

Sing We Now of Christmas

**Christmas Daily Devotionals
December 1st through 31st, 2018**



Statue at the Sagrada Familia Cathedral in Barcelona, Spain

*“Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.”
(Psalm 96:1–3, NIV)*

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Introduction

Worship through song is an important way for us to worship God. The Scriptures encourage us to offer praise to God with instruments and singing. The book of Psalms is a collection of songs offered to God. In addition to psalms of David, a talented musician in his own right, at least 11 Psalms were composed by Asaph. Asaph was put in charge of music at the tabernacle before Solomon built the temple to “Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.” (I Chron 16:7-11)

Others offered songs to God, including Moses (Deut 31:30-31-43; Deborah and Barak (Jdgs 5:1-30); and Solomon. The Israelites sang to God in the exodus (Ex 15:1) and in the wilderness (Num 21:17). Isaiah included songs in his prophesies . The elders, redeemed and angels will sing in Revelation (Rev 5:9, 14;3 and 15:3).

One of the special things about the Christmas season is the music of Christmas; the songs that honor God and celebrate the birth and works of Jesus Christ. Many Christmas carols contain great doctrinal truths and insights. In the rush of the Christmas season and due to familiarity we can overlook the significance of the songs of Christmas, and fail to truly offer these songs as offerings of worship to God.

Each day of this devotional includes words excerpted from a different song of Christmas. If you view the devotional as a PDF you can use the song title hyperlink to take you to a performance of the song on YouTube - some old, some newer; some in traditional choir settings and some in more contemporary style.

Each devotional includes a Scripture verse related to the song text and an application for you to consider. Feel free to make your own applications. Make this Christmas season holy by setting apart time each day to praise and thank God for who He is, what He has done and what He is doing. I encourage you in your worship to be sensitive to God’s voice and ask Him what you should do as a response to your worship of Him.

God Bless,
Jim Bogdanor

Saturday, December 1st, 2018

Sing We Now Of Christmas

Sing we now of Christmas
Noël, sing we here!
Hear our grateful praises
To the babe so dear

I hope you are excited about celebrating Christmas. I know many want to hear “Merry Christmas,” and not “Happy Holidays” at the checkout counter, we might hear “Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer” more often than “Joy To The World” at the mall, and there will probably be controversy concerning a nativity display at some public space. We live in a pluralistic society and many people do not believe in God, much less that Jesus Christ is God incarnate.

Each of us has the power to keep Christ in Christmas and bear witness that Jesus Christ is the savior of the world.

So let us sing of Christmas with joy and thanksgiving! Despite the intrusion of secularism, people all over the world will be exposed to Christ during this Christmas season and that exposure will often be in song. This time of year there is probably more opportunity to share our faith in Christ than any other time of year.

Sing - expression of joy and praise;
We – all who rejoice at Christ’s coming;
Now – implies urgency and priority;
Of - focus on what it is all about;
Christmas – the coming of our Savior

But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. (Psalm 5:11, NIV)

Purpose to worship God and be thankful this Christmas season for the gift of His Son. Ask God to help you keep Christ in your celebration of Christmas and be a positive witness to others. Sing with joy and reflect on the meaning of the words.

Sunday, December 2nd, 2018

Joy To The World

Joy to the world, the Lord is come
Let earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare Him room

Two thousand years ago a weary couple came into Bethlehem seeking lodging. The woman, Mary, was ready to give birth to the Messiah. There was no room in the town available to them, so the Son of God was born in a manger - a feeding trough or stall for animals like sheep, goats and oxen. What a dismal way for earth to receive her king. But still, He came.

Today earth's King is received, or rejected one heart at a time. Is there room for Him in your heart? Or like the town of Bethlehem that night is there no room.

Even Christians must ask themselves this question: "Have I made room for Jesus in my life?" The image of Jesus standing at the door and knocking is from His message to a wealthy church in Laodecia. (Rev 3:14-20) They focused on their material prosperity, but lacked spiritual insight and true fellowship with Jesus. Their lives were full of other things, so Jesus portrayed Himself as being on the outside of the church seeking access! Jesus appeals to this church to let Him in so they can have true wealth and experience deep and intimate fellowship with Him. All they had to do was hear His voice and open the door to let Him in.

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." (Revelation 3:20, NIV)

What can you do to make room for Jesus this Christmas season? How can you make Him the central part of your celebration this Christmas?

Monday, December 3rd, 2018

Angels From The Realms of Glory

*Sages, leave your contemplation
Brighter visions beam afar
Seek the great desire of nations
Ye have seen His natal star*

This is a busy time of year. Come to think of it, when are we not busy? We are busy pursuing many things, often good things - education, time with family, career growth, better standard of living, physical fitness, church and community activities, care for a loved one, raising kids, hobbies...the list can be endless. Sometimes we struggle in our pursuits to simply keep our heads above water, just making it through another day.

Have you ever pursued and obtained a goal only to feel empty and unsatisfied? You may have purchased an expensive item - car or home, got that promotion you worked so hard for, or completed a project only to realize that you were consumed by the pursuit and the achievement did not

bring you the contentment or satisfaction that you thought it would.

God knows the things we need - food, shelter, clothing - and Jesus tells us that as His disciples we should not run after money and other perishable worldly things like pagans do. Instead, Jesus commands us to 'seek first His kingdom.' (Matt 6:25-34)

Jesus Christ, the desire of nations came to earth. We should pause and ask ourselves, "Do I desire to know Jesus?" and , "Do my thoughts and actions line up with the command to 'seek first His kingdom?'"

"I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory," says the LORD Almighty." (Haggai 2:7, NIV)

Write down your list of 'to do's' as Christmas approaches. What does the list show you about your priorities and desires? Do you need to adjust your 'to do' list in order to take a step toward seeking first the Kingdom of God and honoring Jesus, the desire of nations?

Tuesday, December 4th, 2018

Gloria (Angels We Have Heard On High)

Come adore on bended knee
Christ the Lord the newborn King
Gloria O Gloria in excelsis Deo

‘Gloria in excelsis Deo’ means ‘Glory to God in the highest.’ This was the declaration of the angels to the shepherds. The angels declare that there is nothing and no one greater than God. The Tyndale Bible Dictionary defines ‘glory’ as, “The singular splendor of God and the consequences for humanity.” The theme of ‘God in the highest’ is found in the Old Testament as well:

To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. (Deuteronomy 10:14, NIV)

Is not God in the heights of heaven? And see how lofty are the highest stars! (Job 22:12, NIV)

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. (Psalm 57:5, 11NIV)

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests. (Luke 2:14, NIV)

In your prayers today focus on worshipping Jesus Christ the Lord. Praise Him for who He is. Thank Him for His many blessings. As you hear the songs of Christmas this month let them call you to worship Him.

The Lord is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens. (Psalm 113:4, NIV)

The declaration of the angels in Luke is testimony to the fact that the coming of Jesus is part of God’s eternal plan. Jehovah God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is ushering in a new age. The incarnation is essential to God’s redemptive plan.

Paul said that Jesus would be ‘exalted to the highest place,’ leaving no doubt that Jesus is in fact God incarnate; God in the flesh. (Phil 2:9)

One day we will see Jesus in all His glory. Listen to Jesus’ own words:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. (Matthew 25:31, NIV)

Wednesday, December 5th, 2018

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne

There is a phrase used to describe a condemned man on his way to the place of execution: 'dead man walking.' It's sobering to consider, but apart from Jesus Christ we are all dead men and women walking - dead in our trespasses and sin.

But we have hope, the promise of salvation, through the all sufficient merit of Jesus Christ. Jesus paid the entire price for our sins. Salvation for those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is so certain that being raised up with Christ and seated with Him in the

heavenly realms is described in the past tense by the apostle Paul - it is as good as done.

How is this made possible? By God's grace, and His grace alone.

Why would God extend His mercy and grace to us? Because of His great love for us.

You may not feel raised up and seated with Christ today, but it is a promised reality for those in Christ.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4–7, NIV)

Meditate on this passage and the all sufficient merit of Jesus Christ. Envision yourself raised up and seated with Christ. How should this reality affect your attitudes, words and actions?

Thursday, December 6th, 2018

As With Gladness Men Of Old

Holy Jesus, every day
Keep us in the narrow way;
And, when earthly things are past,
Bring our ransomed souls at last
Where they need no star to guide,
Where no clouds Thy glory hide.

Jesus said that the path to God is narrow, but the path to destruction is broad (Matt 7:13-14). He also taught that He is the way to eternal life (Jn 14:6).

The reality is that we need Jesus not just for a one time salvation experience, but every day to experience the full and abundant life (Jn 10:10). The Christian faith is built on a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. As John records in the 15th chapter of his gospel, Jesus talked to the apostles about His remaining (or abiding) in them, and they in Him. This 'remaining in' includes prayer, obedience, fellowship and knowledge of God through His Word.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17, NIV)

Think of how you can apply Scripture to your life in Christ today. Is there a Biblical truth you need to learn? Is there something you need to change, and if so, what does God's Word say about how that change can be made? How can God's Word impact your thoughts, decisions and actions *today*?

Abiding in Christ is where we experience true freedom, purpose and meaning in life. This is not a hit or miss thing that we dabble in. Abiding in Christ should be our heart's desire. As Christians we need to be committed to the idea of abiding in Christ, literally living in Christ and He in us.

Apart from Christ we can do nothing of true and lasting value, but if we remain in Him we will bear much fruit and be effective witnesses, demonstrating that we are truly His disciples to the glory of God. (Jn 15:)

Friday, December 7th, 2018

O Come O Come Emmanuel

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel

I heard a man say one time that he prayed to the saints and the virgin Mary because Jesus, the Son of God was beyond human approach. He looked to the saints and Mary to understand him, and intercede for him with God. I appreciate the seriousness with which he regarded Jesus, but I believe he failed to understand and fully benefit from what Jesus did for us as Emmanuel.

Emmanuel means ‘God with us.’ The name is traced back to the prophecy found in the 7th chapter of Isaiah. Perhaps those that heard or read that prophecy interpreted as meaning something like, ‘God is on our side.’ Before His advent could anyone have imagined that God would be with us as one of us, a human being? We know that the prophecy is about Jesus because that is what the angel told Joseph. (Matt 1:22)

Because on earth Jesus was fully human as well as fully God there is nothing that we

struggle with that will shock Jesus Christ, no weakness He is unable to understand.

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. (Hebrews 4:15, NIV)

Jesus became a man in order to die in our place and save us from the consequences of our sin. As amazing as that is, He also makes God accessible to us.

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. (Hebrews 4:16, NIV)

Jesus knows what it is to be human. He is rightfully called Immanuel, God With Us.

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14, NIV)

Are you holding something back from God? It could be a wrong attitude, sin, or fear. Open up to Him today because He understands. He is ready to forgive, ready to help.

Saturday, December 8th, 2018

Oh Come All Ye Faithful

All Hail! Lord, we greet Thee,
Born this happy morning,
O Jesus! forevermore be Thy name adored.
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

In modern usage the word ‘adore’ is used to describe love or respect for someone, and used casually to like someone or something very much. But the call to adore Jesus in this carol has a deeper meaning.

Originally known as ‘Adeste Fideles,’ this carol was first translated into English about 1841, and there are variations. The translation above may be a bit different from the wording you are familiar with.

In middle English the word adore comes from the Latin *adorare* - ‘to worship.’

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9–11, NIV)

Make time worship Jesus Christ the Lord. Offer Him praise and thanksgiving. Revere and respect Him. Love Him for who He is, what He has done and what He is doing.

Sunday, December 9th, 2018

Good Christian Men Rejoice

Jesus Christ was born to save
Calls you one and calls you all
To gain His everlasting hall
Christ was born to save
Christ was born to save

I heard someone recently describe how he attended a party with good friends to celebrate the birthday of one of those friends. Those attending were all familiar with each other. It was a relaxed and comfortable evening. Conversation flowed freely. This person had a great time and he enjoyed the party very much. However, after leaving the party he was horrified to realize that they had failed to engage with the friend who was celebrating a birthday. He did not even wish the guest of honor a simple, "Happy birthday."

It's easy to get caught up in the events around Christmas and forget the purpose of Christmas. We can feel good about watching a Christmas performance,

singing familiar Christmas songs, attending Christmas parties, completing Christmas shopping and getting our Christmas cards off in the mail, giving and receiving Christmas gifts and enjoying a Christmas meal.

Christmas can be all around us, but we can still miss it. We can do a lot of Christmas things without involving Christ in Christmas.

Christmas cannot be truly be celebrated without recognizing why Jesus came in the first place. And with that recognition we should purpose to worship Jesus Christ this Christmas season and take the message of salvation to the lost.

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10, NIV)

Ask God to help you join in the mission of seeking to save the lost, to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Ask Him to make you sensitive to people's needs and opportunities to share the good news this Christmas season.

Monday, December 10rd, 2018

Silent Night

Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace

Grace is unmerited favor. God was not obligated to come to earth in the form of man to die for our sins. Why did God do what he did? It wasn't because we deserved it. The Bible tells us that it was because He loves us. Out of love, God sent His only begotten Son so that anyone who believes in Him would not perish, but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16) God's love for us was demonstrated by the fact that Christ died for sinners. (Rom 5:8) Out of His love, God extends grace to us and does for us what we could never do for ourselves.

It is by grace that we are saved, and not because of our works. (Eph 2:8,9) And it is good to remember that God's grace is

offered as a free gift for everyone to receive. All that is required is for us to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. (Jn 7:37-38)

And with this in mind, we should be ready to extend grace to others. This time of year can be stressful. People might say something harsh, or act rudely. God calls us to be kind, patient and gentle and by doing so we can be a tremendous witness to others who need to know the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God stands ready to forgive wrongs, and so should we.

"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1:17, NIV)

Thank God for the saving grace He has given to you, and ask Him to give you the awareness and power to extend grace to others through the Holy Spirit. When angered, hurt or frustrated by someone stop and remind yourself that he or she is loved by God before you respond.

Tuesday, December 11th, 2018

Sometimes Christmas Makes Me Cry

I think of Mary and the virgin birth
And I'm amazed by how much God thinks we are worth
That He would send His only Son to die
And sometimes Christmas makes me cry

The celebration of Christmas rightly involves joy, particularly for those who know the reality of Jesus as the Christ. However, there is a bittersweet aspect of Christmas as well. We celebrate the coming of Christ, but the reason He came was because of the sin of mankind. Sin caused us to be separated from God, 'dead in our trespasses and sin.' (Eph 2:1)

We celebrate because His coming to earth is an essential part of God's plan for our salvation. But sin has consequences for our lives on this earth – pain, sickness, evil works of men and death.

Sorrow that we feel for personal sin, leads us to repentance and gratitude to God as

we accept Jesus as Savior, receive God's forgiveness and submit to serve Him.

We also encounter sorrow for the consequences of sin that invade our lives. Even Jesus wept and was deeply moved at the tomb of Lazarus (Jn 11:33-38). Christmas time can bring to memory events that bring sorrow, and we need to be sensitive to that, especially with regard to broken relationships and loved ones that are no longer with us. Sometimes we might feel that there is no escape for the sorrow that we feel, but we have the promise that there will be an end to pain and suffering and even death, and that God will wipe away every tear.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:3-4, NIV)

If you are struggling with a painful memory this Christmas season bring it before God and ask Him to bring healing, peace and perseverance to you. Be ready to offer a word of encouragement, or just a listening ear to someone struggling with regret or sorrow.

Wednesday, December 12th, 2018

What Child Is This?

What child is this?....
This, this is Christ the king.

At this time of year there are Christmas sales, Christmas Carols, Christmas shows, Christmas cards, etc. However, what is often missing in these is the Christ.

The titles ‘Messiah’ and ‘Christ’ mean the same thing – the Anointed One. In the Bible, people were anointed for various reasons. Aaron and his sons were anointed as priests (Ex 30:30). David was anointed by Samuel to be king of Israel (I Sam 16:13). Elijah anointed Elisha as a prophet (I Kgs 19:16). But throughout the Old Testament there are prophecies concerning an anointed one that will have special and unique qualities and purpose

as prophet, priest and king - Israel’s promised Messiah.

So who is to say that Jesus is the special and unique Anointed One of God that Israel longed for? For one, Jesus quoted the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1 and claimed that He is the Messiah anointed by God “*to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the Lord’s favor*” (Luke 4:18-19, NIV) We can accept the claim of Jesus, or reject it, but we cannot take Him seriously and simply ignore it.

The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.” (John 4:25–26, NIV)

As God gives you the opportunity, explain to someone the significance of the title “Christ” and what Christmas means to you. This can be a stranger you encounter, a friend or associate who needs to know Christ as Savior, or even a fellow Christian for encouragement.

Thursday, December 13th, 2018

Born In Bethlehem

Baby Jesus, born in a stable
Humble Savior's birth
You left Your throne in Heaven above
To live here on the earth

The Trinity - God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit - is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. Jesus became a man, but He was always God. The incarnation, God taking human form, is not the beginning of Jesus. When Jesus stated that whoever obeys His word will never see death, the Jews that were present mocked Him. They said that even their father Abraham died and asked if Jesus thought He was greater than Abraham. In response, Jesus declared His deity and eternal existence with the words, "before Abraham was born, I am!" His listeners knew exactly what he was claiming because they intended to kill Him by stoning. (John 8:51-58, NIV)

If we leave the Christmas season with a baby in a manger we miss the meaning of greatest story ever told. The baby in the manger is appealing - innocent, fragile, non-demanding. But that baby is also eternal God, our Creator and our Savior.

When we come to the scene of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem we should be awestruck that the God of the universe would humble Himself by taking on the form of a man, then be obedient to death on a cross for us. Jesus is worthy of all praise, honor and glory.

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:6–8, NIV)

The passage above stresses the point that Jesus was made in human likeness in order to be a servant. Christian are to have this same servant mindset. (Phil 2:5) What can you do to set your mind on being a servant today?

Friday, December 14th, 2018

How Great Our Joy

There shall be born, so he did say,
In Bethlehem a Child today.
There shall the Child lie in a stall,
This Child who shall redeem us all.

Some consider Christianity to be intolerant and exclusive. “How can you say there is only one God?” or, “Isn’t it presumptuous of Christians to say there is only one way into heaven?” they might ask.

But the Christian doctrines that there is one God and one way to enter His heaven are based on the Scriptures which we believe to be the Word of the one true God. Salvation through Jesus Christ, and Him alone is based on Scripture, including the words of the namesake of our faith, Jesus Christ:

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6, NIV)

One way, yes, but available to all who accept the gift of eternal life by faith - Jew

“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:13–14, NIV)

All people are loved by God. Everyone saved is saved by His grace, not because it was earned or deserved. Do you need to change your attitude toward someone in order to be able to share the love of God with them? Ask God to give you His desire that no one should perish, but everyone come to repentance.

and Gentile (meaning all nationalities), slave and free, rich and poor, male and female. Any and all are free to accept the gift of eternal life. These are also the words of Jesus Christ:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28, NIV)

What more could God have done for mankind than send Jesus Christ to die in our place for our sins? What could have been a greater demonstration of His love? What better way to demonstrate His heart; “...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”? (2 Peter 3:9, NIV)

Saturday, December 15th, 2018

It Came Upon A Midnight Clear

O hush the noise ye men of strife
And hear the angels sing
"Peace on the earth, good will to men
From heaven's gracious King."

There are no major wars between world powers going right now, but the world is not at peace. Some take comfort that current conflicts are 'constrained,' a nice way of saying 'too bad for you, but at least I'm not involved too deeply.' Millions are impacted by violence from war, gangs, civil strife and despotic rulers- Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Guatemala, Mexico, Venezuela and North Korea come to mind. A United Nations report claims 68.5 million refugees are currently displaced by conflict and disaster worldwide - almost 1 in every 100 persons in the world.

One day Jesus will reign and bring an end to war - "He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes . . . Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." (Isaiah 2:4, NIV)

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:14, NIV)

Are you anxious or worried about something? When anxiety or worry hits you, pause and ask Jesus to fill you with His peace. Ask Him for the faith to trust Him.

But until that time individuals can experience peace in Christ even in difficult circumstances:

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

Tyndale's Bible Dictionary describes this peace as "total well-being, prosperity and security associated with God's presence among His people." This peace does not depend on external circumstances.

The world waits for the peace that Jesus will one day bring. Until then there will be wars and rumors of wars. (Matt 24:6) But those in Christ can experience the peace of Christ today, secure in His abiding presence.

Sunday, December 16th, 2018

O Holy Night

O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining.
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.

How do you know the value someone places on something? In an auction competing bidders run up the price for an item and the one willing (or able) to pay the most wins the bid and purchases it. To obtain a significant goal people will sacrifice time, money and even relationships. We often talk about the sacrifices made by top level athletes, musicians, or physicians in order to achieve the level of skill and expertise required in their field.

In society we tend to place value on people by what they do - their education level, job, achievements, where they live, title, etc. Oftentimes we do this subconsciously.

The Bible states that God created mankind in His own image - male and female.

The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40, NIV)

What can you do this Christmas season to help someone know that they have worth? It can be a word of encouragement, a gift to meet a need, a helping hand. Ask God to help you see people through His eyes, objects of His love.

(Gen 1:27) Every person has value in God's sight. We know the value that Jesus places on us because of the price He paid for us. The word 'redeem' means to rescue or ransom from a difficult obligation by means of a monetary payment, or substitution of another life. Peter says that we were redeemed not with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. (I Pet 1:18-19)

Jesus loves mankind, all people, so much that He died in our place so that we might inherit eternal life. What greater price could have been paid? What more could God have done to make the soul feel its worth?

Monday, December 17th, 2018

Unto Us

Unto us, unto us a child is born
Unto us, unto us a Son is given
Glory to God in the highest
Wonderful Prince of Peace
Emmanuel has come to set captives free
With the angels we sing
Glory to God in the highest
He has brought this great love
Unto us

As Christmas day approaches you might be thinking about a special gift you will receive or give to someone. As you reflect back on gifts received you might remember them not because they were expensive or big, but because someone was thinking of you when they selected the gift and gave it to you. I suspect that there are things that you treasure because they remind you of a relationship and connect you to someone in a special way.

“Unto us.” Let those words sink in for a minute. Let the message of song and Scripture become personal to you. Jesus is not some abstract philosophy or distant figure of history. Jesus is a gift to you. Jesus is a gift we share.

And while Jesus came for all mankind, remember that He came for you. Christianity is more than a religion; it is a relationship with God made possible through the Son, Jesus Christ.

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

How can you show God’s love to someone you will encounter today in a way that is personal, and meets them where they are? Maybe it is a word of encouragement; taking time to listen; spending time with someone; a small gift or a note to let them know you are think of them.

Tuesday, December 18th, 2018

Hark The Herald Angels Sing

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled."

What comes to mind when you think of the word 'reconciled.' Maybe you think of people working out their differences, compromising and restoring a broken relationship. This typically involves both parties accepting some part of the blame for what caused the breakdown in the relationship. Often times that reconciliation between people may not result in complete restoration of the relationship - a couple may go through with divorce, but remain friends; two former friends might stop hostility, but not pal around anymore; co-workers might agree to disagree and coordinate their work activities, but not achieve collaboration and true teamwork; parents and estranged children can agree to associate with one another, but fail to re-establish a strong parent-child bond with deep affection.

Some people claim to have worked out their own reconciliation with God; "God and I have come to an agreement." Really?

To be reconciled with God means that we acknowledge to God that we are in the wrong because we alienated ourselves from him by sinning, repent of our sins, and ask forgiveness for our sins through Jesus Christ. God is in the right. We were in the wrong. All the blame for the broken relationship with God is on us. God reconciles us to Himself without compromising. Reconciliation with God is God's gift for us to receive. God initiates and completes the reconciliation. There is complete restoration of relationship because of His love for us, demonstrated through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:17-19, NIV)

How can you share the message of God's reconciliation with someone today? Perhaps it might start by seeking reconciliation with someone you know. Is there a broken relationship, or one in danger of breaking in your life? How could you initiate the process of reconciliation, even in a small way?

Wednesday, December 19th, 2018

Go Tell It on The Mountain

Go tell it on the mountain over the hills and everywhere
Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born

Have you ever received good news? I suspect that you have at some time. And I also suspect that when you received that good news you immediately thought about sharing it with someone.

What better news could there be than the coming of Christ to save mankind? As Christians our natural impulse should be a desire to share the good news of Jesus Christ, and the Christmas season offers unique opportunities to do so with family

members, friends, acquaintances and even strangers.

If we are walking in Christ, the light of Christ in our lives will be evident, and we will want that light to shine through the things we do to God's glory.

Light attracts. In the same way our lives should be an expression of our faith, and attract others to the good news of Jesus.

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14–16, NIV)

How can you tell someone that Jesus Christ is born today? In normal conversation people may be talking about their Christmas plans, and this is an opportunity to share with them about the significance that Christmas has to you. Or, it could be as straight forward as sending a Christmas card containing a Scripture reference rather than a "Happy Holidays" card.

Thursday, December 20th, 2018

Carols Sing

He came down to the earth
Bringing us new birth
Carols sing to the King
Jesus Christ our Saviour

Christ came to save us, and change is an essential part of the salvation experience. Paul says that if anyone is in Christ they are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). Jesus told Nicodemus that in order to enter the kingdom of God he must be born again; born of the Spirit. Jesus went on to explain that this spiritual rebirth is made possible by believing in Him (Jn 3:15)

Being born again is not a 'do over,' a second chance to *get* things right with God. If that were the case we would simply fail again.

Being born again *makes* things right with God. We become children of God

members of His family for all eternity by His grace.

Being born again has real and practical impact on how we live. God is at work in us to make us worthy of His calling. (Eph 4:1) This is our Christian walk; maturing in Christ; being conformed to the image of Christ. Salvation and the accompanying rebirth are entirely the work of God, but we are called to live differently as a result of being born again. And because we are born again we are enabled by His Spirit to live lives that please Him.

How wonderful that Jesus became flesh, born of a woman, so that we could be born of the Spirit and gain eternal life.

"You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' " (John 3:7, NIV)

Reflect on what it means to be born again. How do you see the Holy Spirit at work in your life? Is there something you can do today to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control? (Gal 5:22-23)

Friday, December 21st, 2018

I Heard The Bells On Christmas Day

And in despair I bowed my head. There is no peace on earth I said
For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men

Then rang the bells more loud and deep. God is not dead, nor does he sleep.
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail with peace on earth, good will to men

Like many of the Psalms, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem was written in trying times. It was Christmas day of 1863 and the American Civil War was raging. His son Charles had joined the Union Army against his father's wishes and had been severely wounded. His wife had died in an accidental fire.

Despite his current circumstances Longfellow was certain that God was still active in the affairs of men. The presence of evil was evident in the times he lived in, just as they are today, but Longfellow was convinced that God's promises were true. Right would prevail over wrong and God would one day bring peace to all mankind.

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9, NIV)

Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed by circumstances? Do you wonder why God doesn't do something now? Take heart. You are not alone. Give your despair and worries to God and place your confidence in Him - His plan and His timing.

Saturday, December 22nd, 2018

O Little Town Of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth, The everlasting Light
The hopes and fears of all the years, Are met in thee tonight

Bethlehem (also Ephrath) is a village about 5 miles south of Jerusalem. References to Bethlehem in the Old Testament include: Rachel, wife of Jacob died near there in childbirth (Gen 35:16-19). It was the home of Boaz and Ruth, the parents of Obed, father of Jesse (1 Sam 16:8). Jesse lived in Bethlehem and his son David, was born there and anointed there by Samuel to be king of Israel. (1 Sam 16:13, 17:12)

In the story of the Israelites it is nearby Jerusalem that figures most prominently - the place of the temple and the residence of the king. From a historical perspective Bethlehem Ephrath is a footnote. However, in God's plan Bethlehem figures prominently as the birthplace of the Messiah. The expectation would be that Messiah would be born to a king of Judah in the palace. But at the time of Jesus' birth there was no legitimate king on the throne of David. Romans ruled the

province. Herod 'the Great', a convert to Judaism, was appointed king of Judah by the Romans about 40 BC.

From a human perspective it was an unlikely place for the birth of Messiah, and an unlikely time. The Jews hoped for the Messiah, but feared the worst under Roman rule. The birth of the promised Messiah to a simple carpenter and his young wife in an obscure village at an unlikely time was part of God's plan. Very few realized what God had set in motion, Mary, Joseph, a few relatives, some shepherds and a group of Gentile magi from a distant land.

One of the lessons of Bethlehem is that God has a plan and is in control. Even when circumstances look bleak, God is acting even if we do not see what He is doing at the time.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. (Micah 5:2, NIV)

Is there something you need to trust God for today despite circumstances?

Sunday, December 23rd, 2018

The First Noel

Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord
That hath made Heaven and earth of nought
And with his blood mankind has bought.
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel
Born is the King of Israel!

Sometimes we focus on the small things that divide us and miss the great truths that unite us. Christians can be divided in their thinking about appropriate ways to celebrate Christmas – lights, trees, choice of songs, gift giving and even the celebration of Christmas Day. In the scheme of things these are all minor and each person should do as they decide in their heart without judging others with respect to motives (Col 2:16).

What all Christians can agree on is that Jesus the Christ, Creator of all that there is; God With Us, is the Savior of the World. He died for all mankind and

commands us to love our fellow believers (Jn 13:34).

Love for one another is the greatest witness we can show the world. Division and discord among believers is a hindrance to our witness and we should do all we can to heal rifts and truly love one another. A Christian saying often attributed to Augustine, and found in various forms as Christians dealt with controversy through the centuries is worth contemplating – “in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity (*love*).”

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35, NIV)

Is there an attitude that you need to change? Do you need to seek reconciliation with a brother or sister in Christ? Have you let something that isn't really important cause a rift in your relationship with someone. What can you do to start repairing that relationship?

Monday, December 24th, 2018

Come Now Our King

Now my night has turned to day
An empty manger, empty grave
Baby born so I could say
Now my night has turned to day

The celebration of Christmas is an essential part of the story of Jesus, but to leave Jesus in the manger is a mistake. Jesus left the manger and grew to be a man. He presented Himself to the world as the promised Messiah. He lived a sinless life, but was rejected and killed.

Many people do not believe in the virgin birth. They do not believe that Jesus performed miracles. They may see value in the moral principles and teachings of Jesus. However they cut out of the narrative His claims to deity and requirement that people believe in Him. They see His crucifixion as a tragic end to a relatively short life, not part of God's plan of salvation. They reject the words of

Jesus claiming that He would rise on the third day after His death. (Lk 24:46) They leave Jesus in a tomb.

However, Jesus also left that tomb. He conquered death and rose from the grave! The gospel, literally 'the good news,' is incomplete if we fail to include the empty grave. Peter, an eye witness to the events of Jesus earthly ministry and resurrected body, praised God who, "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," (1 Peter 1:3, NIV)

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures," (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, NIV)

As a Christian how has God turned your night to day? Reflect on what your life would be like without Christ. How is your life different because you are a Christian?

Tuesday, December 25th, 2018

Emmanuel

Wonderful Counselor
Lord of Life, Lord of All
He is the Prince of Peace,
Mighty God, Holy One
Emmanuel, Emmanuel

Merry Christmas! How privileged we are to be on this side of the incarnation and the salvation through Jesus. Writing about the prophets of the Old Testament, Peter says:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even

angels long to look into these things. (1 Peter 1:10–12, NIV)

For example, the book of Isaiah is full of wonderful prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. Isaiah 9:6 provides titles describing the person and work of the Messiah. Two of those titles unmistakably identify the child of the prophecy as more than human – “Mighty God” and “Everlasting Father.” As we celebrate the birth of an innocent baby in obscure location we should be awestruck with the reality that God became man to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

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

This Christmas day take time to reflect on the truth of the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ. Consider the titles of Jesus in Isaiah 9:6 and thank Him for the incredible gift He gave us by taking on human form and bringing salvation to us.

Wednesday, December 26th, 2018

I Believe

Heaven's child
The great I am
Born to take away my sins
Through nailed pierced hands
Emmanuel has come I believe

We often hear people say something like, 'You just have to keep believing,' or see signs or graffiti that simply say, 'Believe.' But believe what? ...and why? At Christmas time we often hear people talk about belief in the goodness of man, the importance of family, or simply the need to believe in 'something.' But the message of Christmas is that God became man to die for our sins and that by believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior our sins will be forgiven and we will spend eternity with God in heaven.

The object of our belief is important. Placing our trust in anything, or anyone apart from Jesus Christ is futile. (Jn 14:6)

Each of us should ask ourselves, "What do I believe?" These daily devotionals have been primarily directed to believers, encouraging them to act on their belief. But the Scriptures speak to both believers and non-believers; as Jesus said "whoever has ears to hear." (Mk 4:9) Remember that everyone who professes to be a believer was once a non-believer.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:19–20, NIV)

What do you believe? What are you trusting in? Is there something you can do today to better align your actions with your belief, to take the next step in your Christian walk? For example sin to confess, attitude to change, error to avoid, command to obey? Perhaps you realize you need to make the first step in the Christian walk and believe in Him. To place your trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior - pray to God admitting that you are a sinner, ask Him for forgiveness because Jesus Christ died for you, and commit yourself to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. If this is the decision you make tell someone who can help you learn more and help you grow in your walk with Christ.

Thursday, December 27th, 2018

Bethlehem

He knew the secrets of the world
His lips could not yet speak
Heaven wrapped in flesh and blood
The Son of Majesty

The lyrics ‘heaven wrapped in flesh and blood’ provide a great image of the meaning of the incarnation of Jesus Christ - God become man. In his first letter the Apostle John tells us that true messengers of God acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, and anyone who denied that truth does not come from God. John even says that the denial of the incarnation is from the spirit of the antichrist. He goes on to say that there are messages that come from a worldly viewpoint, but followers of Christ need to listen to the voice of God. (I Jn 4:16)

Embracing the Christmas story is life changing. The incarnation of Jesus, Christ coming in the flesh, is not some myth created by His followers after the fact. It is an essential Christian doctrine - if there

was no incarnation, then no bodily death or resurrection and no salvation for mankind. The world will reject or try to explain away the incarnation, even to the point of denying that Jesus ever existed. Encountering unbelief in the world during the Christmas season may disappoint us, but should not surprise us. We have the privilege of bringing truth and light where there is falsehood and darkness.

Jesus Christ is eternal God, without beginning or end. He entered the world as a flesh and blood baby two thousand years ago according to God’s plan for the salvation of mankind. He is the foundation for our lives, our savior and example.

To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24–25, NIV)

Our Savior is the eternal Jesus Christ, our Lord. Our confidence is in Him, not mortal flesh. Offer Him praise and ask that He keep you from stumbling in your walk with Him.

Friday, December 28th, 2018

He Shall Reign Forevermore

Here within a manger lies
The One who made the starry skies
This baby born for sacrifice
Christ the Messiah
And He shall reign
Forevermore, forevermore

The first time Jesus came to earth He came as the suffering servant to die for the sins of mankind: *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.* (Isaiah 53:5, NIV)

Isaiah also spoke about the reigning Messiah: *...He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever...* (Isaiah 9:7, NIV)

Daniel also prophesied about the ruling Messiah: *...there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of*

heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13–14, NIV)

Jesus applied the prophecy of Daniel to Himself as He told His disciples about His second coming. (Matt 24:30)

Isaiah's Suffering Servant and Reigning Messiah are one and the same - two advents, but one person, Jesus Christ.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1–3, 14 NIV)

Meditate on the eternal reign of Christ. Does His reign affect your perspective one life, and if so, how does your perspective affect your thoughts, attitudes, words and actions?

Saturday, December 29th, 2018

We Are The Reason

*We were the reason that He gave His life....
As the years went by we learned more about gifts
The giving of ourselves and what that means...
He is my reason to live*

This David Meece song begins with reflections of childhood wonder at the gifts received on Christmas morning. Upon growing older he describes the realization that there is much more to Christmas than the exchange of gifts and stories about a baby born in a manger. That baby was born for a reason.

As a parent, and now grandparent I thoroughly enjoy how children anticipate Christmas morning and the giving of gifts. I also enjoy watching children grow and find joy in selecting and giving gifts to others. I've heard people say that Christmas is for children, as if we outgrow Christmas as we become adults.

I have to disagree. As we grow older we should grasp the deeper reality of Christmas. The birth of Christ cannot be separated from His mission and purpose. His birth, the cross, the tomb, His resurrection and His certain return are inextricably linked.

In this song David Meece goes on to say that his reason for living is found in giving every part of his heart to Jesus. As they grow older some become more cynical about the Christmas story, but as Christians the story should become more precious to us every year as we grow and mature in our faith.

“Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God,” (Hebrews 6:1, NIV)

Where are you in your walk with Christ? What step can you take today to progress in that walk and move forward to maturity? Is there a verse or passage you can study? Is there a sin or wrong attitude you need to confess and repent of? Is there something you can do to minister to someone in need?

Sunday, December 30th, 2018

Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne

When the heavens shall ring, and the angels sing,
At Thy coming to victory,
Let Thy voice call me home, saying "Yet there is room,
There is room at My side for thee."
My heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus,
When Thou comest and callest for me.

Have you ever felt snowed under by events and looked forward to a vacation or special event. You might find yourself thinking, "If I can just make it through the next few days,,,,," or, "If I can just get this done..." while anticipating something good in the future.

What could be more wonderful than anticipating spending eternity with your Savior? Christmas begins the story of Jesus' first coming, but He promised to come again and take those who believe in Him to heaven to be with Him.

Life on earth involves challenges and trials. This is true for Christians as well as non-believers. Those who place their trust in Jesus have the promise of eternal life with Jesus. The Christmas story is sort of a trilogy – Jesus is coming; Jesus has come and Jesus is coming again. And when He comes again, He will take those who trust in Him as Savior to heaven to be with Him for all eternity. This is a promise we can grasp hold of to give us strength to endure the challenges we face each day.

"My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." (John 14:2-4, NIV)

The return of Christ is a promise all believers can claim. Let the reality of His future return sink into your thoughts and help give you perspective on the challenges you face today. Ask God to give you strength for today and living hope for tomorrow.

Monday, December 31st, 2018

All Is Well

All is well all is well
Angels and men rejoice
For tonight darkness fell
Into the dawn of love's light

The words 'light' and 'darkness' provide contrast. They illustrate the divide between life and death; goodness and evil; hope and despair; peace and strife.

The lyrics 'darkness fell into the dawn of love's light' illustrate the importance of the incarnation of Jesus. The coming of Christ ushered in a new age that affects the way that people interact with God. Hope became reality. Does evil still exist in the world today? Certainly. Will darkness prevail and evil defeat goodness and love? Certainly not.

Life is found in Christ, and only in Him. We have the opportunity to show people the real meaning of Christmas in a positive way. Light draws people from darkness, and we should reflect the light of Christ in our words and actions. We should be messengers of goodness, hope, peace and love in a world full of darkness. We must be resolute in our faith that with the coming of Jesus light has overcome the darkness. Jesus said that even though we will encounter trouble in this world, that we should be at peace because He has overcome the world (Jn 16:33). All is well.

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:4-5, NIV)

Our actions are a powerful witness to the world. What action can you take today to show the love of Christ? How can you be a light in the darkness today?
