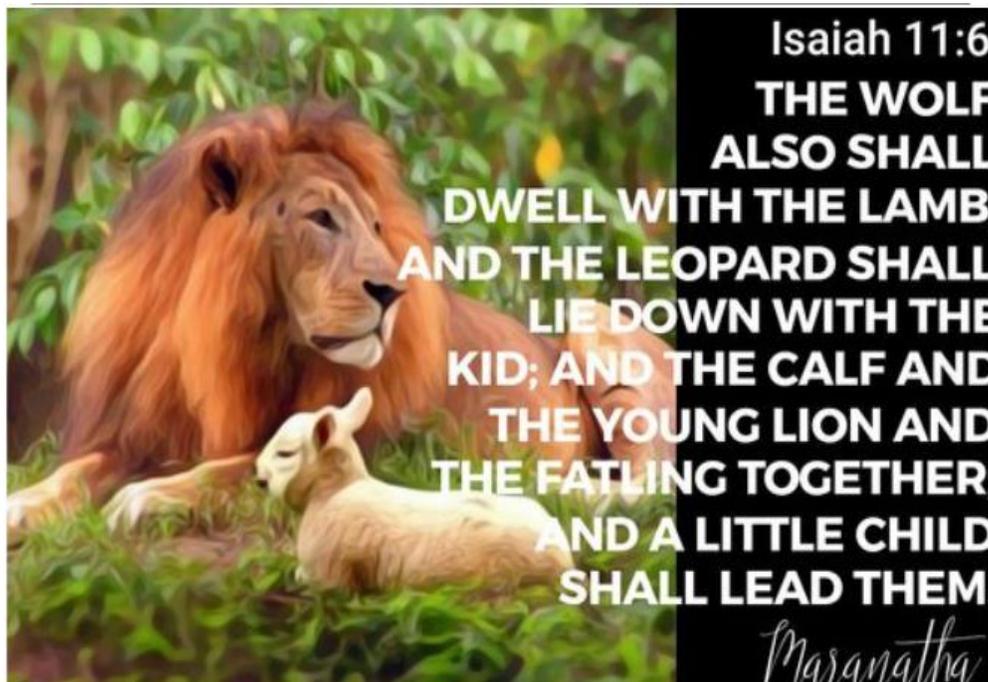
Isaiah 11:6 “...and a little child will lead them.”

Our first creche included Mary and Joseph and the Babe. There were a few goats and a cow and two palm trees, all to be placed inside a barn-like shelter. We purchased these items in Oberammergau, Germany at a woodcarver’s shop. They were special to us then and are special today, even after Carol is gone. Between that earlier time and her passing, we took delight in collecting several other manger scenes from around the world. Each one included similar figures and many included shepherds, wisemen, and angels. One person was missing, though. The back story in that place Jesus was born offered not only shelter, but a person who aided Mary with the birth. Surely Joseph wasn’t that person, as men didn’t participate then or for centuries after. This missing person was likely the wife of the innkeeper, a woman who would serve as midwife. She would be the first person to touch the newborn, to receive Him and wrap Him to protect Him from the chill of the night.

Imagine! A woman who played such a key role being left out of the creche. I’ve always thought that, perhaps, I would find some reasonable facsimile of a woman figurine that I could place in one of our creches. We owe this woman all our praise for her role in bringing forth “a little child [that] will lead them.”

Prayer: Your plan, my God, for bringing forth Your Son worked so perfectly. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNZuLNxgG7Y>



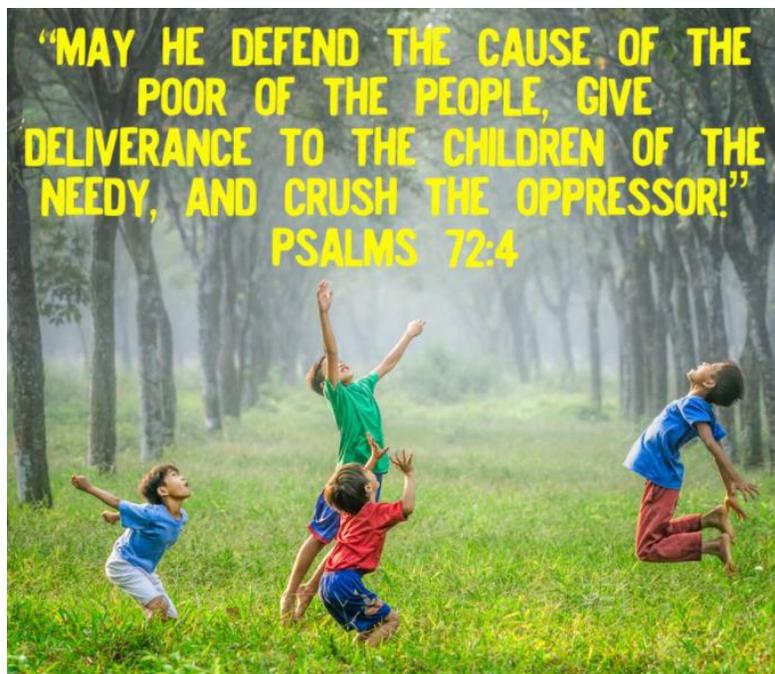
December 4, 8th day of Advent

Psalm 72:4 “...let him save the children of those who are needy.”

An initiative of many protestant churches, including the Presbyterian Church (USA), is to proclaim that they are Matthew 25 churches. In declaring this, these churches vow to devote their energies and resources to eliminating racism, hunger, and inequality. None of these important social issues stands alone, for they intersect in many ways. Whether delivering meals, serving at food kitchens, collecting and distributing clothing, or fighting against the injustices of racism and sexism, Matthew 25 churches carry out what was written centuries before.

Prayer: Help me carry out the mission of serving others. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pgwTL45a5k>



December 5, 9th day of Advent

Psalm 72:18 “Bless the Lord God, the God of Israel—the only one who does wondrous things!”

Space travel, giant telescopes peering into outer space, astronauts living aboard space stations, deep sea exploration, and on and on. Humans have accomplished such an astounding array of feats thought impossible a mere century ago. Each new generation seems capable of doing even more. But can those feats match what God has done? Galaxies so distant we haven't yet seen evidence of their existence. The perfect timing of the orbits of the planets just in our solar system. No, we have yet to match God. And again, in a few weeks we celebrate the miracle of a virgin birth. The entry into Earth of God's only Son, sent to bring salvation. What more wondrous thing!

Prayer: You are wondrous, my God. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PS2PjjoVynw>



December 6, 10th day of Advent

Romans 15:7 “So welcome each other, in the same way that Christ also welcomed you, for God’s glory.”

Most protestant churches include in their worship service a time for “passing the peace.” Prior to the pandemic when services went virtual and even following when caution was exercised not to come into close contact with others, most worshippers enjoyed greeting others in the sanctuary with a friendly handshake or just a wave across the aisle. The procedure takes less than 3 minutes, then congregants return to their seats.

Not so in all churches, though. When confirmation students began visiting Greater Pentecostal Tabernacle in Kansas City, Kansas, we were amazed that the passing of the peace ritual lasted well over ten minutes. In that time, nearly everyone greeted everyone. As visitors, we became even more involved with worshippers who wanted to speak to us. No one hid their passion for welcoming friends or strangers.

How does Christ welcome us?

Prayer: Dear Lord, I welcome Christ’s warm embrace. Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7H4FBd4T_U



December 7, 11th day of Advent

Romans 15:11 “And again, Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and all the people should sing His praises.”

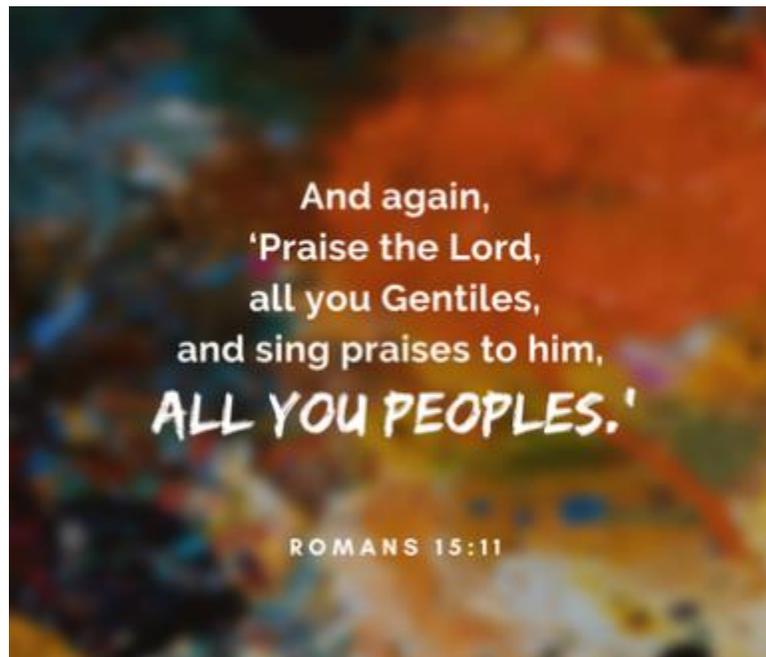
When I was a young boy and went to church every Sunday with my parents, I was puzzled by many things, but one seemed to stand out. The women of the church, at least those who were better off (not my Mom), wore mink stoles during the winter. When they sat down, they would carefully place their stoles over the backs of the pews so that the labels would show. What puzzled me most was that these labels were upside down in the garment. Being upside down, they could be read by those of us seated behind them. The labels would read “Harzfelds,” “Emery Bird Thayer,” or other stores and shops known for their quality clothing. Of course, I had to ask my mother about this and she said the labels were that way so that these ladies could show off.

So why do we go to church? To be seen? To show off? Paul told the followers in Rome that the purpose for worship was to “sing His praises.” We’re not there to be entertained, but to entertain Him. Our singing should exalt His name.

Sing praises to our God.

Prayer: May my lips sing their best and my lungs shout the loudest for You, my God. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xyp3xtHjd8Q>



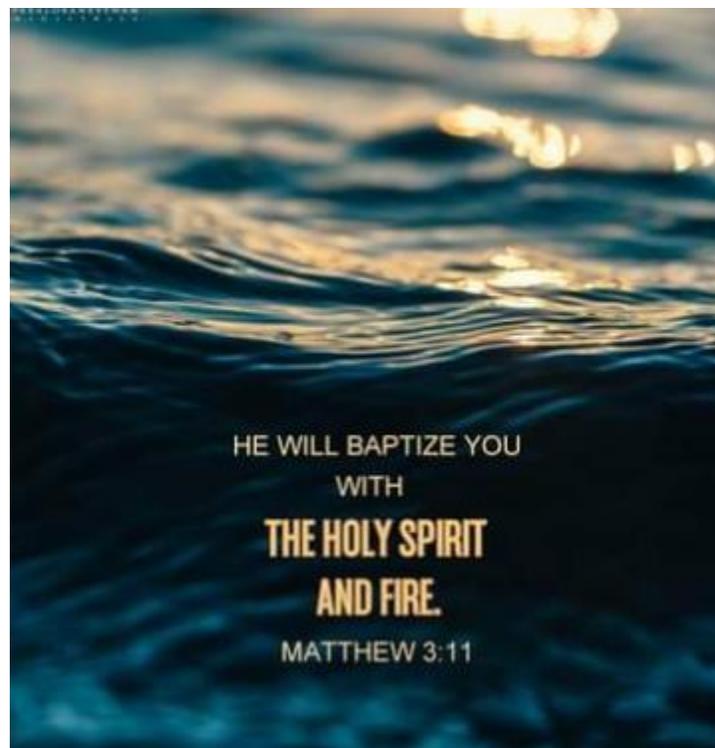
December 8, 12th day of Advent

Matthew 3:11 “I baptize with water those of you who have changed your hearts and lives.”

One Sunday school lesson for kindergarten, first, and second grade children called for a scavenger hunt through the church. I decided to confine the hunt to the sanctuary and, as I described various artifacts and objects, the children would go to that item where I would question them about its significance. They were well-informed, even those as young as six, until we inspected the baptismal fount. When the building was constructed, a stone wall filled the back of the stage and a stone base that contained a metal bowl and a faucet were put in place. Over the years, though, this structure was found to be inadequate, for the parents, the child (usually an infant), and the minister were located farther away from the congregation. Grandparents, aunts and uncles, and friends were unable to take those important photos. Consequently, a ceramic bowl was incorporated into the procedure and placed on the communion table toward the front of the stage. This unused relic in the background was something most children never had a chance to inspect, so their curiosity was always greater and questions about their own baptisms recalled only what parents might have told them since they were too young to know what was happening. I concluded the scavenger hunt at the old fount by asking them if they thought their hearts and lives were changed because of their baptism. Responses from this age group amazed me, for they already understood that baptism connects them to Jesus. How refreshing!

Prayer: May the baptismal promises made to me as an infant be repeated again and again to others. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=py2zZMiQYjA>



December 9, 13th day of Advent

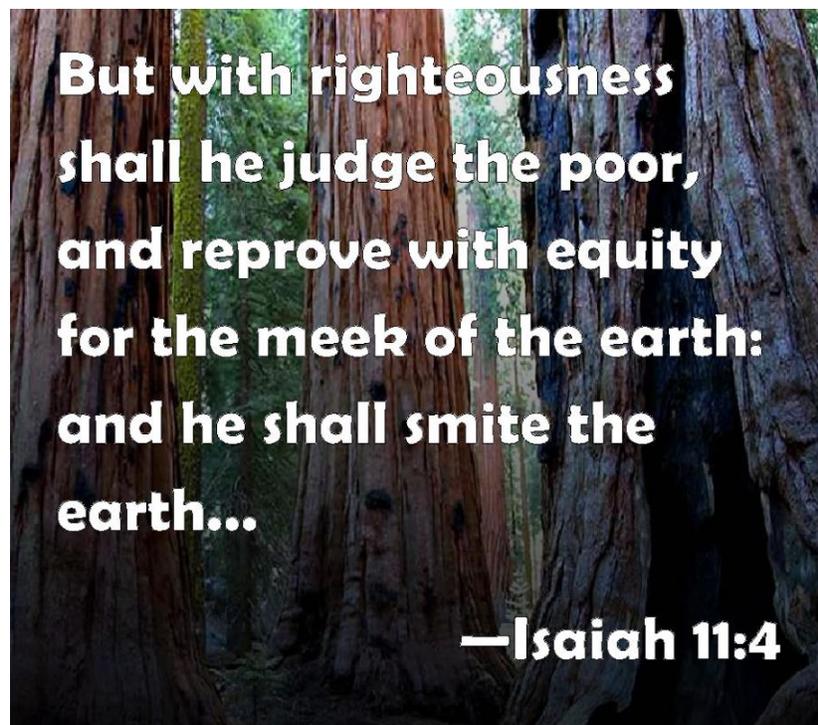
Isaiah 11:4 “He will judge the needy with righteousness and decide with equity for those who suffer in the land.”

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, writes in his 2020 book, “Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times,” that “we are bound by a covenant of human solidarity, whatever our color or culture, class or creed.” Rabbi Sacks goes on to explain that, over the last 60 years or so, we have moved from “We” to “I” and left behind any sense of responsibility for those less fortunate. We have seen what has taken place in Ukraine and the overwhelming response of Ukraine’s neighbors in Poland, Romania, and other regional countries as well as groups and companies around the world who have come together to form a “We” to aid and assist the war-ravaged Ukrainians. On the heels of the pandemic, will we also see a change in the world’s culture to pivot, as they say, back to times when “human solidarity” will bring about greater equity?

Jesus came into the world to bring that about.

Prayer: Help us to do all we can to restore equity in the land. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eeGrTM8WJ4M>



December 10, 14th day of Advent

Isaiah 35:1 “The desert and the dry land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom like the crocus. They will burst into bloom.”

A good neighbor enjoys his skills at being a master gardener. Each spring, his yard explodes with color and fragrance, taking away the drab and colorless landscape of winter. We often laugh when the crocus stick their blossoms above the ground even before winter’s frost has left. Often, snow has covered those fragile flowers as they make their entrance.

Jesus arrived with God’s perfect timing. Unlike the king the people were expecting, He came into the world as a fragile baby, radiating new life and promise.

Like the crocus’ arrival, Jesus brought hope for a new tomorrow.

Prayer: Let us see signs of God’s love all around us. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKBth51Jl9w>



December 11, 15th day of Advent

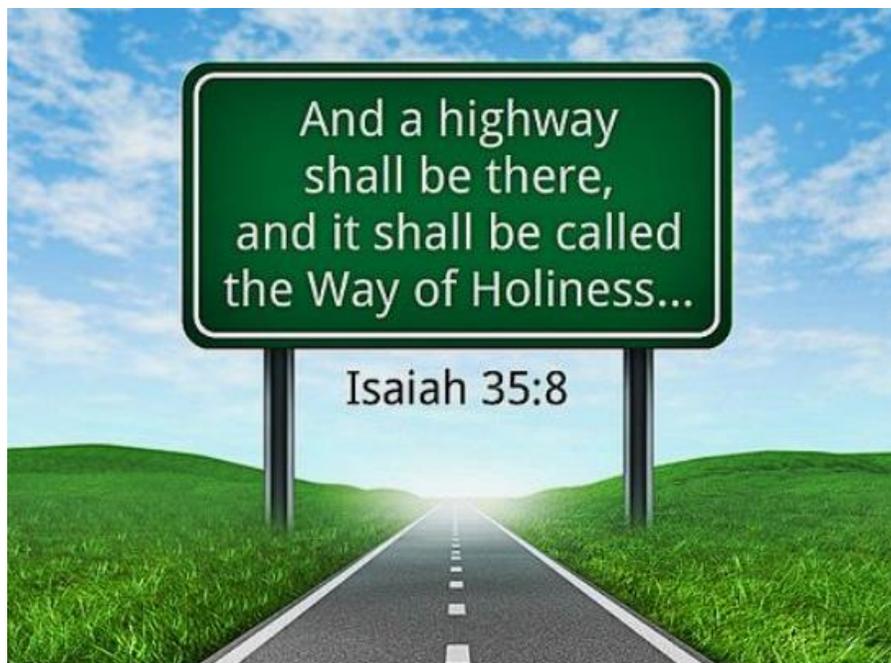
Isaiah 35:8-9 “A highway will be there. It will be called The Holy Way. The unclean won’t travel on it, but it will be for those walking on that way. Even fools won’t get lost on it; no lion will be there; only the redeemed will walk on it.”

Two of the most successful basketball coaches (with connections to the University of Kansas) are Dean Smith and Roy Williams. If you were to drive Interstate Highway 40 through Chapel Hill and Durham, North Carolina, you would likely see two sections of the highway with markers noting that both Smith and Williams are honored with “Dean Smith Highway” and “Roy Williams Highway.” To Tar Heels fans, these are certainly hallowed ground.

The Holy Way in these passages from the prophet Isaiah foretell of the coming of the Messiah who will turn barren desert to lush and beautiful landscapes. And how do we travel that highway? Follow the teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our feet will not fail, our journey will not be burdened.

Prayer: Put my feet on The Holy Way. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aX1gLCICFzM>



December 12, 16th day of Advent

Psalm 146:6-7 “...God who is faithful forever...who gives bread to people who are starving.”

The subject of bread comes along many times in the Bible. In the Book of Exodus, we read about God’s providing manna to the Israelites after their escape from bondage in Egypt and their crossing the Red Sea. In that story, the Israelites didn’t trust that God would continue to provide each day, so they tried to save some of the manna for later, but it rotted. When manna appeared on the ground each day following, the Israelites finally understood that God would not abandon them.

In the Book of John, we read about the multitudes who gather to hear Jesus, but don’t have food. Jesus turns five loaves of bread and two fish into enough to feed 5000 people.

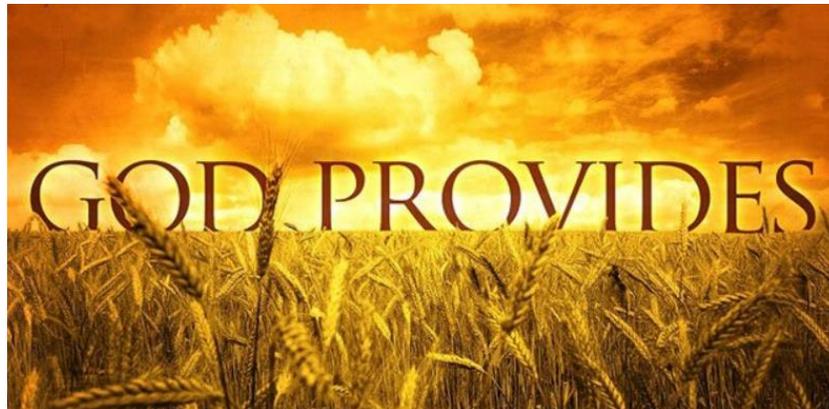
The Lord’s Prayer appears in the Books of Matthew and Luke as Jesus taught His disciples the words, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Of greatest interest is the fact that each time people are hungry, God provides. God’s faithful relationship with His people is confirmed through bread. Jesus uses bread as a metaphor for His body and directs His disciples to commune with one another after His death.

What does this have to do with the coming celebration of Jesus’ birth? Jesus is the bread of life, the salvation we seek, the sustenance we need to survive and thrive.

Prayer: Give us this day our daily bread. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cq0Z2ltN8X8>



December 13, 17th day of Advent

Luke 1:48 “He has looked with favor on the low status of His servant. Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored because the Mighty One has done great things for me.”

American poet Maya Angelou has said that her favorite poem is “Still I Rise.” The words are:

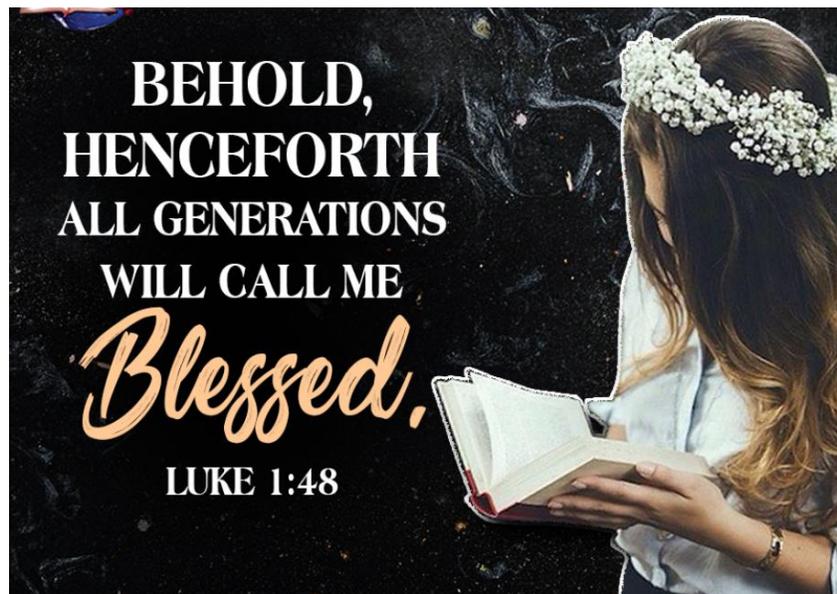
“You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may tread me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I’ll rise.”

Maya Angelou, of course, was writing about the terrible oppression of Black people through the history of slavery and the defiance they shared in fighting against their oppressors.

Mary was not a victim of slavery, but as a young, poor woman she accepted God’s use of her in the birth of the Savior and stood defiantly as God’s servant.

Prayer: Let me accept what God asks of me as well. Amen.

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



December 14, 18th day of Advent

1 Peter 5:7 “Throw all your anxiety on Him, because He cares about you.”

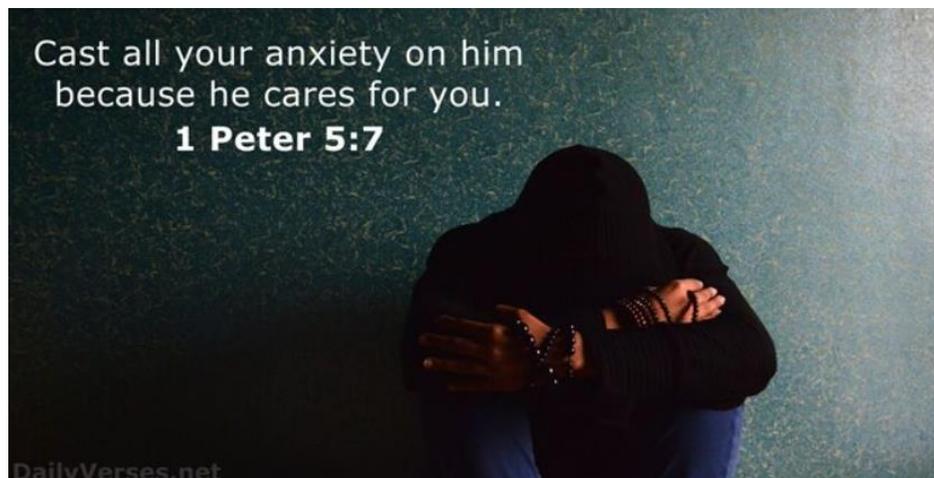
More than 40 million Americans today suffer from anxiety. Panic attacks, social isolation, and drug dependency have those in the medical field worried. Justin LaPilusa, a licensed clinical psychologist in San Diego, said that in his experience he’s noticed that many people develop anxiety in their early 20s, an age when they don’t always have the personal resources to manage their symptoms. People in this age group are also experiencing new external stressors, he said, like new jobs, relationships and colleges. “It’s a time of great discovery,” he said. “It can also be a time of great emotional upheaval. ... The individuals at that age as well don’t always have the wherewithal to seek out mental health treatment.”

In another view of America, we know that church attendance and involvement has dropped significantly, especially among young people.

How do we encourage those who suffer from anxiety to “throw all [their] anxiety on Him?” The Presbyterian Church (USA) has initiated “1001 Worshipping Communities,” a movement that takes church out of the traditional setting and into the familiar for many who are unchurched. As these efforts grow and flourish, a demonstration of Jesus’ caring becomes apparent.

Prayer: May I trust that Jesus will comfort my anxieties. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1JG2DLoDo8>



December 15, 19th day of Advent

Matthew 11:3 “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?”

If you are a reality TV fan, you may be familiar with the show, Are You The One? that puts couples into situations to see if a relationship develops. When I read this quote from Matthew attributed to John the Baptist, I thought there might be some interesting information on the internet; however, no such luck. Of course, there are tons of entries available about the TV show. Not wanting to give in or give up on my quest for more information about John the Baptist’s words, I thought about this Advent season and what Jesus brought. Love of Jesus and love for all others. John would need to look no further than Jesus. He was the fulfillment of the promises to bring forth a Messiah.

And more than 2000 years later, He is still The One.

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



December 16, 20th day of Advent

Isaiah 7:15 “He will eat butter and honey, and learn to reject evil and choose good.”

As a former elementary school principal who spent 9 years leading teachers and students as they grew, my favorite age is the youngest, the kindergarteners. Rough estimates are that I have seen 400+ move into school. Recently, a friend told me of a former student who remembered me (it’s always nice to be remembered) and thought I was a “really great guy.” When I went back to my collection of yearbooks, I found him among the kindergarteners of 1976-77. Thanks to Facebook, I will probably reconnect with him and, perhaps, renew old times.

The question comes, though, at what point does a person learn to reject evil and choose good? It would be great if that happened prior to the start of kindergarten, but, alas, if it were so, principals wouldn’t be needed. As Jesus grew, we know little about Him in those formative years when He likely worked in His father’s carpentry shop. Was it Joseph, then, who formed His values and principles? Did He adjust His moral compass while sitting on His mother’s lap? Did His siblings provide a bit of role modeling for Him?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19bbx6gzrB0>



December 17, 21st day of Advent

Psalm 80:7 “...Make your face shine so that we can be saved.”

My grands and I listen to children’s songs on a CD each morning as we drive to daycare and school. One song sings “I’m gonna S-M-I-L-E, I’m gonna L-A-U-G-H, I’m gonna G-R-I-N.” As with most children’s songs, it isn’t possible to sit impassively; rather, singing along, clapping hands, snapping fingers come easily. It’s hard to be sad and it’s hard to frown. I picture God’s face with a huge smile as He welcomes us to paradise.

Prayer: Make your face shine on me. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gt0ZvmyxMZA>



December 18, 22nd day of Advent

Matthew 3:17 "A voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son whom I dearly love; I find happiness in Him.'"

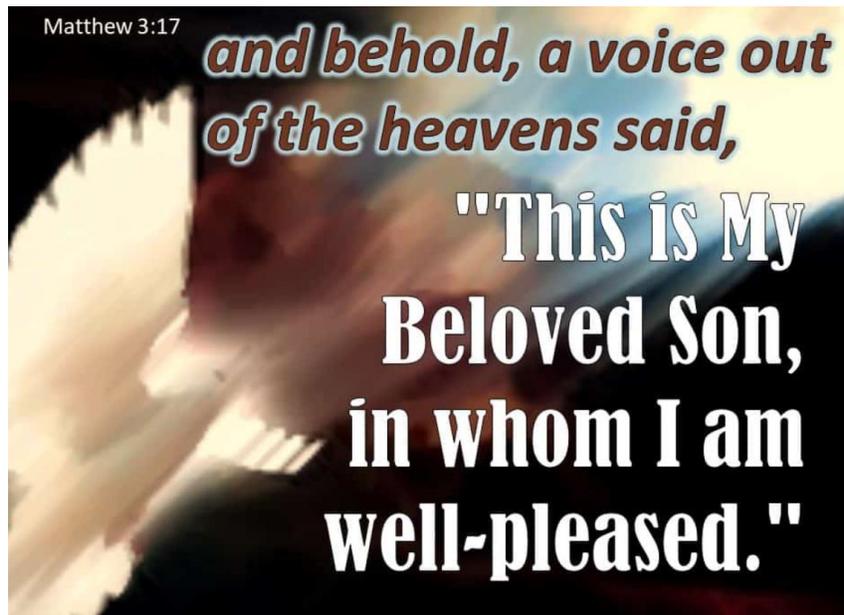
I am often amused by some Facebook friends who upload pictures of their children and grandchildren. Seeing these pictures reminds me of the love they have for their offspring. A few, though, go beyond only showing pictures and seem to say, "Look at my child...isn't he/she beautiful!" Pride dwells within each of us while some take it to the extreme. Author Will Storr's book, "Selfie: How We Became So Self-Obsessed and What It's Doing To Us" explains that we have moved from achievement to fixation on self-esteem. Further research found that those with high self-esteem often were late for appointments, less respectful, more casual, more forward, more condescending, and other anti-social behaviors.

God loved His Son, but did not exude unnecessarily on His qualities. Later in the same Book of Matthew, the writer again quotes God during the reporting of Jesus' transformation, "This is My Son whom I dearly love. I am very pleased with Him. Listen to Him!" (17:5)

Mary's baby is about to come into our world to save us. Only she could have said, "Look at my child...isn't He beautiful!"

Prayer: None are as perfect as the Son You gave to us. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9s0l9brpVsM>



December 19, 23rd day of Advent

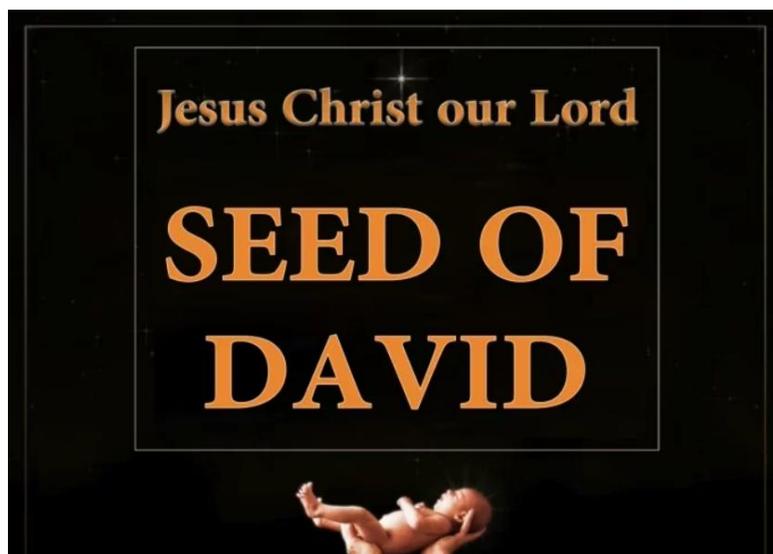
Romans 1:3 "His Son was descended from David."

As we grow older, we seem to become more interested in our ancestry. I've written before that it is because we realize we soon will meet all those who came before us and we want to know who they are. I've also written about my own ancestry searches and, after submitting DNA, found a connection with the Frye/Fry/Frey lineage dating back to the early 1600s when Jacob Frey lived in Gutenswil which is now in Switzerland. There was in that region heavy Germanic tribes influence and when his son, Heinrich, traveled to Alsace-Lorraine in France, then left from England to come to America, the continuation of the line was established. Heinrich begat Benjamin who begat Joseph who begat Benjamin who begat John who begat James who begat John who begat Isaac who begat Arthur who begat William who begat Harold who begat Christopher, Andrew, and Jeremy and on it goes to my grandchildren.

Much more impressive is the lineage of Jesus. Two accounts exist in the Bible, one in Matthew and the other in Luke. There are a few disagreements between the accounts, first in the number of generations and then in the names of those who were in line. Both, though, come down to finding that both Mary and Joseph had claim to the descendancy of David. This babe about to be born in a lowly stable and laid in a manger was truly a king, a messiah, a descendent of Israel. Hallelujah!

Prayer: You are my King Jesus. Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvZW58LQg_k



December 20, 24th day of Advent

Genesis 22:14 “Abraham named that place ‘the Lord sees.’”

Bear with me as I digress from the Common Lectionary in this writing. Most of us aren't familiar with the term Jehovah-Jireh, partly because the phrase doesn't appear in many translations of the Bible. That be as it may, Jehovah-Jireh is what Abraham decided to call the place on the mountain where God provided a ram to sacrifice rather than his own son. God was amazed at Abraham's dedication and faith, so much that He promised Abraham that generations and generations would follow. If you do nothing else today, take time to listen to this 10-minute song that captures what God's power does for each of us. God spared Abraham's son, but by His plan, allowed His own Son, Jesus, to be sacrificed for us all.

Jireh, You are more than enough.

Prayer: My dearest God, I am enough because You are more than enough. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mC-zw0zCCtg&list=RDMM&index=4>



December 21, 25th day of Advent

Matthew 1:25 “...Joseph called Him Jesus.”

Who gave you your name? Your mother? Your father? Perhaps, in their joy and exuberance, months before you were born, your parents made a list of girls’ names and a list of boys’ names. I didn’t think to ask my parents before they left us what other names they considered for me. My name “Harold” comes from my father’s best friend, Harold Baker, who we called “Uncle Harold” even though we weren’t related. When we learned that we were expecting, we made a list of girls’ and boys’ names. Having only sons, Carol was disappointed that we didn’t get the chance to use the name “Elizabeth.” And, of course, like most expectant parents, the names we settled on were, we were absolutely certain, unique as no one else would use them. I don’t recall how many Christophers or Andrews were in their classes. So much for unique!

Joseph, according to the birth story, chose the name Jesus. Likely fitting in a male-centric world, even though Joseph didn’t father Him, it was Joseph’s duty to select the child’s name. Jesus wasn’t named after an ancestor, as we find in the genealogy listing from Abraham to David to Jesus that there is only one Jesus. That makes perfect sense. This is God’s Son, the One, the Only.

Prayer: Bless You, my Savior Jesus. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfaNmNmyBS8>



December 22, 26th day of Advent

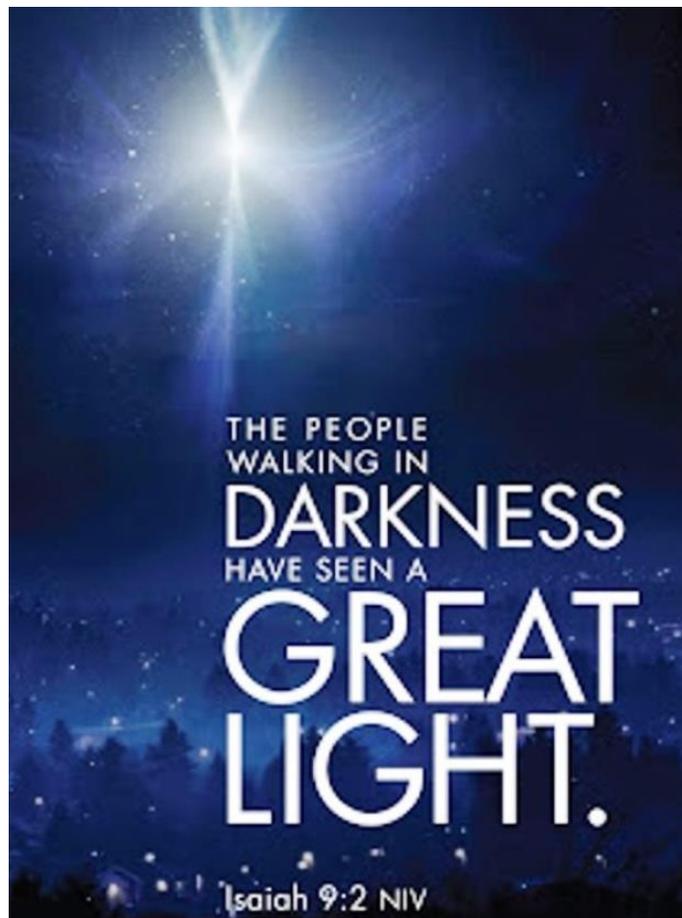
Isaiah 9:2 “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light, on those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned.”

During that terrible time when Russia was attacking Ukraine last spring, a reporter, having interviewed a resident of the capital city of Kiev, said that even in the dangerous times when the city’s lights were out, it was comforting to see the stars at night.

Prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of Jesus, a great light who would turn a darkened land into the dawn. Jesus is the Light of the World. No one before or after has shone so brightly.

Prayer: Let Your light shine on us. Amen.

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



December 23, 27th day of Advent

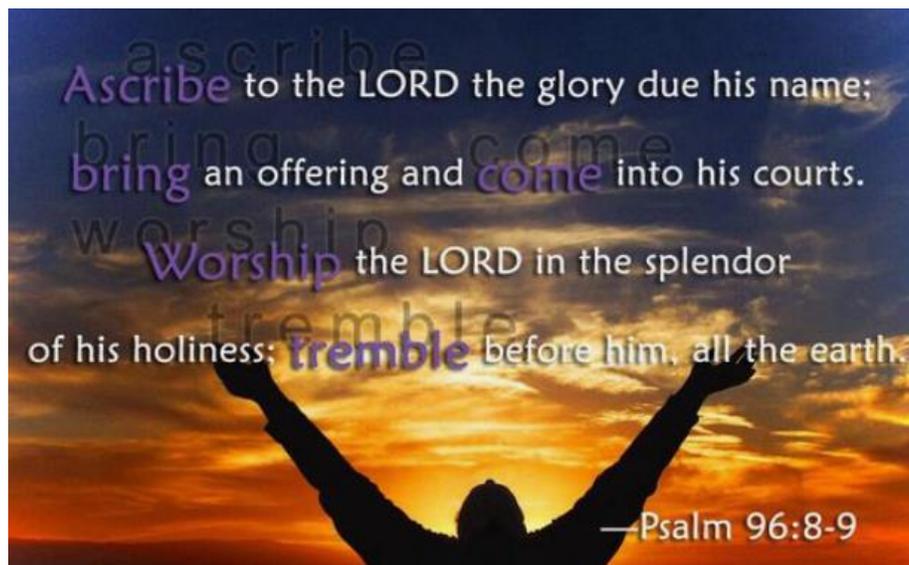
Psalm 96:7-8 "Give to the Lord the glory due His name! Bring gifts! Enter His courtyards! Bow down to the Lord in His holy splendor! Tremble before Him, all the earth!"

The exclamation point appears frequently in scripture, especially in the Psalms, as the writer attempted to bring attention to the heightened importance or emotion or feeling of the passage. In every line of the scripture above, the exclamation mark appears. In the entire Psalm, the exclamation mark is used 18 times. The "bible" of research writers, the American Psychological Association (APA) 7th Edition allows for exclamation marks only when they are a part of a quote. At no other times are they allowed. The exclamation mark is rare, used in special times.

Our excitement is raised as we near the birth of the Savior.

Prayer: We anticipate Your gift, Your Son. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCQ3ehcC15U>



December 24, Christmas Eve, 28th day of Advent

Titus 2:14 “He gave Himself for us in order rescue us from every kind of lawless behavior, and cleanse a special people for Himself who are eager to do good actions.”

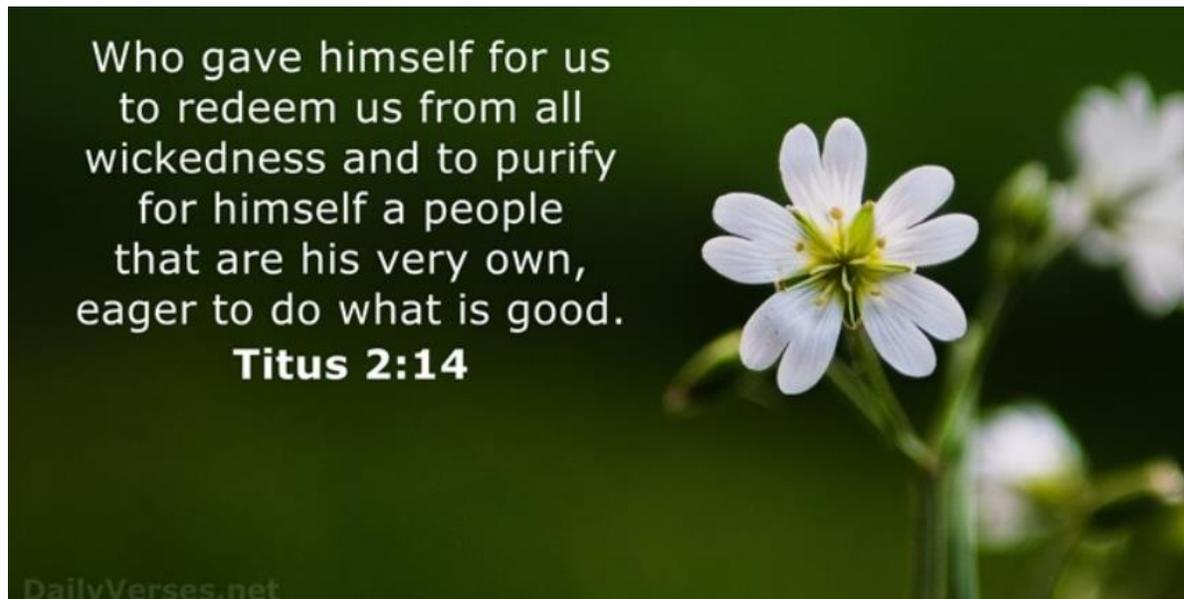
Are all the decorations in their proper place? Are all the gifts wrapped and ready to place under the tree? Is the table set for our guests tomorrow? Are the stockings ready to fill after the kids go to bed? Did someone put new batteries in the candles on the mantel? Did someone remember to turn on the evergreen aroma device? Is everyone dressed to leave on time for the Christmas Eve service? Is the dog in his kennel? Where is the cat? Oh, so many things to do...will we be ready?

We are so busy preparing for Christmas. Among the many things we didn't do: Stop by a homeless encampment to share a hot meal. Take a special handmade card to a shut-in. Sing Christmas carols to residents in a care facility. Volunteer to ring the bell at the Salvation Army donation kettle. Invite a homeless family to share a meal. Take gifts to children in the hospital. Organize a candlelight service at a retirement home. Bake cookies for a neighbor. Volunteer to read at a pre-school.

Eager to do good actions? There's lots on the list. May the peace of Christ overcome you!

Prayer: Let me remember others. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V31CLOnsMks>



December 25, Christmas Day

Luke 2:8-14 "The angel said, 'Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your Savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger.' Suddenly, a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, 'Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors.'"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fti1mL74OE0>



December 26, 1st day of Christmastide

Isaiah 63:7 “I will recount the Lord’s faithful acts.”

Unless your Christmas celebration is like my extended family’s celebrations that stretch beyond Christmas Day and into the weeks following, you may have picked up the boxes and wrapping paper, started to think about dismantling the decorations, and unloaded the dishwasher from that wonderful meal yesterday. Take a moment to recount the Lord’s faithful acts while you are busy at work: He carried through with His promise to deliver the Messiah; He guided worshippers to see the new baby; He brought John the Baptist out of the wilderness to foretell of the coming Christ; He guided the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt; and on and on and on and on. God’s acts of faithfulness are everlasting.

Prayer: I cannot begin to recount all that You have done, but I will try. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIVD5vCnRgc>



December 27, 2nd day of Christmastide

Matthew 2:13 “When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up. Take the child and His mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search for the child in order to kill Him.’”

And so the story of Herod’s insane jealousy continues. He ordered all boys under the age of two to be killed. How unimaginable that parents would face the death of their children only because a cruel ruler was afraid he would lose power.

During this time leading up to Epiphany, focus your prayers on children around the world who are dying from violence, starvation, and neglect.

Prayer: Help me to help children. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6k-cTzw1XSY>



December 28, 3rd day of Christmastide

Numbers 6:22-26 “The Lord bless you and protect you. The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His face to you and grant you peace.”

For those who grew up with the King James version of the Bible, perhaps, these words sound more familiar: “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” Even more familiar to some may be the words in the English version Bible: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” In the church in which we were raised, the Numbers scripture put to music was often used by the choir as a benediction. I heard those words, “The Lord bless you and keep you,” and was inspired to think that my week ahead would, in some ways, encounter God as I went about my life.

In this period of time post-Christmas, it is comforting to think that God gave His only Son for our salvation and that He, at all times, protects us with His grace and peace.

Prayer: You are with me. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zp6aygmVzM4>



December 29, 4th day of Christmastide

Psalm 8:1 “Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth!”

The word “majestic” draws our attention in this Psalm and, for many, brings images to mind of courts, kings and queens, and royalty. “Your majesty,” is whispered as all who come before the king or queen bow before them. We also think of other words like magnificent, impressive, stately, grand, and imposing. If this time in the post-Advent season were in real time, we likely would describe the new baby Jesus by any of these words. So, too, would any new parent describe their newborn. Perhaps, we might not hear them go so far as to say their newborn was imposing.

What we know and celebrate is that God sent His only Son to carry out a very specific mission: the salvation of the human race.

How majestic is that!

The voices of the Indiana State Mass Choir is certainly well worth hearing. Enjoy!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zwzi6VosH0>



December 30, 5th day of Christmastide

Revelation 21:6 "All is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

A friend of mine holds season tickets to the Royals baseball games. He tries to attend every game, but has an annoying habit. He purposely gets to the stadium at the start of the third inning. That's not all, he purposely leaves the game at the close of the 8th inning. I guess he thinks he won't miss much (he actually listens to the game on his car radio). But he isn't there for the beginning or the end.

God's plan for redemption began long before Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. God was there to redeem them from disaster, although they lost dominion over the Earth because they disobeyed God. Jesus came from Heaven to bring salvation to all who were redeemed by His blood. In the end, Jesus will reign over Heaven on Earth for eternity. He was there in the beginning and will be there at the end.

Praise His name forever!

Prayer: You are the Alpha and the Omega, my Lord. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wwOTNBKw84>



December 31, 6th day of Christmastide

Matthew 25:40 “Then the King will reply to them, ‘I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for Me.’”

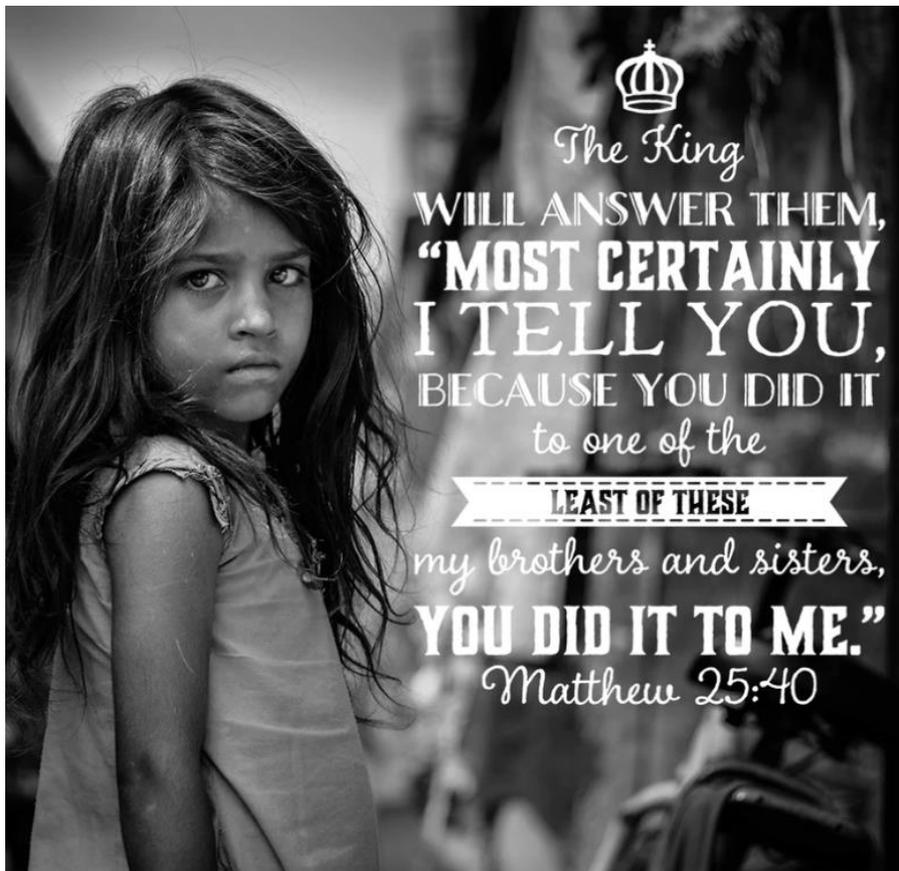
A colleague several years ago told the story of a teacher who noticed a young child in her class who appeared to be hungry. She called the child aside and asked, “Did you eat breakfast this morning?” The child replied “No” to which the teacher asked, “What did you have for supper last night?” The child replied, “It wasn’t my turn.”

That story makes my heart break every time I think about it. When I see children coming through the line to eat at the KCK Hot Lunch program, I say to myself how thankful I am that there are places like that one where children can eat. Then I think about the countless children in the world who are starving and don’t have a place to eat.

The Old Year is about to pass on and be replaced with a New Year. What an excellent time to renew our promise to feed “the least of these brothers and sisters.”

Prayer: May our New Year be filled with opportunities to do for the least. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sH2wTVvsvM>



January 1, 7th day of Christmastide

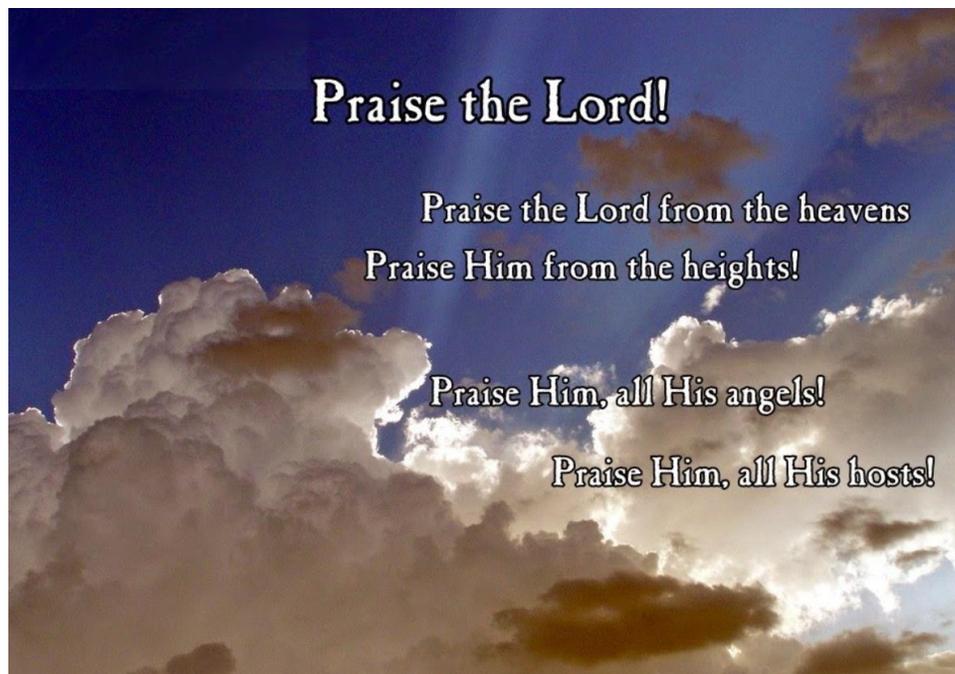
Psalm 148:1 "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from heaven! Praise God on the heights!"

From where have we come? Where are we now? To where are we going? Humankind, with all its advances in science and technology, has learned and evolved in its thinking and reasoning from a time when everything in the world circled around us to a time now when we understand that we are a small and finite part of "the grand plan." In his book, "Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times," Johnathan Sacks notes that "Set in space, this wide Earth of ours turned out to be a speck of dust on the surface of infinity." When we thought we were the center of all creation, we held our heads high with dignity and honor. Now, as only one of a hundred billion others, we're not so sure.

Our only hope is that God is Lord of all, that we praise Him. On this first day of the Year 2023 in the time of Christ, we cling to the hope that our Lord will fulfill His promise just as He did when He sent His only Son to bring salvation.

Prayer: Praise the Lord on high. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFHe4cs-6d8>



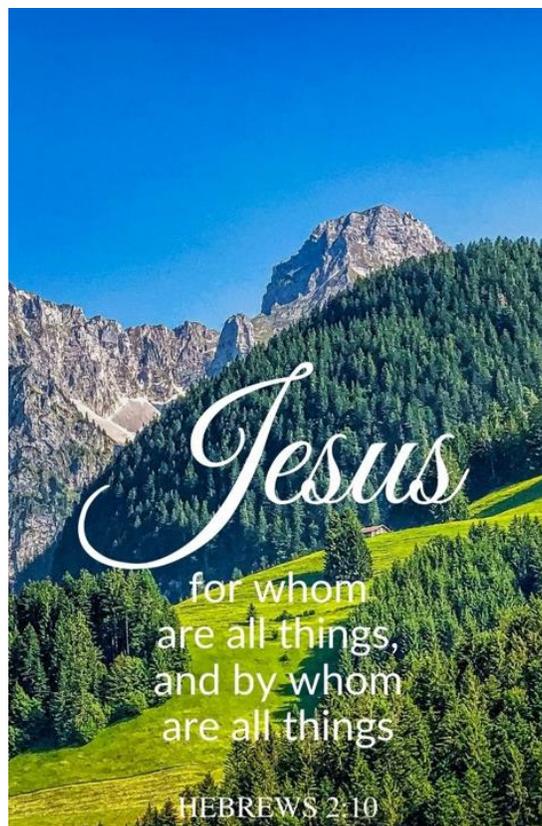
January 2, 8th day of Christmastide

Hebrews 2:10 “It was appropriate for God, for whom and through whom everything exists, to use experiences of suffering to make perfect the pioneer of salvation.”

We’re seeing today a revolution of change in cultural appropriation. Schools and sports teams that had adopted names and mascots to rally the spirit of togetherness have been, in most cases, forced to give up their uses of those mascots out of concern for offending those who first owned them. A high school in nearby Leavenworth, Kansas clings to its use of “Pioneers,” having been established as one of the earliest high schools in the state and accompanying one of the first military outposts in the settlement of towns and villages for Western civilization. Pioneers pushed into these lands to explore, to map, and to make way.

Jesus was a pioneer, making way for what would come in God’s plan. His mission was to bring salvation to humankind. As He traveled through ancient lands ruled by tribes engaged in centuries of conflict, His message was one of peace, hope, and love. To accomplish this, He would suffer the same trials and tribulations brought upon His people. His was a mission of pioneering.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MEnjhcU3hE>



January 3, 9th day of Christmastide

Ecclesiastes 3:13 “Moreover, this is the gift of God: that all people should eat, drink, and enjoy the results of their hard work.”

If the pandemic has shown us nothing else, it has demonstrated that, for many workers who were forced to take their work home, it was possible to do more in less time. The standard of a 40-hour week disappeared and left in its place was a void caused by an absence of commuting time, coffee breaks, chatting at the water fountain, and surfing the internet. Of course, many people did not experience this as they worked in a variety of jobs that required their presence including retail and service jobs. Even educators who were required to be present in the classroom weren't called upon to provide childcare as online teaching and learning took on a different look.

Gift of God? Some filled those empty times with endeavors pushed into the background like baking bread, painting and sculpting, writing and reading, and actually being a part of their children's lessons. Some employers have found it possible for workers to mix in-office with in-home work to the benefit of everyone involved, everyone except those who are finding fewer office leases renewed.

Eat, drink, enjoy, and thank God for the gifts! (Also enjoy as the Byrds bring God's words to life.)

Prayer: We recognize that You, Almighty God, are the source of all that we have. Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4ga_M5Zdn4&list=RDEM-v_dwbnvgE5oQzhoYv82EQ&start_radio=1&rv=HwBiW7ZRmFA



January 4, 10th day of Christmastide

Matthew 2:10 “When they saw the star, they were filled with joy.”

Stargazing has always been a treat for humankind. On camping trips when we were away from the city lights, the heavens seemed to open up with light. Often, late at night, we would go into an open field and lie on the warm grasses, hoping to see a shooting star. Several years ago, we were thrilled to host astronaut Story Musgrave as a speaker at the school district’s convocation. Dr. Musgrave, a physician, was only the second astronaut to fly on six missions. His photography of outer space stands today as testament to our universe.

The magi saw the Christ star and followed it until they came to Bethlehem. Seeing that star must have filled them with awe and wonder. As Epiphany approaches, be filled with the awe and wonder of a child born of a woman sent from God.

Prayer: Fill my heart with wonder. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22SMUUMsx0o>



January 5, 11th day of Christmastide

Isaiah 60:1 “Arise! Shine! Your light has come; the Lord’s glory has shone upon you.”

Newborns hold a special place in everyone’s heart. Facebook is filled with images of infants hardly old enough to open their eyes, sleeping peacefully in the arms of proud parents and grandparents. Today’s cameras that are a part of everyone’s cellphone capture images without disturbing the young ones. In earlier times, flashbulbs exploded, causing a jolt and shudder to dozing babies. Now we can shine the light on them without disturbing at all.

The infant Jesus slept as admirers came – shepherds from the hills, magi from far away, animals that clearly understood a miracle was before them. The Light had come into the world. Truly, God’s glory shone upon Him.

Prayer: Thank you for your gift, dearest Lord. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvUB11kHyiU>



January 6, Epiphany

Psalm 72:11 “Let all the kings bow down before Him; let all the nations serve Him. Let it be so, because He delivers the needy who cry out, the poor, and those who have no helper.”

Author Jonathan Sacks writes in his book, “Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times,” that “The Greater Good Center at the University of California, Berkeley, continues to publish research findings on the health benefits of altruism. A 2019 research study showed that acts of kindness of many different kinds, whether performed for family, friends, or strangers, had positive effects for those who performed them, on both physical and emotional health. Lifting others, we ourselves are lifted.”

Here, now at the Epiphany of the Lord, we come near the close of the season of Advent, Christmastide, and Epiphany when we look toward the new year. Let it be a time when we follow Christ in service to those who need our help.

Prayer: Let me commit my efforts to others. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pgwTL45a5k>



January 7, 1st day after Epiphany

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

Not long ago, I facilitated a class composed of children in grades 3-6. The text came from Paul’s letter to the new church at Corinth that was experiencing difficulties. Paul wrote that, just as our bodies are made of different and specialized parts, so, too, was the church as the body of Christ made of many different parts, the people who came together to worship God. The students readily understood the connection between the metaphor of the body of Christ and the human body.

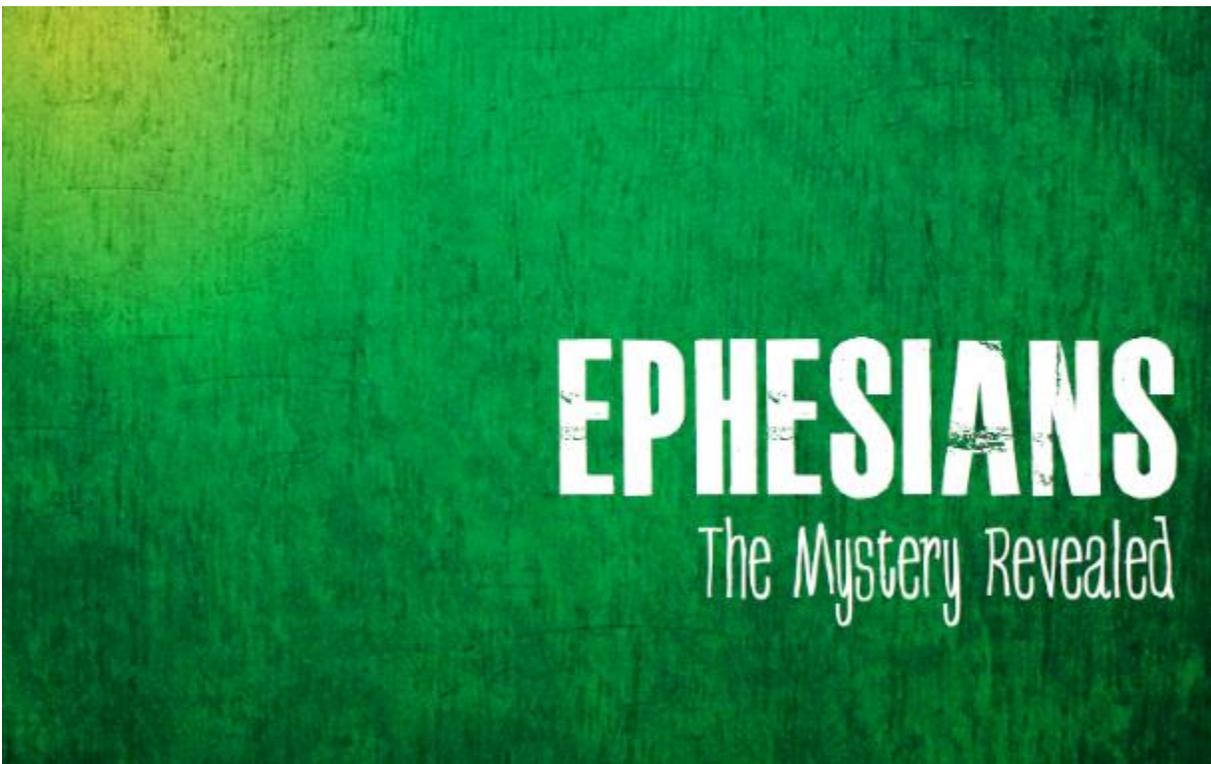
Earlier during the morning worship as communion preparations were made by the pastor, a smaller cross was held aloft and the loaf of bread that represented the body of Christ were held up together as though the bread were on the cross.

The students who were then in my class and had been in the sanctuary to see the bread and cross together quickly made the connection about the body of Christ.

In a few months, the liturgical cycle will bring us to the events of Holy Week. We now have time to be active parts of the body of Christ.

Prayer: Give me the wisdom to understand how I can be a part of the body of Christ. Amen.

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



January 8, Star Sunday

Acts 10:42 "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead."

In many churches, this first Sunday after Epiphany is celebrated as "Star Sunday." Our church, through volunteers, prepares paper stars to remind us that the newborn Christ was worshipped by kings from afar who followed the Christ Star. These stars display a single word meant to guide our reflection into the new year. Some of the words among the dozens and dozens have been awakening, honor, enlightenment, integrity, and connectiveness. As the baskets containing the stars are passed throughout the sanctuary, a soft murmur of voices excited at the words received can be heard. Some prefer to search through the stars for a word that speaks to them while others take their star from the stack without knowing what they will receive, thinking that God's guiding hand led them to a star's word. During the pandemic, the distribution of stars was so important to the congregation that they were made available during a drive-through.

Whether you are guided by a single word through the coming year or whether your thoughts are guided in another way, know that God's gift to each of us is salvation made possible by His Son, Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Guide my thoughts, my Lord and King. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JDGF43wAj0>

