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**2017
ADVENT
DEVOTIONAL
BY THE LAITY**

**WEST VIRGINIA
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ADVENT A TIME FOR REFLECTION

As we enter into another Advent Season, let each of us consider what it means to be called by God to spread the Gospel to those around us. In order to be effective at spreading the Good News we must be deliberate. Can the blind lead the blind? Can a person who has never fished teach someone to fish? If salt has lost its saltiness what is it good for?

Advent is the perfect time to consider, evaluate and become deliberate about our witness for Christ. First spend time in prayer! Listen for the guidance of the Holy Spirit on your life. Answer that call with faithful obedience, by saying here am I, Lord send me! We celebrated 2400 new professions of faith at Annual Conference and going forward we expect those 2400 to become disciples of Christ while at the same time celebrating another 2400 additional new professions of faith. Some might say, making disciples is the job of the pastors. OR I am not able to share my faith with others. Why do we delegate these tasks to Clergy? Clergy comprise only two-thirds of one percent of all United Methodists in the world. If we would mobilize all 12.7 million United Methodist lay persons in our world (which by the way makes us the largest denomination in the world) just think what we could accomplish. How do we do that? One person at a time, starting with each of us! God is calling! A single candle on a dark night can be seen two miles away. Let YOUR light shine.

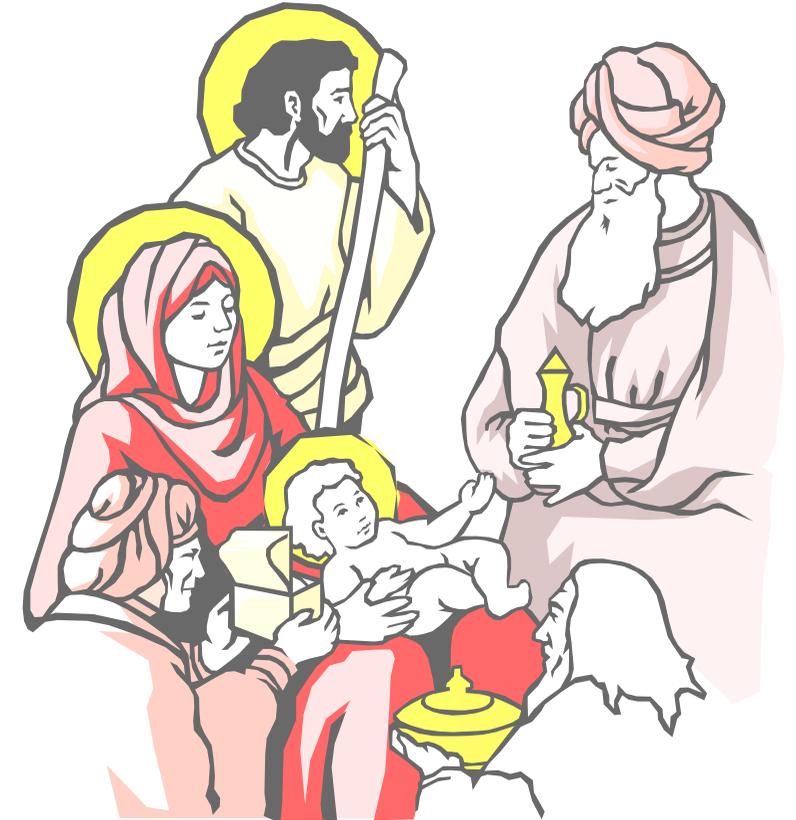
- Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age."

Matthew 28:19-20 CEB

I welcome your questions, comments, suggestions and prayers.

Rich Shaffer, WV Conference Lay Leader,

WV.Lay.Leader@Gmail.com



**This devotional was compiled by the Laity of the
West Virginia Conference of
The United Methodist Church.
Please meditate on each daily reading and pray for God's
Spirit to direct your life in a special way during this
Advent Season.**

WE ARE GOD'S PEOPLE

ISAIAH 64: 1-9

Sunday, December 3, 2017

Isaiah 64:8-9 - Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

Today's scripture is a lament about God's punishment for the people's sins. It is particularly applicable today because we, too, have turned away from God and His love for us. As a nation, as a church, and as a people, we have let other things become more important than our relationship with God. We search for peace but there is no peace because we have stopped putting God first. I find the events of our daily life and the headlines very unsettling.

But, I find hope in remembering that we are God's people—imperfect, granted—but still His people. The people that He loved so much that He would send His only Son into the world to redeem us. The people that He knows by name and calls us His own.

During this precious season of advent let us become the people God calls us to be, disciples making disciples. For us the message of advent should be God's gift of the everyday presence of His Son. We do not go down this road alone, because He is always with us.

Prayer: Oh Lord. You are our Father and we are Your people. Forgive us when we transgress against You. Forgive us when we doubt your power in our world today. Mold us and make us into the people you would have us be. Amen.

Judy Raines, Trinity/Bluefield

BRING US BACK

Monday, December 4, 2017

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

As I sit here at the computer contemplating the unseasonable-like fall we are having, watching the leaves turn to all their glorious fall colors, I recognize that the Advent and Christmas seasons are the farthest things from my mind. And as I study the Scripture that I chose months ago for today's Advent devotion, I am wondering why I chose this one and more importantly what it has to do with Advent.

Psalm 80 is Asaph's prayer to God on behalf of the northern kingdom of Israel in which he asked God to bring back His people to a right position, a position in which they face God. He prayed for their restoration, deliverance, and revival because they had turned from God. Three times in his prayer, Asaph prayed for God to be present with them again...v. 3, 7, and 19.

Even though this Psalm is not considered Messianic, it has the overtones of one. Thus, as we prepare ourselves during this Advent season to celebrate again the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, may we take away from this Psalm the following thoughts and pray upon them.

1. "O Shepherd of Israel" – Christ is the great and Good Shepherd, in whom we find guidance and care.
2. "...come and save us" – Just as Israel needed to be rescued from danger and from her waywardness, we, too, need rescued --- and this comes from the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
3. "...make your face shine upon us..." – God has shown His light by giving us the gift of His son, Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel; come and save us from danger, from our enemies, from our sinful ways; and make Your face shine upon us. Amen.

Pat Mick, Chairperson, Board of Global Ministries

GRACE UPON GRACE

Monday, December 25, 2017

John 1: 1-14

As a child growing up in the Episcopal Church this was the most familiar Scripture reading to me. I sang in the Junior Choir as soon as I was old enough and while that choir sang at the children's service every Sunday, I don't remember that we had a Gospel passage read to us each week. But that choir also sang for the Christmas Morning service and this was the Gospel reading then, as now. And I remember it from then, as an adult now in the Senior Choir. This was read from a pulpit that was elevated high and so we had to raise our eyes towards heaven. I remember the church being dim. And I remember a great sense of mystery, awe, and intimacy for all since that church was full even though it was large.

In the beginning was the Word, Logos. Look at these other meanings of Logos: ground, plea, expectation, speech, account, reason, proportion, discourse. It also came to mean a principle of order and knowledge to philosophers. Think on these as they relate to Jesus.

He is our ground, the foundation for our lives. His plea was in His life, and it calls to us. We have expectation of life in and with Him. He gives us speech when we don't have the words on our own. The account of his life in the Gospels is the story we tell to the nations.

That story is what it means for the world that Jesus, God, came in lowliness, to live among us as an itinerant preacher, and to die a criminal's death, for us.

John says Jesus is the Light of the world. He is the illumination to guide our paths. Light can also be the look or expression in someone's eyes. What shines from our eyes? What do others see in us? Light, an area brighter or paler than its surroundings; do we show as brighter, or at least paler, than the darkness around us?

Jesus, Incarnate God, Logos. Born in the night past, adored by shepherds and angels. "Alleluia" the angels sang. "Alleluia" the earth replies. "Alleluia" we reply with heart and voice this day as we rejoice in this yearly celebration of the coming of Emmanuel, God with us.

Prayer: Alleluia! Praise God, for the Light in the darkness, the Guide for my path. Help me be the light for others to see Christ through me. Praise God, Amen.

Jane Arnold, Capon Bridge UMC

THE BIRTH OF KING JESUS

Sunday, December 24, 2017

Isaiah 9:2-7

Isaiah 9:6; For to us a child is born, to us a child is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

One of the passages we read at Christmas, is the second chapter of Matthew, where the wise men came from the East to Jerusalem, following a star. "They came into the house of Joseph, fell down and worshiped the Christ Child." The Bible says, "when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to him; gold, frankincense and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11). Jesus was born to be King. His salvation and his Kingdom apply to our present world problems. His Kingship also has future implications. The sovereignty of Jesus Christ extends in an unbroken line throughout the ages.

Hidden from view now, He will come again, according to scriptures in God's time and He will reign in righteousness. Today wise people in these troubled times are asking, "Where is He who has been born King?"

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8.) He was King yesterday, He is King today, and He will be King tomorrow.

From His very birth, Christ was recognized as King. Something about him inspired allegiance, loyalty and homage. Wise men brought him gifts. Shepherds fell down and worshiped him. Angels, knowing more than men, knew that he was truly King. However, the great majority of earth's billions have not paid homage to him. They have never acknowledged him as King of their hearts.

Does Christ reign in your heart? Is he Lord and King? The Bible says "If we will confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe in our hearts that God has raised Him from the dead, we will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

Prayer: Dear Father, we know that you are King of our hearts. We know by following you, we will truly know eternal peace and life. Please always live in my heart and transform my life. In your blessed name. Amen.

Ken K. Shanes, Lay Leader Mon Valley District, Certified Lay Servant

GREETINGS THIS ADVENT SEASON

Tuesday, December 5, 2017

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Greetings this Advent season. As we look back to that very first Christmas and all that led up to our Savior's birth, as we look forward to our present celebrations and as we prepare for Christ second coming, I am reminded how much I love the season of Advent. In today's scripture reading we see Paul greeting the congregation in Corinth. Paul knew that he was going to be addressing some problems that had arisen within the congregation since he had last seen them: yet his greeting was filled with love. Paul shared his thankfulness for their relationship with Jesus Christ and reminded them that they were not just living for the present. God had given them every Spiritual gift they needed to remain strong as they waited for the return of Christ. In essence he greeted them with Love, instruction and Hope.

The demands of the season sometimes cause us to rely on our own efforts and we lose focus of the true meaning of the season. If we begin to get caught in today's problems, it's time to take a break and reread Paul's greetings to Corinth. Remember, God loves us so much that he has invited us into a relationship with Jesus Christ. We share in the Love and Hope that Paul shared with the church in Corinth. God has Spiritually gifted us, so that we may remain strong until the return of Christ. This Advent season greet one another as Paul greeted the church in Corinth.

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 1:3)

Prayer: Thank you Lord for the gift of relationship with You. Teach us to love all those around us especially those in our churches. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Anita Tracy, Project Director / Church and Community Worker

KEEP AWAKE

Mark 13:24-37

Wednesday, December 6, 2017

Mark 13 begins with one of the disciples commenting on how large the temple is. Jesus tells them that the days of the temple, which was the center of Jewish worship and life, are numbered and it will be destroyed and replaced with something new. He was then asked when this was going to happen and how would people know? Jesus says it is going to get very dark and very scary and things are going to change.

The word “Advent” is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning “coming; it also can mean “the arrival of a notable person, thing or event”. Often the events – the things that come into our lives - are good things; but what happens when those events, those arrivals, are not only unexpected but scary and painful? Life changes, our world falls apart, we lose hope, and it seems very dark. “Be alert”, Jesus says, “stay awake.” The darkness is not our enemy, as much as is falling asleep in it. We fall asleep whenever fear controls us, and we are deceived into believing there is nothing worth waiting or watching for.

Jesus tells us to remember that when the branches of the fig tree puts forth leaves, summer is near. When the darkness overtakes your life, be still and know that light and hope and love and joy are near. This is being in Advent – staying awake knowing that we will never be abandoned to the darkness; that the light of Christmas always comes.

Prayer: Oh Holy Spirit, help us to be patient in our advent times. Remind us that especially during the times of painful change, you are with us and within us, and always loving us. Help us to stay awake and alert during our times of darkness. Remind us that the darkness will not last forever – the Son Rise will come.

Starr Weaver, Certified Lay Speaker
First UMC, Shinnston WV, Mon Valley District

GLORIFYING AND PRAISING

Luke 2:1-20

Saturday, December 23, 2017

Luke 2:20; “The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”

Frequently I encounter the question, “Why do you believe in the Bible?” I usually accept this inquiry as really meaning “Does the Bible persuade you that there is a God?” My answer is that I am not persuaded by the Bible to believe in God, but that I am persuaded by God to believe in the Bible.

Just like the shepherds in the Christmas story, I have seen and heard things that are just as I have been told about in the Bible. I have experienced God’s work in my life as amazing as manna in a desert, and whispers in the darkness. I often speak my conviction that “Timing is the basic proof of God in my life”. What I need is where I am, when I need it.

People have been able to explain the long chain of weather, tide and geographical conditions that would have allowed Moses to lead God’s people across a sea and destroy the Egyptian army that followed them. Yes, it explains how it could happen, but the miracle is in the timing, when the nation of Israel needed it.

Likewise, God has proven to me that He exists and I am able to frame my paradigm in that belief. I believe that the Bible reflects the God that I know and tells stories of God’s people who are just like me.

It isn’t Bible stories that will allow me to convince my neighbors, but my own testimony of what He has done this week for us all. As we go out each day we must recognize His work.

We all need to come back with the good news “glorifying and praising God for all the things” we’ve seen!

Prayer: Dear Lord, Once we know You, we can see you in your world, and in your work with us. Bless us Lord with your choir of voices in the night and the fulfillment of your promises in the dawn. Strengthen us for the testimony that we must share in the world, to transform it! Amen

Stephen Prince, Westover UM Church

THE BIRTH OF JESUS FORETOLD

Luke 1:26-38

Friday, December 22, 2017

Luke 1:38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

As I contemplate this scripture of the upcoming birth of our Savior, it takes me back to when I was a little girl, maybe six years old or so. I was attending Sunday School in a small community church in Nicholas County, and I so loved my Sunday School teacher. Her name was Leoane. And another thing I loved was the beautiful mural she put up every year at Christmastime. I remember her telling us that it was getting too old to keep, and that she was going to discard it. I was so upset that she could throw something so beautiful away, that I asked for it.

The mural had three or four panels depicting the scenery of Bethlehem, almost covering the whole wall. At the far right high upon a barren, rocky hill, I remember were the three well adorned Wise Men and their huge camels, against the bluest skies. Then descending the hill, all I can remember about it was the grass was growing a bright green color. Then far to the left, a huge village of small homes and barns. Atop one home, a bright silvery light sparkled in the sky. .

I'm not sure what happened to the mural, but I do remember Mom helping me put it up many Christmases after that year; using tape, thumbtacks, whatever we could, to secure it. It was, then, that the season of Christmas was starting in our home.

It's my prayer this year that we all can reflect on small ways that Christ comes to us every Christmas.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for the many years that I was able as a child to learn about You and your love for me. Thank You for loving us all so much that you died for us. Thank You, also, for your mother, Mary, who gracefully accepted her responsibility to love and nurture You. Help us in this Christmastime, to love and care for others. Amen.

Millie Gonzalez, Fayetteville United Methodist Church

COMFORT FOR GOD’S PEOPLE

Read: Isaiah 40:1-11

Thursday, December 7, 2017

“Comfort, comfort my people! Says your God. Speak compassionately to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her compulsory service has ended, her penalty has been paid...” Isaiah 40:1-2a (CEB)

Oh the struggle!! I wrestle with myself to resist wonderful comfort foods. During holiday times, it’s even worse. (I’m pretty sure God doesn’t intend this as a consequence of my celebration of our Lord’s birth!)

In the book of Isaiah, the first 39 chapters are written as a warning of the coming judgement and destruction, and a call for repentance to an exiled nation. Now, in Chapter 40, this is “counterbalanced by promises of deliverance, forgiveness, and renewal.” (*Wesley CEB Study Bible, p. 901*) While today’s passage talks of hope for Israel, oh how much it speaks to us of the hope and comfort of our Savior Jesus Christ!

Verses 3-5 tell us that “The Lord’s glory will appear” to straighten paths and level the way forward for Israel. Likewise, his glory gave us Jesus Christ to smooth out the rough places and lift us up out of the valleys. Verses 6-8 reveal that “our God’s word will exist forever.” We celebrate Jesus’ manifestation in the human form during this season, but we know that he is Alpha and Omega, from the beginning to the end: eternal. And verses 9-11 tell us to proclaim from the “high mountain” that the Lord our God is coming triumphant and with strength, “bringing his reward with him.” As the angels proclaimed to the Shepherds, so must we proclaim to the world the triumph and reward of Jesus’ glorious birth!

Oh what comforting words we hear in this passage from Isaiah as we come to realize that this sweet, sinless baby was born to bring us deliverance, forgiveness, and renewal. Christ was born to pay our penalty and gather us as a shepherd into his arms and onto his lap!! This is TRUE comfort: not comfort food – COMFORTER JESUS!!

Prayer: Compassionate Father, we are comforted by your words that endure forever, just as the love, renewal, and hope of your eternal son, Jesus Christ, comforts us. We rejoice in the birth of our redeemer. He paid the penalty for our sins; therefore, we go forth and proclaim his forgiveness and comfort to the world. Amen.

Patricia Ramsey, Certified Lay Speaker, Wellsburg/Franklin Charge

OPEN YOUR EARS AND LISTEN

Friday, December 8, 2017

Psalm 85 1-2 & 8-12

Psalm 85:8; I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly.

It has been said that the book of Psalm are groups of small prayers, others say they are songs that need to be sung praising the Lord in all the glory we can render. Either way, it is easy for us to read the spoken words. But we sometimes, don't take the time to understand the meaning or listen closely to what we have just read. Your teachings are very down to earth using common words that are easy to understand, if we would only hear them the way they are written. The teachings are a set of rules for the way we should live our life's, but we are so quick to forget and then to go astray. You have made each of us different in so many ways. You have given us the wisdom and knowledge with the ability to go forth in life to make this place a better place to live, if we would only use the things you have provided. We do not listen even through you talk to us every day, sometimes when we are down a person will just thank us for doing a good job, this is one of the ways you are taking to us and it certainly lifts ones spirt. There is no way we can repay you for all you have given us, we can try to be better disciples and do a better job of bring those that have gone astray back into the flock to be better Christians.

We offer this small **prayer**. "Heavenly father, you have brought us out of bondage, have forgiven our sins and have let us hear the spoken words through the teaching. As we go forth and enjoy your salvation of mercy and truth we will meet together and righteousness will look down on us from heaven. Let us go forth to be good disciples in honor of your glory by teaching others and spreading the spoken words of the LORD. Amen"

Don Davis, WV Conference UM Men President

A GREAT MYSTERY REVEALED

Thursday, December 21, 2017

Romans 16:25-27; "Praise God! He can make you strong by means of my good news, which is the message about Jesus Christ. For ages and ages this message was kept secret, but now at last it has been told. The eternal God commanded his prophets to write about the good news, so that all nations would obey and have faith. And now, because of Jesus Christ, we can praise the only wise God forever! Amen." (Contemporary English Version)

Do you enjoy mystery stories? I really do! When I was younger, I loved the Columbo series on TV and now I love reading the mystery stories of authors such as Michael Connelly, Sue Grafton and John Grisham. So if you too are a mystery fan, you may be intrigued by today's Scripture passage.

These ending verses of Romans 16 are a prayer of praise to God. Paul says up until now there has been a mystery surrounding the revelation of God. But through the birth of Jesus, God's glory and grace have been revealed in a world-changing way. Paul reminds the Christians in Rome (and us) to live as Christians and to spread the Gospel to the whole world. While we are celebrating the Advent of our Savior, Jesus is also the reason for the season. We celebrate Advent to remind us that the mystery Paul spoke of in this passage in no longer a mystery or a secret.

Romans 16:25-27 is a song that praises God for God's work through Jesus. The mystery of salvation was revealed on that first Christmas long ago. The angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary was the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret throughout history. But as believers in Christ we are in on the secret! The mystery is the Good News! Jesus came into the world, died for our sins, was raised to life and he will return! God's plan for our salvation has unfolded in full splendor! Praise God!

Prayer: Thank you Lord for revealing Your great mystery to us and for sending to us so great a gift as Your son Jesus. As we anticipate the celebration of Jesus' arrival, we will remember to give our praise and honor to Him. Amen.

Sharon Miller, Warwood United Methodist Church, Wheeling, WV

GOD MAKES PROMISES TO DAVID

Psalm 89: 19-26

Wednesday, December 20, 2017

In this passage Ethan remembers the promise God made to David. He said that all God's people could see God in a vision. A vision is like a dream. They could also hear what God said. He told them that David was to be their king. In those days they made someone king by anointing them, by pouring oil over them. They made the oil from olives, which grew on the trees in Israel. The hands and arm of God means the things that he does on earth. The horn, a horn on the head of an animal, makes it look strong.

Here God makes David strong. The hands over the sea and rivers mean that David is strong in these places. David will call God "My Father".

David is promised to have God's power to accomplish God's will. Without God's help we are weak and powerless, inadequate for even the simplest spiritual task. But when we are filled with God's Spirit, his power flows through us and our accomplishment will exceed our expectations.

Whenever you feel you cannot go on in your life, you must trust that God will be there for you, you must ask Him into your heart. He may call you in a dream, or a vision. You may hear him calling you, so listen for the smallest sound. He will make you strong and equip you with what you need to do his work!

Prayer: Dear Lord of all, open our ears and hearts that we may hear you when you call us, and may the Holy Spirit be upon us to carry us in our daily lives to do the work you have for us to do. Bless all your people and comfort those you know that need you. In Jesus name. Amen.

Melanie Herr, Johnson Memorial UMC, Huntington, WV

HURRY UP AND WAIT

2 Peter 3:8-15a

Saturday, December 9, 2017

Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame. – Revelation 16:15 (NKJV)

"Time flies when you're having fun." We've all heard that saying, and probably most of us have said it, either seriously or sarcastically. We have also spent time waiting on something ...a checkout line, a traffic light, a doctor's appointment. We tend to get frustrated if the wait is too long. How about waiting for the birth of a child or grandchild, news about our own or a loved one's medical condition, or the arrival of a special visitor? We tend to get anxious if the wait is too long. Waiting is an inevitable part of life. Do we do it graciously? How do we use that time?

Peter is telling us not to be anxious as we await the return of Christ. While it may seem like a long time to us, it is a blink of an eye to God. Peter tells us in verse 9 that our Lord is "...not willing that any should perish but that all come to repentance." In His delay, Jesus is not being delinquent in keeping His promise to return, but providing plenty of time for all to find salvation.

We are also told that when Christ does return it will be as a thief in the night; when we least expect it. We are asked, what manner of person ought we to be? Should we wait in stress, frustration or anxiety? No! We should await Jesus' return with peace and joy, living a Godly life and striving for holiness.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to be diligent in living a life pleasing to You, as we await Your glorious return. Amen.

Roger Dahmer, Certified Lay Servant, Franklin, WV, Mt. Horeb UMC

JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

MARK 1:1-18

Sunday, December 10, 2017

Mark 1:3, “a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

I think I speak for most people when I say that there are very few positive things about shopping. In fact, I can think of only two: 1. the electronics department and 2. the food sample tables. Do you know about the sample tables? These are tables— seen all over many large supermarkets—manned by one individual cooking sample foods on the spot and inviting you to partake. Now the host’s goal for the sample table is different from my goal for the sample table. Their goal is to get me to purchase something; my goal is to fill up on free samples. Sometimes I think my grandkids go to the supermarket with me just to get free samples. After they (we) get full then we move on to the electronics department.

We sometimes treat Jesus like a supermarket sample table. We partake for our own good, but we’re not interested in “buying in” to the product itself. Why do you follow Jesus? Is it for self-interest or divine interest? The Gospel of Mark compels us to answer the question, “Do I follow Jesus because of who He is, or because of what He can do for me?” Mark anxiously tells his readers in the first verse of the book, Who is Jesus? He is the “Son of God”. Peter and Andrew, James and John— they all responded with haste. While their initial response is immediate; the text later demonstrates that they certainly didn’t know what they were getting themselves into. Although these disciples follow Jesus immediately, the rest of the Gospel shows that they failed to consider the cost. And the cost turned to be too high; they all abandoned Jesus before ultimately coming back to Him.

As we see John the Baptist urging repentance in the desert, we listen carefully to his message and prepare carefully for Jesus’ second coming. Yet we also see John the Baptist and remember that God is faithful to all his promises. He sent the great forerunner—John the Baptist. He sent the Savior. He forgives our sins. He saved us!

Remember, the goal of the food sample table at your local supermarket is that you would buy the product. The samples are not designed to satisfy completely; they are meant to validate the quality of the product on the shelf or in the freezer and as a result persuade you to purchase. Likewise, Jesus’ miracles are not intended to satisfy completely; they are designed to validate the true identity of Jesus and as a result persuade you to embrace Him. Jesus desires for us to do more than merely sample for our own good. He wants us to consume, to purchase, and to entirely buy in. Do you treat Jesus like a sample table?

Why are you following Jesus? Are you in it to get something from Him, or are you in it for Him alone?

Prayer: Lord God, you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for your Son to come. We now ask that his message of repentance ring clearly in our hearts as we prepare carefully for your Son to return once more. Keep us watchful and ready! Amen.

Krista Cather, First-Memorial UMC, Williamson

MIRACLE OF INCARNATION

Psalm 89:1-4

Tuesday, December 19, 2017

In Psalm 89 **God** is quoted thusly: “I have made a covenant with my chosen one” Immediately one thinks God must be talking about Jesus, the Messiah. But verse 3 shows that one is wrong. ...”I have sworn to my servant **David**, ‘I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.”

Now we know that David’s actual throne was far from being “firmly established through all generations.” According to Matthew, the throne collapsed after only fourteen generations. So was Ethan the Ezrahite misquoting God? Probably not. It’s just that we, like the Israelites, are so focused on Earthly things that we can’t see God’s true intentions.

Matthew apparently loved genealogy; he was so careful to show his Jewish readers that Jesus was descended from David. But that line of succession also missed the point. Later Matthew quotes John the Baptist to indicate that spiritual lineage beats physical genetics. (Matthew 3:9)

“David’s line” mentioned in the psalm refers to you and me, not to the physical offspring of David and his descendants. Through the miracle of the incarnation, you and I and all who place our faith in Jesus are the true children of the promise. That’s what we celebrate in this advent season – that through the Son of God and his redemptive life, death, and resurrection, you and I have entered the true family of God. The line has continued not through flesh and blood, but through the spirit acting in and through the body of Christ – again, you and me. The line will continue, as God promised, regardless of what I do, but I want to do my part. I want to be an instrument that allows the Word to be spread to others, so that they too may become part of the “line of David” and become heirs of the promise.

Our celebration of Advent offers the perfect opportunity to gently inform the world of the King and his Kingdom. Let us be careful to celebrate in a way that draws people in, and not in a manner that makes them feel excluded.

Prayer: Lord, prepare the hearts of the people we share the Good News with, to be receptive. Amen.

Neal Lacey, First UMC Beckley, Raleigh Shared Ministries, Member of Conference Justice and Advocacy

DAVID AND GOD'S TEMPLE

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Monday, December 18, 2017

“The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you:... Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”

My wife and I live in a thirty year old trailer that she owned before we married. It's just a single-wide, on a lot that she owns, she has clear title to it, doesn't owe a mortgage, it is a simple place. Episodically we go “house hunting”, we have the means to make a pretty good down payment and to afford the payment, but we've struggled with making that commitment to a house when we aren't quite sure where we “ought” to be. We think about the “drive to work”. We had the short-term concerns about what school district we would be in for our daughter in high school, but in the long run, where has God called us to be?

We still haven't resolved that but as I look at today's story about David and the building of the temple, I take hope in the promise God made to him. David had built a cedar mansion for himself, but when he committed himself to building God's house, God responded with this promise for a house that will endure, forever.

Prayer: Lord, we are your people! We are eager to build up your house, to prepare your Kingdom here on earth. We will not despair or be anguished about where we will dwell here and now, but look forward to the promise as you've given it to David, of a house, as in John 14:3 “I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” That is where I want to be, Lord, in a new house, with you, forever. Amen.

Stephen Prince, Westover UM Church

THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOR

Isaiah 61:1-4

Monday, December 11, 2017

Isaiah 61:1-2 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (ESV)

As I am writing this devotional, Hurricane Harvey is devastating southeastern Texas. I am witnessing via television and Facebook some of the miseries that God's people are experiencing: mourning for lost loved ones, loss of home and personal belongings, lack of clothing and food supplies. How this brings home to me the experience of the June 27th, 2016 and the flood's aftermath in our area. I remember the rushing water through our front yard, the destruction of roadways and homes, the loss of lives and those who barely escaped with their lives.

Yet, God was with us and the Spirit of the Lord was there in the hearts of all who gave their time and resources to “raise up” the fallen, to rebuild “a beautiful headdress” from the destroyed homes, to “bind up the brokenhearted” with tons of food and clothing. I again see this Spirit in the hearts of those assisting the storm victims in Texas, as churches open their buildings with families to overflowing, as many risk their own lives to rescue others and the outpouring of food and clothing to those in need.

As we are approaching the Christmas season, everyone thinks of the Spirit of “giving”, just as we do when there is an emergency crisis. But we need to remember, the need for us to give is year-round, every day, every hour. There are families whose homes are unlivable; there are children who are hungry every day; there are lonely folks who just need a hug or a smile, all in our local neighborhoods. May we see the need and fill it to overflowing.

Prayer: Dear God, Heavenly Father, May the “Spirit” fill our hearts daily to raise up the brokenhearted and give ourselves wholly to your work here on earth. You have blessed us with many talents and resources; may we use them for others. AMEN

Karen K. Grafton, Mt. Olive UMC, Greenbrier District, Lookout, WV

SALVATION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

Isaiah 9:6-7 and Isaiah 61:8-11

Tuesday, December 12, 2017

Isaiah 61:11: As the earth puts out its growth, and as a garden grows its seeds, so the Lord God will grow righteousness and praise before all the nations.

Rejoice, Rejoice and be glad!!! Sing a new song!!!! The Prince of Peace is coming to establish a new world, the Kingdom of God on earth. This little babe will grow into a man that will bring salvation to all who accept him. He will be a wonderful counselor. He will show acceptance, justice and love to all forever !!!!!

The Kingdom of God was established by Christ years ago. Today we, as followers of Jesus Christ, are embolden to become more like Christ in our daily walk with him. We have been called to bring salvation to all, to accept all, to act justly for all, and love to all we encounter.

During this Advent season take a moment and renew your vow to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. Bring one to salvation, be accepting, bring justice to those in need and show love to the unloved. As in Micah 6:8 "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Prayer: Heavenly Father thank you for sending your son to lead your people. Father God lead me in my daily walk with Christ to be more like him. To show mercy, to be just with all, to accept and love all. May I listen for the Holy Spirit to lead me. Amen.

Fred Herr, Certified Lay Servant, Johnson Memorial UMC, Huntington, WV

THE WAY OF THE LORD

John 1:19-28

Sunday, December 17, 2017

John 1:23; He said I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaiah.

When John the Baptist came, his role was to point to one man in the midst of the crowd and set Him forth as the Lord. John's identification of Jesus as the Christ could pass so far as His outward appearance was concerned, but God Himself declared from heaven that Jesus is His beloved Son.

The priests only came to see Jesus because of curiosity and were not expecting to hear a message from God that they could apply to their lives. Sometimes we attend times of worship not ready to receive the Spirit life and faith from Christ Jesus.

John proclaimed the most exciting news that ever greeted the ear of man: Christ came into the world to save sinners. As followers of Christ we are also called to spread the gospel of His redeeming love. The way of the Lord means that we are to take the Word of God seriously, to be receptive to the spiritual challenging parts of scripture, to not use the Word of God to say just the things we want to hear but believe what the Word of God truly says, and not to deceive ourselves into thinking that hearing the Word of God is the same as doing the Word of God.

Prayer: Almighty God, guide us by your gracious hand to do your will, your way. Lead us as we proclaim the truth and authority of scripture. Thank you that the life we are now living is lived in the faith of your Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

David Byrd, Morris Memorial UMC, Charleston, WV

IS IT TIME YET?

Saturday, December 16, 2017

John 1:6-8; There was a man named John who was sent by God. He came to tell people about the Light. Through him all people could hear about the Light and believe. John was not the Light, but he came to tell people about the Light. (International Children's Bible)

"Is it time yet?" - "I can hardly wait!"

Anticipation. There's plenty of it in Advent! It's exciting to be looking forward to something. When John the Baptist was ministering, people had been waiting forever (so it seemed) for the Messiah. What a privilege it was for John to prepare the way for, then baptize, Jesus the Son of God! John had known Jesus since before birth, when he leaped in Elizabeth's womb at the presence of Mary and the yet-to-be-born Jesus. Now 30 years later John paved the way from anticipation to proclamation. The time was upon them.

One of my favorite books is *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* by Barbara Robinson. (It's also a movie – 5 stars from me!) A family of wayward children work themselves into a church's traditional Christmas pageant, changing their own lives and the church's outlook! Gladys Herdman, "with her skinny legs and her dirty sneakers sticking out from under her robe," portrays the Angel of the Lord: "*Hey! Unto you a Child is born*, she hollered, as if it was, for sure, the best news in the world."

We have that privilege – and responsibility – to proclaim that Jesus is our Savior. What a joy to know this and to share this precious news. We can openly tell folks about Jesus. We can sing it like the angels. We can show it by the way we live. Will others see the Light in our eyes, our words, and our deeds? There was a lady in our Willow Chapel congregation who absolutely glowed with the Light of God's love, especially when she received communion. May we, too, reflect God's Light so well that others may feel the warmth of His Love and Goodness. In this holy Advent season, let's step up our sharing. Let's ask God to work through us with His Joy and Love so that others may know the Light and believe. *Hey! Gloria in excelsis Deo!*

Prayer: Dear God our Father, thank you for your Son Jesus, the Light of the world. We are ever so grateful for the privilege of sharing your love with everyone. Help us to do it lovingly, with enthusiasm and joyful smiles, shining with your brilliant Light. In Jesus' name we ask for your favor and blessing. Amen.

Patty Moffett Austin, Cacapon Charge, Potomac Highlands District

IN GOD'S TIME

Wednesday, December 13, 2017

Psalm 126

Psalm 126: 3, The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad.

When I was young child I felt like I was held captive. I lived in a home where we went to church but my parents didn't live the same life as they did on Sunday. My life as a child wasn't easy and I recall nights spent praying and crying to God that he would change my parents. Looking back it seems like I prayed and cried for years and nothing changed. When I was 15, I could not take the abuse anymore and attempted to kill myself. At the age of 15 I didn't really know what I was doing. I wasn't strong enough to do anything more than take a bunch of pills. God saw me at my lowest point in life and picked me up.

I have learned that God answers our prayers in His time not ours. Psalm verse 5 says, "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy." There are times when we have to hold on a little longer, pray a little harder, and fight a little longer. God will always hear us. He never leaves us. God helped me, things changed in my life. My parents divorced when I was 16 and the abuse stopped. It took 6 years of praying, 6 years of abuse but God never left me. Even though I thought I was alone, I was never alone. God was always with me. God will never leave you no matter how hard your life is, or how far you have fallen from God. There is always a path back, and that is prayer.

Prayer: Dear Lord, protect the little children who have lost hope. Let us extend a helping hand to **all** of God's children. Amen.

Teresa Prince, Westover UM Church

MARY PRAISES GOD

Thursday, December 14, 2017

Luke 1:46-55

Luke 1:46-47, With all my heart I glorify the Lord! In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior.

There is great excitement and many preparations that need to be made to be ready for a new addition to a family. The arrival of a new child, especially the first child, brings with it many changes to the family dynamic. When the parents are not married that puts another layer of complicated change into the already stressful anticipation. This was where Mary found herself. Not only could she be ostracized from the community for being pregnant out of wedlock, she could be put to death by stoning. But, Mary's faith was great. She believed the promises God had made to her through the angel. The angel told her she would have a son, God's Son. Therefore she believed God would also protect her so the child would be born. There were so many ways Mary could have doubted God. First an angel spoke to her. People would think she was crazy! She was pregnant but she had not been with a man, sure, OK, that makes no sense. She was carrying God's Son. That sounds like a definition of blasphemy to me.

But Mary's visit to Elizabeth confirmed what she already believed. Mary knew what God had promised and she accepted the blessing God had for her. In this scripture Mary breaks out in song praising God for the high honor He had entrusted to her. Here she expresses her joy of being a mother and especially a mother to the Son of God. Mary in her humility felt unworthy to be used in this way, but she knew what an honor God had rewarded her for her faithfulness. Her praise emanated from the depths of her soul.

Prayer: Dear Lord, let us also be willing to do whatever you ask of us, even if it puts us into jeopardy of being ostracized, ridiculed or laughed at. Lord we know Your ways do not always make sense in the eyes of today's successful or influential people. Give us the wisdom to want to please You instead of pleasing people who gauge success by worldly standards. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Rich Shaffer, WV Conference Lay Leader

LESSONS FOR LIFE

Friday, December 15, 2017

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 (NIV)

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not treat prophecies with contempt ²¹ but test them all; hold on to what is good, ²² reject every kind of evil. ²³ May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

Advent is defined as the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event: the coming or second coming of Christ. During this notable event in the Christian church, Christians all over the globe prepare for the coming of Christ. As a school teacher of many years I have always stressed organization and preparedness to my students. As I was studying our passage I realized that Paul is giving us clear instructions as to how to "prepare" for the coming of Christ. This lesson will not only help us throughout the Advent season, but throughout our entire lives. I have put them into a "to do" list to help us get organized.

1. Be joyful always!
2. Pray all the time.
3. Give thanks no matter what.
4. Listen to the Holy Spirit within you.
5. Do not disrespect God's Word.
6. Hold on to good actions and thoughts.
7. Reject evil.

Do all of these things, and the promise is there... "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it."

Prayer: Heavenly Father, We give You thanks for Your promises of everlasting life. Thank you for Your word. Allow Your Holy Spirit to work in us throughout this Advent season. Help us to be all You created us to be. We ask all of this in the name of Your precious son, Jesus. Amen.

Cheryl Bramble, Bridgeport UMC, Lay Servant