

2013

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

O, Come, All Ye Faithful



*Written by the members of
Macedonia Evangelical Lutheran Church
Burlington, North Carolina*

2013 ADVENT THEME: *“O, Come, All Ye Faithful”*



Special thanks also to the
Macedonia Writers
who contributed to this year's
Advent Devotional

Special thanks to our editors,
Joy Rust and Cindi McCarthy

“Advent Theme” - O, Come, All Ye Faithful

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Sunday, December 1
Written by Julie Russell
Mark 13:35-37

Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.

Have you ever fallen asleep in class? Taken a short power nap at your desk? Have you nodded off in church (tell the truth!)? Have you hit snooze on your alarm clock one too many times and missed an appointment? Parents, have you dozed off waiting for your teen to come home on a Friday night? What have we missed out on? What responsibilities have we dropped? Are our lives so packed with busy activity that we end up dragging our exhausted selves from one moment to the next? Most of us can answer ruefully, “Yes, that’s me.”

It sounds like we need a good night’s sleep, no?

In today’s scripture, is Jesus telling his disciples not to ever sleep? Does he want us to deny ourselves rest? No! He wants us to be alert, be prepared, and to anticipate his return with eagerness. He would like us to live our lives as though he may return at any moment! How different would our lives be if we chose actions, words and thoughts each minute of the day as if Jesus could walk in on us at any time?

During this season of Advent, we watch and wait eagerly for the coming of Jesus. As we shop for gifts, as we bake cookies, as we attend Christmas parties and pageants, as we sing carols and visit with family and friends, let’s not tire ourselves out so much that we forget what we’re celebrating! Let’s keep awake! Like the innkeeper who offered his stable to a young scared couple in the middle of the night, let’s not miss the chance to help someone in need. Let’s keep awake! Like the shepherds who were watching their flocks that night in fields outside of Bethlehem, let’s not miss the angels’ message of good news. Let’s keep awake! Like the wisemen who followed a brilliant star to find the Christ child, let’s not miss the chance to seek Jesus first. Let’s keep awake!

Dear Jesus,

Help us to put aside all those things which prevent us from seeking you. As we celebrate this wonderful season, fill us with your peace and joy so that we can share them with those around us. We thank you for coming to save us. And we wait eagerly for the day you come again.

Amen.

**“Blessed
is the
one
who comes
in the
name
of the
Lord!”**

Monday, December 2
Written by Bruce Moore
Luke 1:38

³⁸ Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

*He will be great and
will be called the
Son of the Most High.*

Luke 1:32



When the angel Gabriel came to Mary and told her she was favored by God and would be the mother of Jesus, she could have flatly rejected the notion. Instead, Mary accepted God’s call to service, knowing she risked ridicule and scorn and even potential loss of her fiancé, Joseph.

When we are called by God to service, it is very easy to say “sorry, but I have a conflict at that time,” or some other excuse. Maybe our “conflict” is a ballgame or favorite program on television. To us, God’s call is just an inconvenience that we would rather ignore. Surely, Mary took a far greater leap of faith when she agreed to accept God’s call and bear the Son of God than we do when we agree to do something relatively simple as prepare food or serve the homeless at Night Shelter or some other “inconvenient” task. Shouldn’t we follow Mary’s example and do our part to serve God?

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for Mary’s faith that led her to accept God’s call to service through the angel Gabriel. Forgive us when we reject your call, and help us have the faith and courage to be your servant, even when it is inconvenient for us. Amen.

Tuesday, December 3
Written by The Spencer Family
Ephesians 6:10-11

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

When I read this, I understood verse 10. My understanding of it was, "Always trust in God for His power is never-ending." However, verse 11 was a little more difficult. I understood the whole armor of God would protect you from the devil. But, what is the whole armor of God? I had to do a little research. The whole armor of God has 6 pieces:

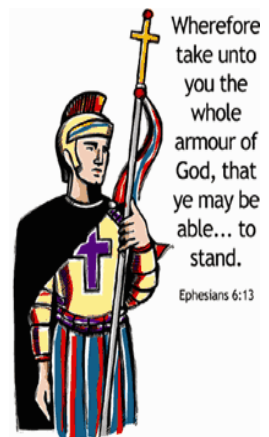
1. The helmet of salvation.
2. The breastplate of righteousness.
3. The belt of truth.
4. Feet fitted with the gospel of peace.
5. The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
6. The shield of faith.

How important is this shield of faith? The shield is the most important piece of armor because it protects all the other pieces of armor. It fends off arrows, spears, and swords. When the shield is down the other pieces are exposed. Our shield of faith guards us against one of Satan's deadliest weapons, doubt. The shield of faith has a very specific function which the Bible makes abundantly clear in Ephesians, "...quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one." (Not just some darts, but ALL of them.)

In Romans 12:3 we are taught that everyone has a measure of faith that is assigned by God. Matthew 17:20 teaches us, that even if we have a tiny faith as small as a mustard seed, we can still do great things in His Name. When Paul discussed the whole armor of God, he was talking to Christian believers. He talked about truth, peace, righteousness, salvation, and he also talked about the shield of faith being the most important piece. None of the other pieces of armor mentioned so far are exalted as highly as the shield.

We are urged in the Christmas song "O, Come, All Ye Faithful" at Baby Jesus' birth:

O Come All Ye Faithful
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him,
Born the King of Angels;
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.



Saint Paul reminds us, the believers, again in Ephesians 6:10-11 that it is still the faithful that follow a crucified Messiah and to use His whole armor with the shield of faith to their best advantage.

Dear God,
Thank you for your grace and the never-ending power of Your protection. Help us to pray often, to read the Bible, and to trust faithfully in your promises.
In Jesus Name, Amen.

Wednesday, December 4
Written by Linda Cykert
Psalm 98:4-9

***⁴ Shout your praises to God, everybody!
Let loose and sing! Strike up the band!
⁵ Round up an orchestra to play for God,
Add on a hundred-voice choir.
⁶ Feature trumpets and big trombones,
Fill the air with praises to King God.
⁷ Let the sea and its fish give a round of applause,
With everything living on earth joining in.
⁸ Let ocean breakers call out, "Encore!"
And mountains harmonize the finale—
⁹ A tribute to God when he comes,
When he comes to set the earth right.
He'll straighten out the whole world,
He'll put the world right, and everyone in it.***

Perhaps one of the most wonderful things in life to see and hear is a children's church choir! The joy, excitement, enthusiasm, and offer hand clapping and dancing truly shows their uninhibited love. At this time of year, and at all times, let us all try to emulate young people's joy in the Lord. Please remember the following from Matthew 18:2-4:

King James Version (KJV)

² And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,
³ And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.
⁴ Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.



Thursday, December 5
Written by Sheila Gibson
Isaiah 40:1-5



“Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

This passage always invokes memories of Christmas for me because it is the first aria of Handel’s Messiah, which became a Christmas tradition for me to listen to when I was taking voice lessons over 10 years ago. My voice teacher wanted me to practice my lessons while learning some of the arias, so I bought the CD set which contained the entire cantata. Since then I have always listened to it while putting up my Christmas decorations, looking forward to hearing the familiar music each year. I have always hoped to be able to be part of a chorus that performs it, either at Christmas or Easter, taking comfort in the fact that even though many of these pieces are very challenging, I have learned and sung several of them.

One of the greatest things about the Messiah is that it contains three distinct parts that can be performed together or separately, depending on the time of the church year. The first part, which ends with the glorious “Hallelujah Chorus,” centers on the season of advent and the birth of Christ. This is why it has become my Christmas music staple - it really is the anthem of the season! “Comfort ye My People”, the first aria, is this exact scripture reading set to music. It references the struggles and hardships that the Jewish people had endured and were still facing, yet amidst that pain and suffering, the message is one of hope. It will all soon fade away with the coming of the promised one, the Messiah. But before He comes, the people must prepare by continuing to be steadfast in their faith, trusting in God, believing that his promises will be kept. All of the faithful are called to do this, and when the preparations are through, everyone will be invited to come and experience the glory of the Lord.

So be comforted my fellow Macedonians, trusting and believing in the promise and hope of this passage - remain steadfast in your faith and prepare your heart for His coming. Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of you comfort and grace. Enable us to bravely prepare for your coming which will allow us to see and praise your glory. Amen.

Here’s wishing all of you a very blessed Christmas and the joy of God’s peace and love in the New Year!

Friday, December 6
Written by Frank Rhue
Psalm 27:1

***Psalm 27:1 The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?***

God's Grace is ours all the time.

Like the verse says, "...my light and my salvation...the stronghold of my life..."

So, what does that mean for our lives?

Like the Psalm says, it means that we have nothing to fear. Problems might cause us to change courses. Problems might cause difficulties; some quite frightening; some seemingly impossible to deal with; some completely impossible for us to deal with by ourselves. We can face those times in our lives with the assurance that God's Grace will be our companion. He will be our strength. What an awesome promise! How awesome is God?!?!

How do we respond to this Gift?

An answer can be seen in text to a Carol attributed to an Englishman named John Wade who wrote a praise hymn way back in the eighteenth century.

O Come All Ye Faithful

"Joyful and triumphant," "O come, let us adore Him," "Give to our Father glory in the Highest;"

"O Jesus! for evermore be Thy name adored. Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;"

"Christ the Lord"

What else can we do but thank and praise God for the Gift of Grace though the sacrifice of Jesus?

What else are we, "The Faithful," to do but to proclaim the glory? What better time than now during Advent as we anticipate the celebration of the beginning of Christ's life here among us. He lived as one of us to show us how we should live in response to God's Grace.

As we anticipate the celebration, it is good we remember the Gift of His life that was given on a Friday just like this day of December 6. So,

"Come and behold Him,
Born the King of Angels;
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord."



Saturday, December 7
Written by Chrissy & Marilyn Adkins
Luke 17:19

“Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Jesus performed miracles in order to get people to trust and believe. He had to gain the trust in the people so that they would have faith in him. As He performed miracles, people began to believe and trust that Jesus was the son of God. There was no trickery; no snake-oil salesmen stunts, nothing up his sleeve. He was transparent in what he asked of other people. He asked them to love one another, He asked them to treat each other the way that they would want to be treated, and He asked them to have faith. Faith is the belief in something that you can't touch or see, it is trusting that you will be taken care of, that others will love you, and treat you like Jesus would want them to treat you.

My mother used to say that faith is easy when things are going well, it takes a true unshakable belief in Christ Jesus to have faith when things are going badly. It is difficult to trust and believe in people, when so many wound and dishonor other people. It is difficult to believe that everything will be “ok” when you are helping a loved one through an unyielding, devastating illness. It is hard to have faith when life hits you when you least expect it, with difficulties that alter your life. However, what we need to remember is another thing that my mother would say, “When God closes a door, He opens a window.” That is faith. That is the belief that in some form, that you cannot touch or see, that God will take care of you, and everything is going to be “ok”. I have every faith that one day I will see my mother again, and she will be healthy, happy, and full of life.

One of my favorite hymns is My Life Flows On in Endless Song, with the refrain of “No storm can shake my in-most calm while to that Rock I'm clinging. Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?” Your Faith will keep you well.



Sunday, December 8
Written by Robin Huffman
Matthew 14:31

³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"



Jesus Calms the Storm

This verse is instantly recognizable: Jesus walks out to the boat where his disciples have floated and Peter jumps out to greet him, walking on the top of the waves until he becomes aware of the wind and waves and starts sinking in fear. Jesus reaches out, clasps Peter's hand and brings him to his side. The lesson is that we should let faith triumph over fear, right?

But what I forgot about this story is that it is imbedded in a chapter of Matthew that is full of other stories of note. It starts with the beheading of John the Baptist, of Jesus grieving the loss of his cousin and retreating to a mountain to be alone, of being followed by the crowds who demand to be touched and healed and preached to, of his disciples finding a boy's lunch of loaves and fishes for Jesus to turn into a feast for the masses, and finally of Jesus sending his disciples to the boat to rest while he spends the night in prayer.

Wow. And I thought it was just a story of a miracle of walking on water. Instead it is a story filled with the kinds of life events found in many of our lives today. Tragedy. Death. Grief. Work to do. Too many people. Too much rushing around. Unsuccessfully trying to find a quiet moment.

This gives me a new sense of this story, of this miracle of walking on water. Like us, Jesus is besieged. Like us, Jesus is assaulted by the weight of being human. Like us, he tries to get away to pray, to recharge his batteries, and to meditate. And like us, he sometimes gets sidetracked by life and others' needs. But he has the infinite power to rise above it all, to walk on water, and most importantly, to reach out to us.

And how alike we are to Peter. When faced by the reality of our situations, by the waves lapping at our ankles, by the futility of our attempts to manage on our own, by the paralyzing fear we have of what might happen, we sink. But Jesus is there to pluck us from our woes, to chide us for losing our faith and losing sight of him. And we grow strong and walk beside him, even on water.

Oh you of little faith. O, come, all ye faithful. Instead of drowning in despair of what we cannot do despite our best intentions, let us reach out to our Lord, gird ourselves with the knowledge that we cannot beat the waves alone, and allow ourselves to walk with him in faith.

Monday, December 9
Written by Dan Voelkert
Isaiah 9:6

Isn't He Just Like His Dad?

*For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

My niece just had a beautiful baby boy last weekend. We fuss over him continually. We play the game of guessing who he looks like. "He has his mother's eyes." "He has his dad's chin." All families do this. What we are looking for in the child is a connection to the family he comes from. Today's text is kind of a pre-birth announcement where God is telling us how we will recognize his Son. This helpless little boy, diapered, swaddled and laid in a cow's feeding trough, will have the unmistakable mark of his Father. "He's got His Dad's authority." That's a lot to place on a newborn's shoulders.



As His life unfolds, how does this authority manifest itself? Does it come with great and awesome deeds heralded by angel choirs? Or does it come in the form of an itinerant preacher who astounded listeners because he taught "as one having authority and not as the scribes"? (Mark 1:22) Does he show his authority in victory at the head of heaven's legions? Or is it displayed in an ignoble criminal's death where even a Roman centurion recognizes that "this man was God's Son"? (Mark 15:39)

True authority does not require grand displays of power. It does not need intimidation. Contrary to our human wisdom, God's authority shows up in weakness. It meets us in Christ's humility. We see it on Calvary as he dies among criminals. Even in the great moment of power—the resurrection—he showed himself quietly to his friends. Two of his disciples walking to Emmaus talked with the risen Christ during their long walk and only recognized Him in the breaking of bread. They recognized his authority even when they did not recognize Him. "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us...?" (Luke 24:32)

As the church of Christ, we are children of God—sons and daughters of the King. We share in this authority. This authority manifests itself in small acts of kindness. It shows up where there is poverty, disease and suffering. But it only shows up in those situations if we show up. We must follow Christ's example. He did not exercise His authority from heaven but came down in the midst of those he chose to help. As we step out to show God's love in the world. Let us remember that we are doing so with Christ's authority.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, you gave your Son authority over all and he showed it in humility and love. Send your Holy Spirit that we might go into the world in the example of Christ, to show your authority as Christ did. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Tuesday, December 9
Written by Charlie Harris
Philippians 2:9-11

“WHAT IS IN A NAME?”

Philippians 2:9-11

“Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

What is in a name? Prospective parents spend hours trying to determine just the right name for their new child. There are hundreds of web sites and books with baby names. There are lists of the most popular names. Depending on which list and which survey you choose Asher and Liam are currently the most popular names for boys, with Emma and Charlotte being the top pick for girls. By regions, Michael is the most popular name in the South. Parents are faced with the pressure/expectation of using a traditional family name. (Five generations of the women in my family were given the middle name of “Ann”.) Actors and musicians look for a name that will set them apart (Lady Gaga, Ice T, JZ, Little Kim). Even corporations and businesses commit considerable dollars for a name that will create brand recognition. What about Mary and Joseph? Matthew (Chapter 1, verses 21 and 23) tells us they were not burdened with trying to find a name for their little baby. God sent an angel who appeared to Joseph in a dream and declared that the child would be named Jesus. (“She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from sin”.....”Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel, which means God with us”).

When you hear the name Jesus, what do you think? Do you think of the Son of God who was humbly born in a stable, the teacher, the healer, the feeder of masses, or the faithful son who went to the cross so that we might have everlasting life?

While Jesus may have the ultimate name recognition, he does not have an ad agency or publicists to promote his image. This is where we come in. Marked through our baptism and by the sign of the cross, we are his agents and it is through us others know of his goodness, ultimate sacrifice, and loving grace. Every day our words and our actions are the ways his name is promoted. When we help those in need, when we hold our tongue in anger, when we take the time to listen to someone hurting, or we teach a child about his goodness, we are honoring, glorifying, and praising his name. As you read this devotion, what will you do today to exalt the name of Jesus?

Payer:

Heavenly Father, as we go about our daily tasks and all we do, let our words and actions exalt the name of Jesus Christ.



And He shall be named Jesus!

Wednesday, December 11

Written by Joy Rust

Matthew 25:1-13

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' ⁷Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' ¹⁰And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹²But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' ¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.



"I am coming soon."

This passage has several different themes, but the one that is speaking to me right now is “be ready.” In our faith life we learn early on that we need to be ready, for we don’t know when Jesus will return. Some theological writers say that they believe Jesus will come when things are going just fine in the world. That is an interesting thought, isn’t it? (If things are going well, will people be less Christ centered? Pray less?) We often hear the opposite view. “Things are in such bad shape, maybe the world is coming to an end soon.” But what if it is the opposite of that? What if Jesus returns when the Carolina blue skies are gleaming, the economy is thriving, and all is well? Would there be many believers with Christ at the center of their lives? So often people aren’t strong in their faith life when all is going well. But the bottom line is that we don’t know when Jesus will come. “Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” (v. 13)

We do know that when He comes, it will be without warning. At a time we don’t expect Him. But we need to be ready. Advent is a time to pause, to assess my life. Am I leading a godly life? Is Christ at the center of my life? Am I rushing around with Christ at the center of everything? Or is Christ an afterthought? Sometimes when we evaluate what we are doing it may not make us feel good. I have watched the church change from the time I was a little girl to now. When I was a little girl most families went to church as well as all activities the church offered. All the kids in church were actively involved in our youth group. One never heard, “We’ll be back at the end of soccer season” or “We can’t come, we have dance on Tuesday.” For the past 20 years it has felt like many participate in church only when there isn’t any better option for an activity. How does that play when you consider “keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour?” Tough stuff. Sometimes introspection isn’t pretty. But the good news is that we can change. I recently read a spiritual writing that asked: Do you have the “vital signs” of spiritual life?

PRAYER: Dear Lord, help me remember to keep you at the center of my life. Let me be ready. Let me have the vital signs that show you are the center of my life. I want to be with You. Amen!

Thursday, December 12
Written by Yvonne White
1 Corinthians 11:23-26

“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”



When I read this scripture and the theme for the year, I was immediately reminded of something my mother would say when asked if we should alter the communion schedule to something other than every Sunday. She said, “You never know when someone needs to renew their faith.” It is a time of remembering what Christ did for us, a time for self-examination, and a time to make a statement of our faith. The need and timing for each of us is very different and driven by things that happen in our lives, good and bad.

Mama lived the last three years of her life in a nursing home, unable to walk. So, she could not attend church to receive communion. Pastor Dietz visited one day and did not bring communion. I remember vividly Mama’s response. Pastor Dietz didn’t make that mistake again. It was important for my mother to renew her faith regularly in the way our Lord commanded.

The liturgical prayer after communion on Sunday says “we give you thanks, Almighty God, that you have refreshed us through the healing power of this gift of life”. That was exactly my mother’s point. It was not just about reaffirming her faith in God, but receiving healing and hope. She knew she would never walk again, but she was “healed”. What a wonderful gift!

Friday, December 13
Written by Richard Johnson
Luke 11:4

***“And forgive us our sins,
For we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial.”***

God asks the impossible, because God does the impossible.

Few things are as contrary to the human character than to do what is required of us here.
To forgive.

Think of the great slogans of American history:
“Remember the Alamo!”, “Remember the Maine!”, “Remember Pearl Harbor!”

And closer to our own time, what was our reaction to the
911 attacks?

Forgiveness was not high on our list.

But God is not like us. God does forgive.

Soon, we celebrate the birth of the man who, while dying
on the cross, asked that his murderers be forgiven.

So rather than condemn ourselves for our reluctance to
forgive, let us remember that God forgives us for
everything we do, including our insistence on revenge.

It is because God does the impossible. He must do it
because we cannot.

But we must continue to try and perhaps find that we can do the impossible.

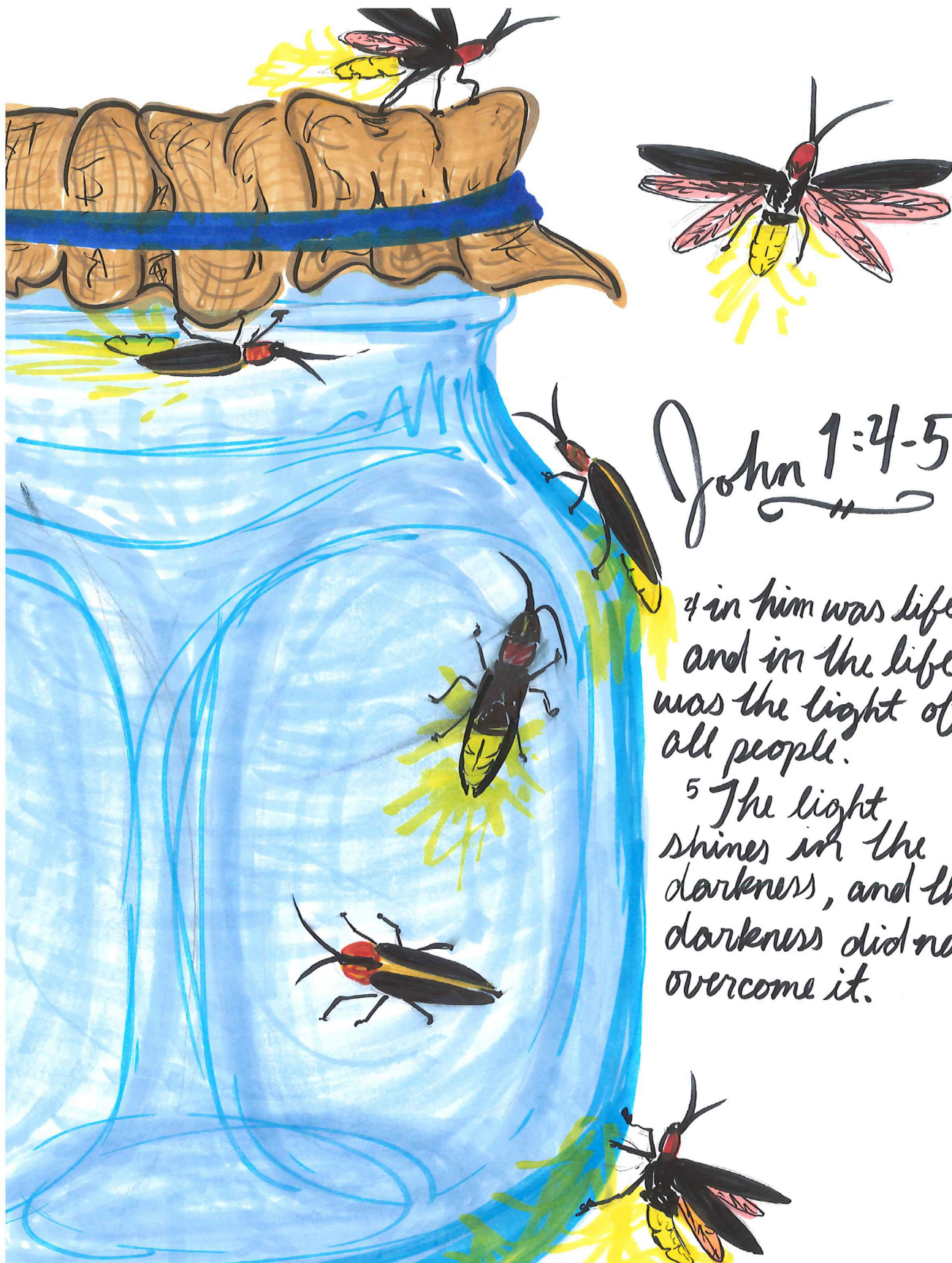
We did rebuild the nations of our World War II enemies. And many Vietnam vets have
traveled to Indo China to meet former adversaries.

So maybe the requirement of forgiveness is not so foreign to the human character after all.

Maybe Lincoln was right, and somewhere within us are “The Angels of Our Better
Nature”.



Saturday, December 14
Artwork by Christine Perry
John 1:4-5



John 1:4-5

4 in him was life,
and in the life
was the light of
all people.

5 The light
shines in the
darkness, and the
darkness did not
overcome it.

Sunday, December 15
Written by Pastor Suzanne Shoffner
Psalm 130:5-6

*⁵I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;
⁶my soul waits for the LORD more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.*



*My soul waits for
the LORD more than
those who watch
for the morning.*

Psalm 130:6

“WAIT FOR THE LORD”

My soul looks to God as I wait for healing.

Has time ever seemed to “drag on” while you waited for an answer to prayer? Are you a “night wrestler” who stays awake wondering what will happen or when you will come through a period of illness, stress or conflict?

The Psalmist had similar thoughts, feeling and questions. The writer of Psalm 130 needed to know of God’s care and forgiveness as these prayers were spoken in the middle of the night. The Psalmist was suffering. We also suffer.

During Advent, we can try to learn the value of patient waiting, but this process takes time and also the acknowledgement of our true feelings. We can “tell all” to our Creator God who loves us where we are, even though our feelings may involve anger, frustration, hurt, betrayal or fear. This is not a time to wound ourselves with phrases such as “if only” or “what if.”

Patient waiting involves suffering through the present, really entering into what is going on, all the while waiting for God’s presence to be manifested in the experience. This can lead to the kind of hope that helps get the healing process in motion.

Here are some suggestions for active healing:

- * Look honestly at your fears and address them. When brought into the light, they are less threatening.
- * Adjust your expectations. Perhaps you have been unrealistic about goals in your life. You and I are not called to be perfect. We can make changes in our lives which are easier and bring peace.
- * Move from anger to acceptance. “Let go and let God” is a wise saying which, when lived out is a significant part of our faith journey. We can let go and let God heal us.

WAIT FOR THE LORD - - - BE STRONG, TAKE HEART!

Monday, December 16
Written by John Gee
Philippians 4:6

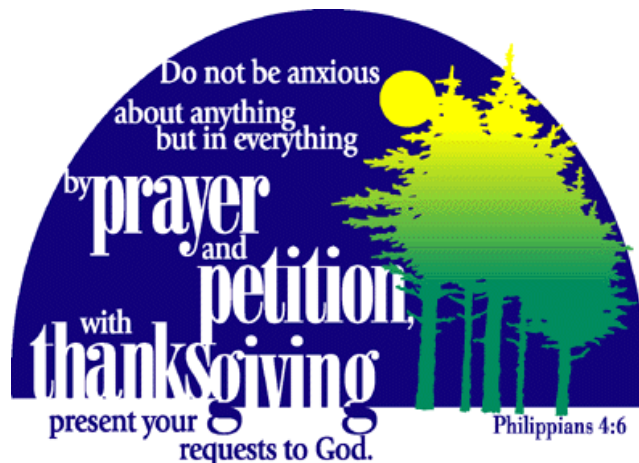
Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Do not worry about anything. WOW!! NO WORRY!! That would be great, but how do you do that? In our daily life there are so many events and situations that arise, worry could be a constant and depressing part of living.

I think back many years ago, when I was a District Rep. for an area newspaper. It was my job to check all the newspaper drop sites (Graham to McLeansville) to be sure the papers were there and the newspaper carriers were there to throw their route. This normally went very well, but if a carrier was not there by 4:00 AM, it was my job to find him or her, or throw their route myself. Most of the time, I found the carrier. But sometimes I did not, and I had to throw the route myself. On those occasions I did not know his route, so I had to rely on a cassette tape to guide me through the dark and unknown roads of the county. That could have been a time of worry. As I think back, the reason I did not worry, was because I had many years of training and experience. I was prepared to handle whichever the situation.

The same can be said of our daily worry. We have been prepared to handle worry by our daily reading of the Bible and attending church. Christ has taught us how to pray, and to know through Faith, that He is with us no matter what occurs.

Prayer: Father thank you for being with us in all we do. Be with those who travel in the dark that they make seek your light. Keep us from worrying about tomorrow, by being prepared for today.



Tuesday, December 17
Written by Debbie Riggs
Matthew 3:3

***³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,
"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.'"***

2013 has been a long year. As I look back over the year, paths have played a big part of my life. This verse could be a guide or role model for my year. To me, it means we are to prepare for the coming of Christ each and every day. How do accomplish that goal? It's really very simple when you think about it. First and foremost have a true relationship with Christ and share it with others.

Now, how are paths important? Each day, we start a new path. For me, one of my paths was ending a relationship that had been great for 2 years. My second path was watching my Dad fight a losing battle with cancer. Both paths were not what I would have chosen to walk. However, having a strong faith and a relationship with Christ has made those walks easier. How? Seeing my Dad put Christ first, even in the worst of times, showed me that preparing the way of the Lord is the path we should follow and make each day. Dad faced his path and never looked back. He knew he was headed home and that his path was the right one. We can walk the path alone or we can walk with Christ and NEVER be alone. Dad was not alone on his path. On my paths this year, I know I was not alone. The paths we choose are not always easy, but knowing Christ is taking each step with us makes the journey easier.

Christ was helping us on our paths this year. I'm glad I have chosen to follow Christ's path.

Father, thank you for walking with us. You know the paths we are taking and what we need to do to follow those paths. Help us to prepare for the season of your son's birth and to make the path easier for all who believe.

Amen



Wednesday, December 18
Written by John & Gail Pertschi
Hebrews 11:8



⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going.

I want to share a story with you. Each time I have told this story it only serves to remind me of how God blesses his people...his imperfect people.

It begins about ten years ago in South Florida. I was excited because I could finally see the light at the end of the proverbial tunnel called retirement. Oh, how grand that would be not to have to get up so early in the morning, to finally be able to do what I wanted to do! But wait, what would I do with all my time? What was it that I really wanted to do? Where would we live? Would we really be able to retire, and on, and on, and on, the questions came to mind. And of course, I just had to worry about it all. Now mind you, for most of my working life I was employed by the church and felt called to serve God in his church. So, if I retired, did my desire to serve my God retire as well? How would God have me serve him in retirement? Would I be ready to tackle something new and oh heavens, it would be in a new place with new people too. That means looking for a new church home. As you can see I was becoming a real professional at the worrying thing. I'm sure God was in his heaven thinking, "Here she comes again with the questions. I wish she could just trust me 'cause I got this whole thing handled." Enter God!

So here sat two people, very unsure of what the future would hold, holding hands praying for guidance and hoping that we would be able to retire to North Carolina, near our grown children and our grandchildren. At the right time (His time) ...right smack in the middle of one of the worst economic downturns in years and with a legendary buyers market...we were sent a real estate agent who not only sold our home of close to thirty years, but did so in less than four months; when other home sales were closer to a year. As the sale progressed there were landmines of problems, left and right. Guess what? God was always clearing the path ahead.

Okay, we're set now. The house is sold. Oh, yea, what about a place to live in North Carolina. Two weeks before the move and no place to go. Dear God, we are back again needing your help. Well, that was the beginning of April of 2011. Good Friday...a few weeks later we moved into a lovely rental home...next door to a member of guess where? You guessed it...Macedonia Lutheran Church. A few months following that we were again blessed to find a realtor...a faith filled one at that, who helped us locate our current home in Elon, a lovely home in a lovely area...more than we could have ever hoped for. In February 2012 we found ourselves thanking God for our new home, our new church home and family. It is here at Macedonia that we both have found new purpose and new ways to serve our God.

Now John and I do not equate ourselves with Abraham and Sarah, but we can relate to having to put legs to this thing called faith and fully and completely trust God for whatever our future was to hold. Of course that holds true everyday of our lives. The lesson in all this for us was and is (just like God's grace was and is) first, that this story really isn't about John and Gail Pertschi, it's about God who calls us into the future asking us to trust him, loving us, forgiving us for our weaknesses, and yet shining His light for us to follow in obedience. Amen. Amen.

Prayer: Father, we give you thanks that you love us and want only good things for us. Help us to trust you especially when we cannot see the road ahead. In you is our hope and our future. Lord, lead us to obediently follow you that our lives may witness to your love. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Thursday, December 19
Written by Connie Poovey
Matthew 2:2

Matthew 2:2 ‘...asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.”’

In October Bill and I gathered once again at Camp Royall near Pittsboro to share 3 days with friends in our fifteenth (15th!!!!) HESED retreat. HESED is the Hebrew word for God’s abundant mercy, overwhelming love, inexplicable grace... and that is exactly what we experience during every HESED retreat. People from across North Carolina – different denominations – different races – different abilities – join together to experience God’s HESED love in a new way. We don simple robes and let our imaginations take us back to the days of Christ, as we experience His birth, life, death, and resurrection in mini-dramas.

This year I had the joy of leading the drama team. Our own Macedonian, Marc Ellsworth, has been one of the ‘Props Angels’ for many years now... and he takes his role very seriously. He plans ahead to make sure he has everything organized and ready for the next drama, and he is ‘Johnny on the spot’ to hand the wise men their crowns, the shepherds their staffs, the soldiers their helmets.

However, nothing makes him more proud than to be asked to play the role of the ‘star carrier’. We have a cardboard star - painted bright white with sparkling glitter – which is mounted on a long pole, so that when Marc carries it and leads the wise men to the baby Jesus, all can see it clearly. He proudly holds it at the manger to show all the world the Christ child.

I think it is so fitting that one as humble as Marc can show us the way to Christ. It was never the strong, the wise, or the rich who Christ chose, was it? It was the simple, the humble, the teachable... those who were willing to sit at His feet and listen and learn and be led.

When Suzanne Shoffner led the Celebration Singers, one of my favorite songs was:

“Come as a child, when He calls you to follow.
Just come as a child, for His love is untold.
Come as a child, when you seek His communion,
For then all His blessings unfold.”

Prayer:

Dear Lord, As we celebrate the birth of the Christ child, help us to come to you as children – trusting, meek, and humble. Help us to focus on your Son during this season of Advent, and to take time in the midst of the busy-ness of the season to be still and KNOW that You are God.

Amen



Friday, December 20
Written by Fred Black
Luke 2:16

And they came hurriedly and found Mary and Joseph and the baby consecrated in the manger.

In the preceding verses the shepherds were visited by angels and told of the birth of Jesus. As the angels left the shepherds, the shepherds decided to go to Bethlehem to see the newborn King. God could have sent a legion of Angels, or Archangels. He could have sent an army of massive, muscular warriors. Instead he sent an infant. God sent a helpless, innocent baby to save all of mankind. The shepherds, upon hearing this news, left their fields and flocks behind to find and visit this Savior in person.

Not only did God send a helpless baby, the baby was to be born in the lowest of places, in a stable with the animals. Not in a castle, not in a place of royalty, not even in the commonness of a regular home, but in the noise and filth of a stable.

It would have been easy for the shepherds to believe the Angels if they had said to them that God had assembled an army, or sent Angels armed with the powers of Heaven. But a baby? It took faith for the shepherds to believe that a baby, an infant, was the newborn King that would be their Savior. Perhaps they weren't quite sure and that's why they took off to find this baby. However, the next verse, verse 17, says they believed and proclaimed (affirmed) their belief:

Luke 2:17 And as they saw, they affirmed the Manifestation that was proclaimed among them concerning the baby.

There's another point to the plainness of the stable: God's power and our salvation is not tied to magnificent surroundings or worldly things. Jesus could have been born in, and surrounded by, all the wealth, finery, and pomp and circumstance of a Pharaoh: instead God arranged a hay filled manger beside a cow and donkey. Why? I don't think that God wants us to be poor and suffering, I don't think the point was to shun nice things and places, or to live a life of poverty. I think the point is that gold and silver, pomp and circumstance, or the proclaimed hierarchy of some churches, can't buy our salvation and that we shouldn't fall into the trap of thinking they can. Only that helpless infant has the power to wipe our sins away and free us.

Our Savior was born in a stable beside animals. A King of a Universe we can't even conceive, much less comprehend. His power to save and transform our lives introduced to us in a plainness we should all understand. Yet it's too easy to overlook the simplicity of it. As humans we too often try to make something more sophisticated out of His birth and even His death. We try to mess it up with our ideas.

The shepherds got it:

Luke 2: 18 And whoever heard was amazed over the things that were told by them by the shepherds

(Translations: Ancient Aramaic New Testament by Vic Alexander)



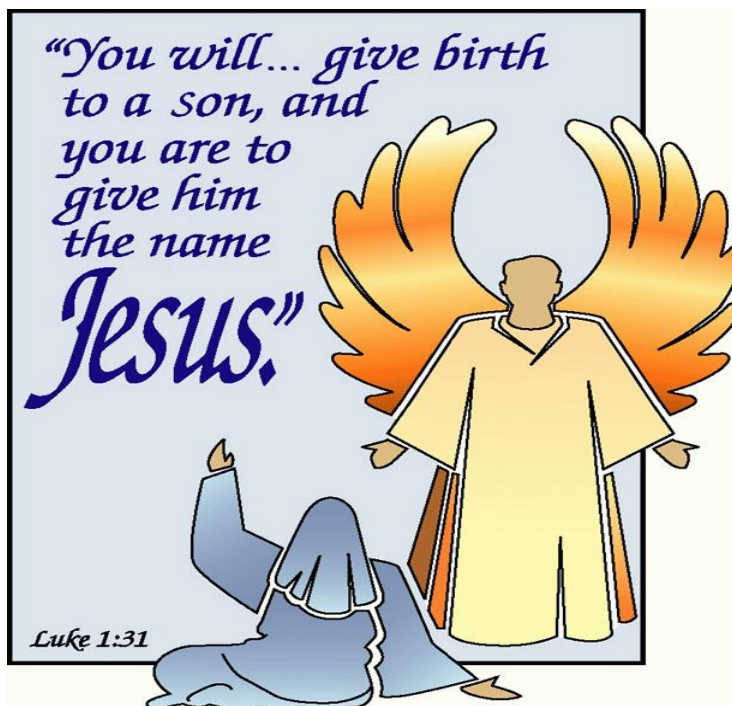
Saturday, December 21
Written by Melinda Menz
Luke 1:26-31

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus."

We've heard and can relate to the stories of those who chose to avoid God's call. They gave excuses like "I can't because I stutter" or "I don't want to go to Ninevah." Mary could have offered some very legitimate excuses like "I don't want to be a source of scandal," "I don't want to be stoned" or "I have a plan for my life and it is going well right now, thank you very much." She does not respond in any of these ways instead she responds immediately and with conviction "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Mary's response is a reminder that we should not limit God's choices. He can use each of us as we are if we trust in Him.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, help us to be ever mindful of what you are calling us to do. We ask that you strengthen our faith so that we will respond without hesitation to your call and others will identify us as a servant of God by our actions. Amen



Sunday, December 22
Written by Maddie Braxton
Luke 2:13-14

and good will
toward
men
Peace

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ " Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

Peace is a beautiful concept. For me, it is a state in which there is nothing to stress about, no papers to write at the last minute, no performances in the upcoming weekend, and no mistakes to dwell on.

Peace is a feeling of comfort. It provides reassurance that there will always be a better day.

Peace is a place within my soul where all that matters is that God is on my side.

I imagine that this multitude of angels must have been a beautiful display full of that peace. Sure, it was probably overwhelming and maybe a bit frightening at first, but it couldn't have taken long to find comfort within this holy sight.

Sometimes it is easy to forget what really matters in life. We often get caught up in our daily tasks and worries, and we obsess over lack of perfection. We constantly search for solutions to the mistakes that we have made in the past as well as all the possible mistakes that we may make in the future. Then it becomes difficult to find a sense of satisfaction in ourselves. Fortunately, the comfort of God isn't hard to find. The satisfaction that God has in us shows truly just how much He loves us and how that love is really all that we need to feel full. We all have so many things going on in our lives, let's just take a moment and really see the heavenly host.

When you do find that comfort, take it and share it. Give your glory to God as He provides your peace.

Amen.

Monday, December 23
Written by Emily Adkins
Mark 10:14-15

¹⁴But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, " Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

God's selections as "Chosen Ones" never cease to surprise humanity. The Great Creator, the God of all Power, Honor, and Glory selects as His messengers and heroes the weak and small of the earth. Some of our most beloved Bible stories are tales of the "little guy" winning: David beating Goliath, Esther saving her people, and Jesus, who came as God incarnate not as a terrible, powerful vision of war but as a tiny baby sleeping in the lowliest of places. Yet, for all these examples that the Disciples had to follow, they just didn't get it. In these verses they didn't understand that God had given the power to discover the Kingdom of Heaven to the children, the small, the lowly, the unvalued by society. Time and time again they had been shown that God doesn't judge by human standards, and in fact the "Big Wigs" of society are often those who cause God's kingdom the most trouble. And still, they tried to prevent the children from coming to Jesus, probably because there were more "important" people wanting to see Him.



"And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them."

Mark 10:16

But Jesus said, "Let the children come."

Jesus understood what the children saw in Him. I think oftentimes we misunderstand what it means to have the faith of a child. I think it may even have a bit of a negative connotation, as if we are still today trying to discredit the children who ran to Jesus. We often take having the faith of a child to mean following blindly, unquestioningly, even naively. But children don't do this. They ask questions: simple, honest questions that improve their understanding of a concept. The children would have asked of Jesus the questions the Disciples dared not for fear of sounding foolish, yet their questions were probably the ones that warranted the best answers. Children don't follow anything blindly – they are sometimes disobedient towards parents and teachers (and lifeguards at the swimming pool) but choose to obey most of the time because they love and respect these people. They don't listen to just anyone. The children that ran to Jesus ran because they recognized the Son of God for who He was – the Savior who loved them beyond understanding.

When Jesus was born, He was not what the world was expecting. He was not the Messiah the world wanted. He didn't come to overthrow Rome or to say that the Pharisees had gotten everything right all along. He was a baby, who grew into a carpenter, who grew into a rabbi that died a criminal's death on a Cross. How fitting that it was the children, whom society thought lesser than men, who were the ones that recognized Jesus for who He was before anyone else. In order to inherit the kingdom of God or to further His kingdom on earth, we have to be willing to do this ourselves. We have to ask silly questions, we have to choose to listen to what God is saying. We have to humble ourselves to the humility of a child and be willing to see God in places society says God should not be - in the broken, in the poor, in the weak, in the ugly, in the tiny manger in a stable in Bethlehem.

Monday, December 24
Written by Cherub Choir
Luke 2:7

⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.



Wednesday, December 25
Written by Ellen Greeson
Mark 16:15

And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation."

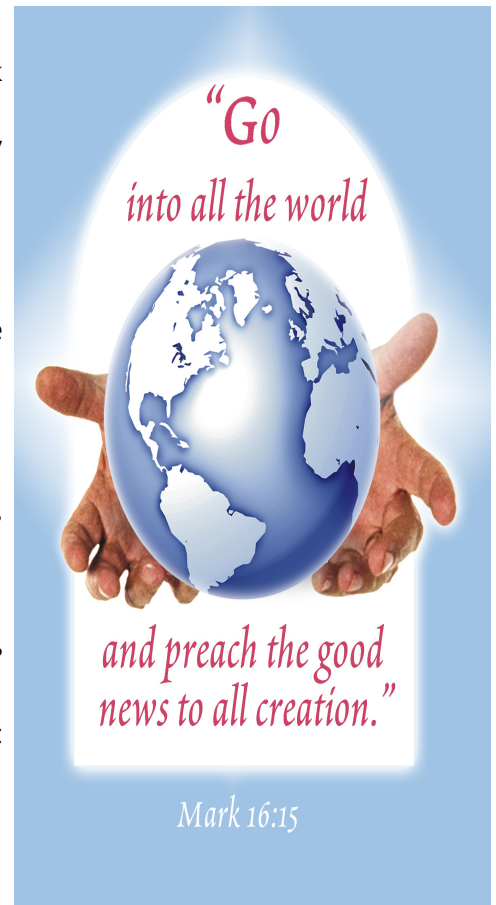
What is the best news you have ever heard? What is the best news that you have ever shared? You might think of happy family occasions like engagements or expecting babies. Those are important pieces of news that we enjoy sharing with anyone and everyone we can find. We like sharing good news with friends, family, even strangers that we strike up conversations with. We excitedly tell our news, confident in the knowledge that the listener will cherish our news and will feel honored that we have chosen to share our valuable information with them.

Our verse from the Gospel of Mark today refers to Jesus' conversation with the Eleven after his crucifixion, death and resurrection. He has appeared to them as they are eating. Jesus has important news to give them because he is soon to ascend to heaven. The news he delivers is simple and straightforward - "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." Those words packed a punch then and should continue to do so now. The disciples did as they were told and "went out and reached everywhere" as it tells us in verse 19.

Aren't we thankful that the disciples followed Jesus' directive to take the good news and share it? Think

about that for a moment. If the disciples had not shared the good news, we would never have heard that Jesus died on the cross to save us from our own sinful natures and certain punishment. Jesus took the place of you and me, paid our price so that we can live in the assurance that we will be In eternity with him.

But wait! Jesus is not just speaking to the Eleven disciples in Mark 16:15. He is surely speaking to all who believe. That's us! Who do we know or who might we come into contact with that needs to know the good news? We need only to be ready to share the good news and God himself with people in our paths that need to hear the message. We should be honored and excited that we too have been chosen to proclaim the good news "to the whole creation". This is the best news you will ever hear and the best news you will ever share! So get out there and start proclaiming!



Rev. Mrs. C. H. H.