

A JOURNEY TO CHRISTMAS

Devotions and Meditations

By the members and friends of

Emmanuel

ADVENT 2010

Introduction

This year our devotional focus for the season of Advent will be the Lectionary as found in the ELW. Most authors are not theologians, but simple fellow believers on a journey. As you read these verses and the writings you will see a common theme of Faith Journeys.

As you reflect on the readings, approach each day in prayer. Let the star that led the journey so many centuries ago help us find our way to the Spirit of Christmas.

*Blessings to you for a
Spiritual Christmas journey.*

Sunday, November 28, 2010

Matthew 24:36-44

Meditation: "Know not the time or the hour." It is the first Sunday of Advent. We KNOW (or at least we think we do) the time and the hour of our Lord's coming – It is December 25. There are four weeks for us to "get ready."

We all have our plans for gifts, baking, Giving Tree, concerts, Gifts of Hope and social events. Yet....NONE of this is what God and Jesus had in mind when they said "preparation!" We are to prepare our minds and lives to live as He teaches us.

Anna Roberts spoke to us this fall about quiet time each day. Time to quiet our mind is especially important during this hustle of the Advent time. Let us open our hearts for the reason for the season. Jesus is our best gift of the season. In many ways, we do not know when He will come into our lives. Nor do we know when He makes our hearts ready to receive his gift of grace.

Prayer: Dear Lord, quiet my heart. In the quiet moments, change me, open my heart and make me ready to receive you in my heart. Amen.

Ginger Boone

Monday, November 29, 2010

Genesis 8: 1-19 - The Noah Story

Meditation: Noah is able to see beyond his present disaster to a bright promise. Right before Christmas, as my friend Rich's ship was leaving port to rendezvous with a carrier, which had the ship's letters from home and Christmas presents, she damaged her propeller and had to return port. No rendezvous. No letters. No Christmas presents. And there is nothing a sailor likes better than letters and presents from home. To say everyone was depressed is putting it mildly. Well almost everyone. Rich went down into the engine room. Enginemen rarely come up on deck to see the light of day. Two young sailors were singing Christmas carols and making a Christmas tree out of old cans, spare parts, and anything they could get their hands on. It was the ugliest tree Rick had ever seen, but in much bigger sense it was most beautiful tree he had ever seen. They had seen beyond their present disaster to bright promise of Christmas and they could sing about it.

Prayer: Help us to see beyond the letters and presents to the real and deeper meaning of Christmas.

Bob Jones

Tuesday, November 30, 2010

Genesis 9:1-17

Thinking about rainbows during advent, would you have done that but for this devotional?

In this passage God makes a new covenant with Noah and all future generations.

God told Noah that never again would there be a flood to destroy the earth and, as a sign of that he would put his bow in the sky. Advent is a time of preparation and anticipation and rainbows are another symbol we use to think of God's covenant!

How fortunate we are to share this time of wonderful anticipation! We must try to concentrate on this covenant as we prepare for Christmas. We know that we should set aside time to prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of Jesus and spend less time dealing with the commercialism of Christmas. This is hard to do in our busy community but we all will try! Let us try to encourage each other to celebrate the season of Advent!

Dear God: Please help us remember the new covenant you made with Noah and the sign of the rainbow. Let us prepare our hearts and minds for the birth of Jesus by celebrating the season of Advent.

Diane Swenson

Wednesday, December 1, 2010

Isaiah 54:1-10

As the One who inspired both Isaiah's ministry and his writings, God again reveals Himself as the Leader of leaders. Throughout his prophecy, we see the Lord Telling Isaiah what to say to the people and warning them of impending judgment if they fail to repent. God also gives Isaiah visions about the future and in Chapter 54 provides strong hope.

In Chapter 54, Isaiah shares a perpetual covenant of peace and provides people with the hope of better things to come. In this chapter, the women who were barren and had no children reminded me of anyone who seems down or forgotten. He reminds them that God has everlasting kindness towards them, will have mercy on them and that their descendants will inherit the nations.

Prayer

Dear God, Let us not forget that God is always with us and has mercy on us, especially at times when our situations seem bleak. Help us to remember to turn to the Lord with our trouble and put our faith in him. Amen

Kurt Einwaechter

Thursday, December 2, 2010

Isaiah 4:2-6

One of the things I'm good at is research. I consulted with two pastors as I worked on this devotional ... because the history of Israel during the period of "1st Isaiah," in approximately the 8th century BC, is somewhat complicated. It is a vision of Israel's restoration following the exile (there were several) as a result of Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom, from which the 10 "lost" tribes were dispersed. Those remaining in the southern Kingdom of Judah, in Jerusalem, were anxious, concerned about their future as the "righteous remnant" of faithful Hebrews. This passage tells them they need not fear, that the Lord will wash away their filth, make them as fresh and new as babies ... and then the same presence of the Lord in the Exodus, the "cloud by day and smoke and a flaming fire by night" will be a canopy to protect them.

What does this mean for us now? I am reminded of a song from a few years ago, Carrie Underwood's "Jesus Take the Wheel." She says something along the lines that she knows she hasn't been living her life the way she should, she hasn't given God center stage. She comes to a point of crisis, and needs to rely on God as her anchor, her "center." This is the same conflict faced by these long-ago Hebrews, and something that is relevant for us today, in a time of uncertainty – jobs, taxes and the economy, as well as controlling Iran and other nations in their thirst for power. They were uncertain about what the future would bring, whether they as a people would survive. The promise of our God to wash us clean and then restore us to a place of safety and dignity is one that offers hope to us in Advent.

Prayer: Lord, help us have faith that you will be there for us, that you will make us clean, and envelop us in your loving kindness. Thanks for your protection through the worst of our challenges and your support as we do our best to make you our anchor, our center.

Jane Rosenquist

Friday, December 3, 2010

Isaiah 30: 19-26

Patience:

1. The quality of being patient, as the bearing of provocation, annoyance, misfortune, or pain, without complaint, loss of temper, irritation, or the like.
2. An ability or willingness to suppress restlessness or annoyance when confronted with delay.
3. Quiet, steady perseverance; even-tempered care; diligence.

Patience is a characteristic that can be difficult to practice in our fast paced world. We often move at a hurried pace, whether it is in relation to work, school, children's activities, volunteer meetings - the list goes on.

Isaiah 30:19-26 reminds me that I need to be patient and to appreciate all God's gifts. I appreciate Sunday morning worship-a peaceful time without any rushing or deadlines. During times of trouble,

I need to remember that God is always present, patient, and merciful. He guides me, and though I may not always understand the course, I need to be patient knowing that He will provide for me.

Advent is a time to reflect on patience as we anticipate the celebration of Jesus' birth and God's gift to mankind.

Anna Roberts

Saturday, December 4, 2010

Isaiah 4:2-6

Isaiah shares the message of God's frustration with his chosen people. Isaiah also gives a clear account of God's actions when the Israelites fail to follow his directions.

The selected verses come after Israel has been living in widespread sinful actions. God has punished the wrongdoers while he has selected worthy people to be blessed and protected.

God's forgiveness and love is once again shown. God's mercy has set the stage for the mission chosen for Christ to come to earth to demonstrate the power and love of God. As we prepare for the Christmas celebration of the Christ Child's birth, let us give thanks to God for the gift that enriches our lives.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help us to grow in our relationship with you so that we learn to do as you teach us. Help us live and serve you in your loving spirit.
Amen.

Gene Boone

Sunday, December 5, 2010

Matthew 3:1-12

You need to have a change of mind and heart: Altered thinking leads to a change of heart.

You need to have a change of life: With a change of “mind and of heart” a change of life should follow.

You need to have a change of heart and be sorry for your sins. Actions speak louder than words; so let your actions show you have had your change of mind, heart and life.

Make room for Christ. And in making room, we just might discover the truth that the peace and joy God wants to give to us.

Lord, help me to change my mind, heart and life so that they can be more pleasing to you and that I may discover all of the joy and peace you want to give.

Karen Wrublik

Monday, December 6, 2010

Isaiah 24.1-16a

In the time of Isaiah, one of the most important religious themes for the day was God's justice and righteousness. Isaiah could describe his society as both stubborn and proud, as evidenced in their unfounded confidence that they were safe from attack and they were too good to be conquered. Isaiah told the people that none of them were safe from the judgment of the Lord who was about to "lay waste" their lives, as if an earthquake were to destroy their homes. "As with the people, so with the priest," he said. The Lord's judgment is rendered for all the people, for the entire city, for all the land and its inhabitants.

In our time, one of our most important themes is justice "for all!" We hear the words spoken with dignity in America, "with liberty and justice for all." This justice that we hold as an ideal is challenged day after day by our current fear of terrorism, our lack of trust in politicians and institutions, our concern for the economic well being of our families and by the erosion of our families, especially in our inner cities. Is it "just" that various schools have different attitudes toward education and that some will prove to be more successful than others in the process?

Isaiah says that our hope is not in our human abilities to work lawfully: "The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed laws . . ." This reads like a headline in our daily newspaper/online news item. It seems to be in the nature of humanity. Our true hope is in the majesty of the Lord, to whom Isaiah encourages the people to sing with joy.

We too can sing to the Lord, who has redeemed our land and our lives from what diminishes this precious gift of living through our Lord Jesus. Jesus is coming and his arrival has changed the world.

Prayer: Dear Lord, hear our prayer for our nation and our families. Help us to look for your presence in our lives, that justice and righteousness may flourish in our country and that our families may know the astounding Peace that comes as a gift, so silently, like snow on the Christmas trees. Amen.

Pastor Jan P. Lookingbill

Tuesday, December 7, 2010

Isaiah 41:12-20

“For I, the Lord your God, Hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, “Do not fear, I will help you.”

When you are fearful, how do you feel? Terror? Dread? Panic? Apprehension? We have all experienced fear of some sort, it is a natural feeling. When we are afraid our defense is to move to protect yourself or someone else. Many people become disabled because of fear. They will not come out of their home. Many have fear of the unclean and will not touch anything unfamiliar to them. Fear is a powerful force that we often have to stand-up to and face the cause of our fear, to be able to move on in life. But we do not have to face these fears alone.

When we understand the love God have for His people and His wanting to be in a relationship with us, we know that God’s Grace is always there to help us overcome our fears.

God is our redeemer. He will provide us with all our needs, water to quench our thirst. He will water the ground so that the *“acacia, the myrtle and the olives will grow.”* He will help us overcome our fears. We serve a God who says, “Do not fear, I will help you.”

Dear Lord, I give thanks for the relationship I have with You, that assures me of Your presence in all situations. I do not fear, for I know you are there holding my hand. Amen

Katherine S. Burrell

Wednesday December 8, 2010

Genesis 15: 1-18:

As children, if we do a good thing, we look for a reward. Now. As adults, if we perform well at our jobs, we look for a raise, or a promotion. Now. We seem to be programmed for instant gratification.

Abram had longed for a child all his adult life, and now he was an old man, with an old wife. In his despair, he was visited by God in a vision. God assured this faithful man he would have an heir, of his own issue, and *in time*, his descendants would number as the stars, and rule vast lands. The operative words are *in time*: it is hard for us to understand why things don't work out exactly as we'd like *immediately*, when we've worked so hard toward our goals, in good faith. But stop and think: "Let go, let God" is a well-used phrase for good reason.

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God, grant us the patience and wisdom to take the long view, to rely on your love, your compassion and your understanding to see us to our destinations as we go through life.

Mae Scanlan

Thursday, December 9, 2010

Ruth 1: 6 – 14

This passage tells the story of Naomi and her two daughters-in-law and their decision around returning to Bethlehem after the death of Naomi's husband and two sons. Naomi discouraged her daughters-in-law from returning with her, but encouraged them to stay in their native land. If they did come with her she wanted it to be of their own choice, knowing the difficulties and costs of leaving their comfortable surroundings. In the end, Orpah, even though she did not want to leave Naomi, did not love her well enough to leave Moab for her sake. Ruth's love for Naomi, on the other hand was such that she was willing to forsake all her familiar surroundings to return to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law.

Many people are like Orpah in that they have love for Christ, but fall short of salvation because they will not forsake other things for him. Ruth exemplifies the grace of God in that her devotion to Naomi shows a willingness to abandon all she has known for what may not be known, but is better in the end.

Prayer: Dear Lord, our view of what is right is often colored by our by our desire to be comfortable in our situation. Please allow us see beyond our possessions and our familiar surroundings to see that loving you gives us a far better reward. Amen

Brad Fackler

Friday, December 10, 2010

Ruth 4: 13-17

A wise person once said, "Never be quick to judge whether something is a blessing or a curse." The story of Naomi reminds us of this. The name Naomi means "my delight" but when her husband and sons died, Naomi concluded that God's hand had gone against her. She then declared, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."

Rather than judge her circumstances as a follower of the one true God who had proclaimed unfailing love for His people, Naomi did what most of us tend to do: She judged God in light of her circumstances. And she judged wrongly. God had not turned against her. In fact, Naomi was given a treasure from God. Although Naomi lost her husband and two sons, she was given something totally unexpected, a devoted daughter-in-law and a grandchild who would be in the lineage of the Messiah.

Naomi's story shows us that sometimes the worst things that happen to us can often open doors for the best that God has to give us. While in the midst of our crisis, we must remember that God is always with us to protect, guide and sustain our lives. We need to open new doors that give us new direction. God's purpose for today's events may not be seen until tomorrow.

Prayer: Dear God, help me not to judge Your love for me on the basis of whether today brings good news or bad. Give me strength and faith to open doors to unexpected gifts from you. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Judy Lookingbill

Saturday, December 11, 2010

Luke 3: 1-18

As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; 6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Opportunity comes with so many different shapes and faces that we often don't recognize it. That's probably why we sometimes miss its call. Many today believe opportunity comes with a college degree, good investments, or even lottery tickets. But none is guaranteed.

The divine opportunity comes in what is, to our human eyes, the most unlikely garments of all. It's no wonder we don't recognize it; or that, recognizing it, we resist it. This Advent season is an especially good time to experience the divine opportunity.

The first Advent preacher, John the Baptizer, offered opportunity in a compelling, almost ferocious way. When you read his words, you don't think he's offering opportunity; I expect that if we had heard him in person, we would have been even more doubtful. William Barclay said that John's message "was not good news; it was news of terror" (The Gospel of Luke, Westminster John Knox Press, p. 28). I understand what Professor Barclay was saying, but I see it differently. It seems to me that good news must sometimes come dressed in rough clothing.

That was surely the nature of John's approach. When we read the brief gospel summaries of his messages, we wonder why people went to so much trouble to hear him. Were they perhaps hoping to hear him thunder against the sins of their neighbors? One way or another, the crowds flocked to him. And largely, I think, because they felt, in the integrity of his message, an opportunity that they had sought for a long time. His was a message of judgment; but in the judgment was opportunity. And opportunity was wrapped up in the word repent. They could be Baptized and free of sin, and maybe even see God. What a great opportunity!

Jennifer Lewis

Sunday, December 12, 2010

Matthew 18: 2-11

I am always amazed at how efficiently Jesus conveys the essence of Christianity. My version of the Holy Bible is 1133 pages long. Yet in Matthew 18: 2-11, it takes Jesus half a page and three parables to summarize the essence of man's relationship with God. He tells the disciples that the greatest in heaven is humble like a child. The next four verses describe temptation. Jesus recognizes that man is not perfect: "Occasions for stumbling blocks are bound to come." But while Jesus acknowledges temptation, He also notes that those who place stumbling blocks before His children do not enter God's Kingdom, Jesus concludes by reminding his disciples about God's feelings towards his flock. Like a shepherd who finds a sheep that has gone astray, God rejoices when one of us lost souls returns to the fold. So, the recipe for receiving God's grace is pretty simple. We should be humble like children and avoid the active pursuit of evil.

Prayer: Glory to you, God, for caring so much about your flock and for not giving up on your children when we go astray. Amen

Andrew Szamosszegi

Monday, December 13, 2010

Isaiah 29: 17-24

Wonderful things are being foretold here. When we are in trouble we can truly rejoice in God, and soon we will have the greatest reason of all to rejoice in God. The grace of meekness contributes to the increase of our holy joy. The powerful enemy will become mean and weak. This is our God who rescued Abraham out of snares and troubles time and time again. Now we will be rescued and redeemed. God is about to give the Son to the world. It will be the greatest comfort to parents to see their children as renewed and redeemed people, the work of God's grace.

As a people of faith we are called to pray for those who have been deceived by the enemy. We are called to share the truth. We are called to show others how our faith has produced in us a peace which cannot be found anywhere else. As St. Francis once said, "Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary use words."

O gracious and loving God, help us to find ways to share the joy we find in our faith with all those around us – and not only in words, but through letting Your light be reflected in all that we do. MEN

Pastor Robert Lewis +

Tuesday, December 14, 2010

Ezekiel 47: 1-12

Ezekiel describes a huge river, leaving from the Temple in Jerusalem. So wide no one can swim across, it empties into the Dead Sea, turning it into a fresh-water lake. Trees and all manner of living things grow on its banks, and people rely on the fruit and leaves of those trees for food and healing.

In the real world, there is no such river, and the Dead Sea is, as the name implies, dead, being far saltier than our own Great Salt Lake. So Ezekiel is clearly having a prophetic vision. Some of our more literal-minded brethren might argue that someday there will be such a river. But more important than the river itself is the metaphor: a life-giving, boundless river flowing from the temple, where continuous sacrifices are performed for the sins of the people.

The ancient Jewish people probably saw this passage in nationalistic terms. Israel is circumscribed by two great river systems – the Nile and the Tigris/Euphrates – which spawned Egypt and Mesopotamia, man's earliest civilizations. Also, foreign invaders from each at various times conquered Jerusalem. In other words, Egypt and Babylon, you think you have a great river, some day we Jews will have an even greater one, not something meager like the Jordan, where Pastor Lookingbill probably needs a permit to fill a couple of bottles.

Christians too, can read their story in Ezekiel's vision. The river flows from the Temple, where daily sacrifices are made for our sins, and Jesus' saving grace flows continuously for us. In a desert people perish quickly without water. Moreover, such rivers are the basis for an entire ecosystem – Egypt is the gift of the Nile, and whether acknowledged or not, we all receive the gift of Christ. Extending the metaphor, some have been to the river more recently, some have drunken more fully, some clash with other river dwellers, but nothing is more important than the river – reminiscent of Paul's analogy that we are all one body in Christ. In Christ we are no longer Jew or Gentile, male or female, or even Republican or Democrat. Christ is the straw that stirs the drink.

Kevin Adams

Wednesday, December 15, 2010

Zechariah 8:1-17

In this passage from the book of Zechariah God addresses the Jews returning from the Babylonian Captivity. He promises peace and, painting a beautiful picture with words, says that old men and women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem and that those streets will be full of playing boys and girls. But this is the Old Testament and God presents this promise as a contract, requiring something from his people in return: they must treat each other fairly.

Surely this sounds like what Jesus says to us in the New Testament: whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them. Matthew reports that Jesus points out that this is the law and the prophets. But Jesus also says that he came to fulfill the law. In other words, Jesus isn't a promise – he's the fulfillment of the promise – a gift from God. And unlike a contract – a gift is not given with the requirement of something in return. But isn't our impulse to respond to a gift with one in return? And Jesus certainly gave us his wish list.

Dear God In this season of gifts help us to remember the gift you gave us and the way you would like us to respond.

Jessica Botsford

Thursday, December 16, 2010

2 Samuel 7: 1-17

Meditation: This chapter is from the Old Testament and begins with David's plan to build a more fitting house for the ark of God. Later in the story, God reveals through Nathan that David's good intentions of building a temple-house would interfere with God's own building plans for David. This reminds me of when I was little and I believed that Santa Claus and God were alike... He does not want or need any physical gifts from us. God is the giver, and wants to supply all our needs. But unlike Santa Claus, I know God is real and not a myth. We are truly called to live our life obedient to God's word. And if we accept Gods ways and gifts, then our gifts and we will live on forever more.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for your gifts and unconditional love. Please help us to keep you in our hearts forever, and to make you first in our lives. Amen.

Martha Lundberg

Friday, December 17, 2010

2 Samuel 7: 18-22

David, now king of the Jewish state, has thrived in his new role and has just moved into a glorious new palace made of cedar. He is living well, but he is concerned because of the contrast between his estate and that of God, whose seat (the Ark of the Covenant) still resides in a flimsy tent. He wanted to build God a temple to replace the tent, but God sent Nathan the prophet to tell him that God was content with a tent as his dwelling place. David is first flummoxed and then realizes what a gift he has been given. David prays this marvelous prayer of thanksgiving not saying that he has all the gifts from God because David is so great, but rather in awe that God has given all these gifts even to me, a former shepherd boy, a servant in God's house. No wonder David recognizes the magnificence of God. We, too, would be wise to consider what God has given us, freely, and without merit on our part. From this should come, awe, gratitude, joy, and willingness to share with others that all may benefit.

Prayer: Oh Father, David was blessed by you with long life and riches, grace and power, love and forgiveness. He knew how to say thanks. I, too, have been blessed and I thank you. Help me always to show that thanks to you. Amen.

Mike Poston

Saturday, December 18, 2010

2 Samuel 7: 23-29

This passage is part of a larger chapter in which David has a dream about building a temple in God's honor.

David reasons that he is "living in a house built of cedar, but God's Covenant Box is kept in a tent!" (2 Sam 7:2)

David believes a temple would be a more appropriate venue to glorify God. God, however, tells David "no" – he will not build the temple but someone else will. In verses 23-29, David thanks God and asks him to bless his descendants forever.

We sometimes forget that God saying "no" to us can be a gift for which we can be thankful. We may have our own ideas of what God wants and of how we should live. But, like a good mother or father, God can say "no." David mistakenly thought a temple would be more worthy of God than a tent, but forgot that God cannot be limited to these earthly structures. Similarly, we forget that our ideas *and goals may not, in fact, be what God has planned for us*. Sometimes, we need the gift of "no" to grow in our faith journey. And for that, we can – like David – give thanks.

Maria Green Cowles

Sunday, December 19, 2010

Matt 1: 18-25

This passage is about the story of Joseph visited by God and was told that Mary was with child, yet he was not the father. The child would be a son and will be called Immanuel, a name that means "God – is – with – us." It was to be a gift from God.

It was difficult for Joseph to accept this news at first, but he trusted God and accepted God's gift, even when he felt his reputation was in jeopardy. You can only imagine the turmoil he was going through because of his cultural background and what he had been taught. You can only imagine what would have happened if he did not follow God's command. It took great courage on Joseph's part to do this.

That too can be applied today when we read in the newspapers and hear on the news about those who are discriminated against because of their sex, race, or religion. There are those who do not have the courage that Joseph demonstrated to stand up for what is right and to accept each of God's gifts.

Immanuel - God is with us. God is with us everyday regardless of who or what we are. It takes inner strength and a belief that God is true to his word and that regardless of what others say, we have the courage to accept God's gift and follow.

Prayer: Help me to have the courage to act when my reputation may be sullied in the process.

Donna K. McGee

Monday, December 20, 2010

I Samuel 12: 1-10

Some people are good and do what they are supposed to do. Others disregard the will of God and yet, still expect God to rescue them from distress.

Some of us show little tolerances for people who continually want things for themselves. Yet God endures requests and continually accedes to their request even after they turn their back on God. God is ever forgiving and always there. It is only when we reach out to others in need, we too will be blessed.

Prayer: God help me to see other people's needs and not my own burdens.

Tuesday, December 21, 2010

Isaiah 2: 1-5

This is the famous “swords into plowshares” passage.

“Nation will not lift sword against nation, no longer will they learn how to make war.”

This is the prayer of every parent with a child in a war zone. But nations war because people war. And people war because they fear and they hate what they fear. The prayer should not be for our governments but for ourselves.

Prayer: Lord, help us to overcome our fears, to embrace those who would be our enemies. Help us to “walk in Yahweh’s light”

Donna K. McGee

Wednesday, December 22, 2010

Matthew- 1: 1-17

An advent devotional on a genealogy? Well, first and foremost the purpose of this passage is to set forth that Jesus is God's supreme agent. In listing Jesus' ancestors, Matthew asserts that God has direct control over Israel's history. From the beginning of time, God has guided Israel's salvation through the promises He had made to Abraham and to King David. Now in the coming of their heir, the "Messiah," these promises have been fulfilled. The entire history of Israel, beginning with Abraham, attains its goal with the birth of Christ.

Verse 1:16 of the genealogy indicates that Jesus is the personal name given (which in Hebrew means "God is salvation.") God is active in Jesus to save. Yet, how does Jesus become a part of this lineage? Jesus, born of Mary, but not fathered by Joseph, can legitimately be designated as 'Son of David' because Joseph, who is by lineage a son of David, adopts Jesus into his lineage as his earthy father. And with Jesus being the 'Son of David', Israel will be blessed among nations. Matthew uses the genealogy to assert that God has guided the whole of Israel's history so that it might begin its culmination in the birth of Jesus Christ –the 'Messiah', 'Son of David', 'Son of Abraham' (and reach its apex in the resurrection).

Prayer: Gracious God, help us to prepare our hearts and our minds this Christmas season. Amen

Kim Groves

Thursday, December 23, 2010

Isaiah 11:1-10

“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them”. Isaiah 11:6

When I read this verse, I thought of the painting “Peaceable Kingdom” by Edward Hicks (1780-1849). I find it interesting that each animal is with its natural prey; however, the painting depicts the animals in harmony. Further, the left side of the painting depicts William Penn signing a treaty with the Indian tribes.

Edward Hicks’ painting has been interpreted as a representation of world peace during the reign of Christ. The animals will be led and guided by Christ, the Shepherd, and live in harmony. All that is true will be realized.

When you look at the painting I suggest you look at Edward Hicks’ use of light. During this Advent season how can we, as Christians, have our Light within us shine brighter?

Prayer: Dear God, Help us to remember the true meaning of Christmas and how you brought your Light into our world. We continue to pray for peace in the world.

Patti Leppert

Friday, December 24, 2010

Isaiah 35:1-10

Meditation: “What a glorious writing of Joy personified in nature!!! Joy at the coming of the Lord! In his song, Zechariah also expresses the joy at the birth of his son, John the Baptist. Luke 1:78-79 “because the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come from heaven to shine of those living in darkness.” Nature shows so much of God’s grandeur. What we see and can comprehend must be dwarfed by God’s majesty. Think on these things -- the glorious sunrise with the pink-blue colors painting the skies or the majestic mountain peaks around the world or the different colors of the oceans and seas – the deep blues to the azure blues, the striations of the canyons in the western US, the petite precise feathers on the birds, the spots on the leopards!! No words can take it all in, yet Isaiah and Zechariah use nature and God’s creations to express deep and great joy that we will know with Christ’s coming. The Lord will steady the knees and calm the hearts that fear.

Today, choose joy! Rest in that deep-seated joy that comes from our Lord who redeemed us.

Prayer: Come Lord Jesus. Let me rest and revel in the joy of knowing you in my life. Amen.

Ginger Boone

Saturday December 25, 2010

Christmas Day

Luke 2: 1-20

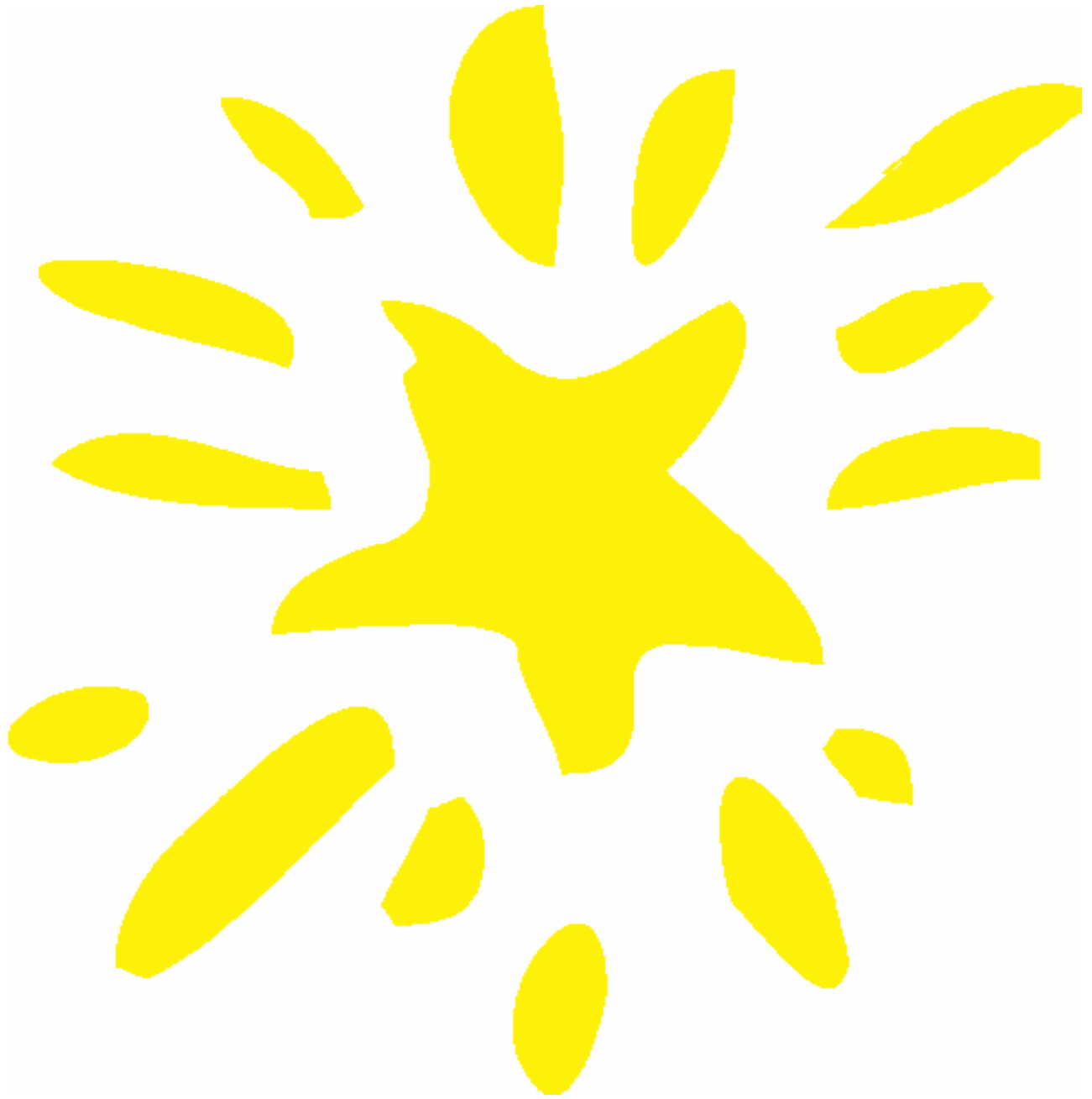
Is it possible to add a new twist to this most memorable story in the bible? There is no need to. But there is a need to remind us again and again of this story. God came to reveal himself to us as the child of an unwed homeless mother, rebuked at birth by the innkeepers who could have offered comfort. Welcomed only by barn animals and shepherds.

Those of us who live in this suburban enclave in one of the richest counties in America are reminded once again that God came to this earth as an outcast. He never forgot his roots. He continually ministered to those rejected by the rich and powerful.

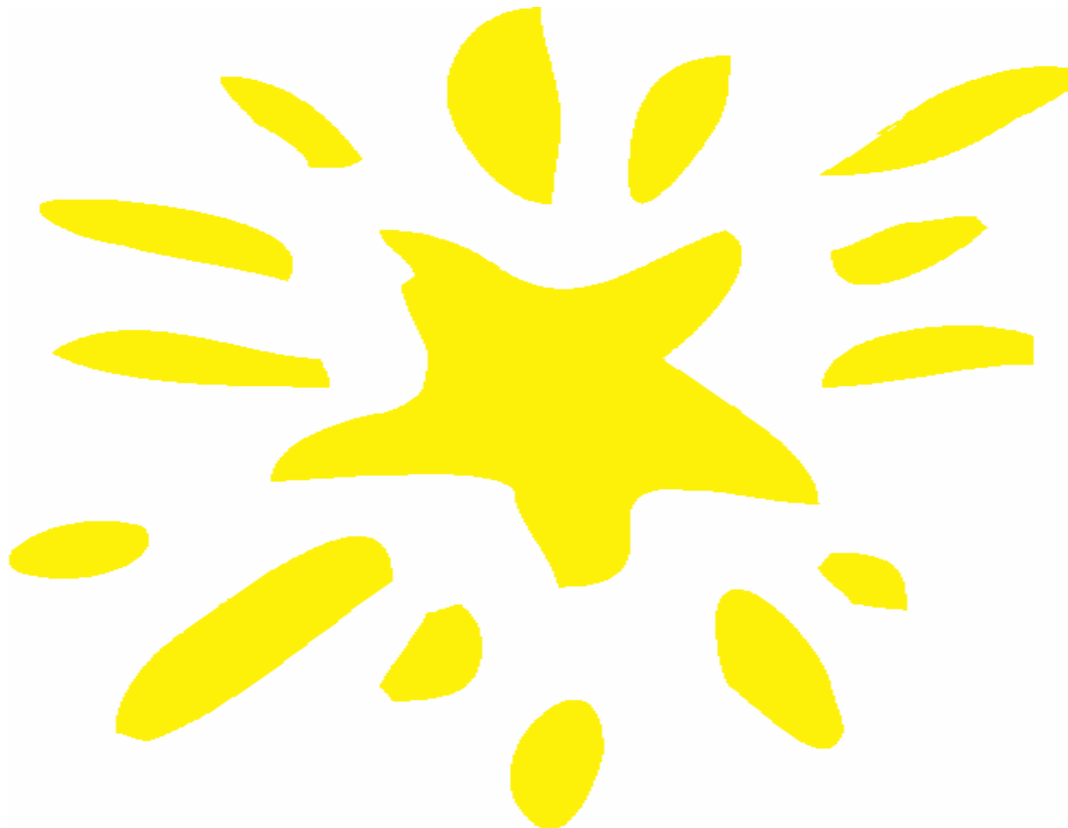
It is a humbling story, an uplifting story, and a magnificent story. It is our story.

Prayer: Lord, help us to always remember that, as you were not welcomed you welcomed others. Help us to recognize the grace of God in all those rejected and defeated by the larger society. Help us to welcome you by welcoming others.

James McGee



*Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace!*



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