

## **Devotions - December 16-22, 2007**

**by members of Trinity Lutheran Church, Rhinelander WI**

Because we are in the Season of Advent, we are centering our devotions this week on the theme of preparation. Advent is a time of preparing; a time to prepare our homes with special decorations and special foods for guests who may be coming for the holidays; a time to prepare our gifts for others with beautiful wrappings and ribbons; a time to prepare our church with special decorations, music and worship services; and a time to prepare **ourselves** for the BIG EVENT!

Advent is a time of waiting. We think of Advent as part of the Christmas season, those busy days before Christmas when we shop 'til we drop, make cookies and candies, write cards, and make our list and check it twice. But, really, Advent is very different than the busy weeks leading up to Christmas. Advent is a time of quiet reflection, repentance and preparation for the **spiritual** gifts of the season.

For Christmas, we make out our lists of things we want and hope to get, but for Advent, there are no lists of things we want. Advent is a time of waiting, of open-ended waiting. We don't wait for something **we** want. Instead, we wait expectantly for what **God has in store for us**. Advent is a time to be surprised, and we can only be surprised if we're able to give ourselves over to the moment and to God. That is the **big event!**

### **Sunday, December 16**

By, Carole Hansen

“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me.  
Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple;  
the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire,  
will come, says the Lord Almighty.” Malachi 3:1

When I think of preparing for Christmas, I think of all that must be done—decorate the house, light the lights, bake the cookies, pour over catalogs, buy gifts, wrap the presents, send out cards and the list goes on. But the one preparation I need to make is **me**. Am I; are you; are **we** preparing ourselves for the Messiah?

In all the clatter, clutter and noise of these preparations, we can lose sight of Christmas which is the coming of Jesus who is the Messiah and Emmanuel. He brings us the gift of life and the assurance of God is with us always!

May we take time each day to thank God for giving us such a great gift—life through Him!

*Prayer of the day: Father, please calm our anxiousness and busyness. May we rest in you and your promises of life—and of your being with us always. Help us to really prepare ourselves for Christmas. Amen.*

## Monday, December 17

By, Judy Durkee

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will be able to tell others the “reason for the season” because we have His power to do so. Advent is the perfect time to make yourself available to be used by Him. God does not care as much about our talents and abilities as much as He does our just being available to Him.

If you feel God calling you to witness for Him – especially at Advent – “Fear not,” as the Angel Gabriel said, because God will prepare you and empower you to glorify His name. He only asks that we serve Him, “not by might, nor by power, but by His Spirit.” (Zechariah 4:6)

Fix your eyes during Advent on God’s power, His sufficiency, and His ability to accomplish His purpose in our lives and, **through us**, in the lives of others. Successful witnessing is simply sharing Christ in the power you have through the Holy Spirit—leave the results to God.

*Prayer of the day: Help me share the Christmas story in some small way with all people that I meet this Christmas. Help me seize each opportunity to tell of Jesus’ love. Give me the words. Let my actions during this busy season mirror what my heart feels. Let me be strong and fearless in the power of the Lord, to be able to put on the full armor of faith and stand against evil and the devils’ schemes to steal Christmas. Amen.*

## Tuesday, December 18

By, Marsha Schultz

“But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.  
In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.  
We do not know what we ought to pray for,  
but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.  
And he who searches out hearts knows the mind of the Spirit,  
because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”  
Romans 8:25-27 (NIV)

I have a vivid memory of one Christmas. I was in first or second grade, so I would have been about 6 years old. It took forever for Christmas to come that year! Time seemed to slow down and I needed it to speed up because I just couldn’t wait for Christmas!

I remember sitting by the window. It was dark outside but with the streetlights shining, I could see big white snowflakes falling from the sky. It was so beautiful! I remember our tree in the living room, with the colored lights lit up and the tinsel shining from every branch. It was so beautiful! And I remember the presents under the tree, all wrapped up nice and tight (so I couldn’t peek inside) with ribbons and bows. They were so beautiful!

I was so excited, I couldn’t contain it. I was bubbling over with anticipation!

That’s it. That’s my memory of that Christmas. I don’t remember opening gifts. I don’t remember one thing I got that year. I don’t remember the dinner or the Christmas pageant at church. But, I remember the **waiting**. The excitement was in the waiting. THAT was the **big event!** It was so beautiful.

*Prayer of the day: Be with us, O God, in our waiting. Help us to wait without expectation—but with anticipation of what we do not know. Help us to clear our minds, to settle down the hectic thoughts, so that we may hear you when you speak. Keep us from being so busy that we miss the big event of you speaking to me! Amen.*

## Wednesday, December 19

By, Jim Hohman

“The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: **The Lord Our Righteousness.**’ For this is what the Lord says: David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel.”  
Jeremiah 33: 14-17

When I was an elementary school teacher, I had many projects that matched the seasons of the year. The Christmas season was always filled with preparing programs for parents, decorating rooms, and parties with the kids. Often the struggle was to maintain the focus on learning.

Early in my career, I came across a math project that challenged the kids to calculate the number of ‘gifts’ in the song “The 12 Days of Christmas.” I did this activity with kids for at least 20 years. We would spend time in class working the problem and I often sent the kids home with a request to see if their parents could solve the problem. This was a simple arithmetic problem that could be solved with addition—and most kids and their parents got it wrong. Take a break and see what you get for an answer.

You might wonder what this has to do with Advent. The first day of Christmas is December 26<sup>th</sup>, and ends on January 6<sup>th</sup>, Epiphany. The song has roots in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and some believe it was used to teach children aspects of the Christian faith that were dangerous to talk about during the religious wars of the time period. But, for me, it was a math problem that taught the essence of Christmas—the gift of Jesus by a True Love—that is, **God to His people.**

The answer to the math question is 364. There were 364 gifts given during the 12 days of Christmas. Think about this.

If the first was given on December 26<sup>th</sup>, there are a sufficient number of gifts for each day of the year except December 25<sup>th</sup>. The gifts run out on the last day of Advent. What more is needed on the 25<sup>th</sup>—other than **the gift of our Savior!**

Did I tell my kids this story? Yes, I did. I always explained that this is what Christians believed and why we celebrate Christmas. It is not illegal in public schools to teach about religion. Freedom from religion is a gift of God as well.

*Prayer of the day: Heavenly Father, as we wait for the gift of Jesus, help us to remember that we receive gifts from you each and every day of the year. Teach us to be thankful, faithful, and patient. Help us to share these gifts with our family and friends during these busy days of Advent. Amen.*

## Thursday, December 20

By, Marsha Schultz

“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them,  
for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God  
like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms,  
put his hands on them and blessed them. Mark 10:14-16 (NIV)

We have all seen pictures people have taken while on vacation. The pictures are nice but they are small, and only give us a little idea of where our friends have been and just a little glimpse of the place they visited.

I remember, when my kids were little, friends took a trip to the Magic Kingdom (Disney World) with their children. We didn't have a lot of extra money, so a trip to the Magic Kingdom was out of the question for us, but we got some glimpses of it from looking at their pictures and listening to their descriptions of it. They told stories of how scary a ride was, or how much fun it was to be with Sleeping Beauty and Mickey Mouse. They described the castle and it sounded so beautiful, we just wanted to be there to experience it for ourselves. But, because we didn't have much money, we had to wait before we could see the **big picture**.

When our children were in Middle School, we were finally able to take the journey to the Magic Kingdom. When we walked through the gates and saw how grand it was, how the air felt and smelled the different smells ... things you can't get from seeing a picture ... I realized what we had missed by not experiencing this earlier. We had waited with anticipation, not knowing how the true experience would feel. It was only by experiencing it ourselves that we knew the grandeur of the Kingdom.

The bible gives us glimpses of life thousands of years ago. The bible gives us glimpses of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Our pastors tell us about the bible stories, and describe to us the meaning of Jesus' parables and His life on earth. By reading scripture ourselves, we get a more meaningful glimpse and a better understanding of God's Kingdom and how it relates to our lives.

But, it is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can truly understand the **big picture** ... not by our own doing, because we are not able to understand on our own ... but only through acceptance and faith in things we cannot see, are we able to see the big picture of God's Kingdom.

*Prayer of the day: Gracious God, we are adults and because we are adults, our thoughts are regulated by things we have experienced in life. Help us, O God, to clear those thoughts out of our heads, to become more open in our thinking ... to think more as a child thinks ... to be aware of all the beauty around us, from the waterfalls and trees, to the grandeur of a sunrise. Help us to be aware of your Kingdom here on earth. Amen.*

## **Friday, December 21**

By, Karen Blakeslee

“Only in returning to me and waiting for me will you be saved.  
In quietness and confidence is your strength.” Isaiah 30:15 (NLT)

I need to be reminded to put my focus on God. All the preparations; like baking cookies, wrapping presents, and cleaning the house need to be put in their proper place.

Do you find yourself tired or wandering? Return to the Lord.

*Prayer of the day: Dear Lord, please help me return to you. Keep me focused on you during this time of preparation. Prepare my heart to receive your son. Amen.*

## **Saturday, December 22**

By, Judy Durkee

“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all,  
and therefore all died.” 2 Corinthians 5:14

Scripture tells us that Christ’s love compels us to witness to others. Compel is a very strong word. It means to urge ... with force.

What better time to do this than during this Holy Season. What opportunities to witness to the life-changing experience of meeting the Christ Child!

Whether this is your first experience in reaching out to others with the gospel of Jesus Christ, or you’ve done it many times — look for simple ways to share God’s love.

- Say with a big smile, “bless you” instead of Merry Christmas. Or, say “have a Blessed Christmas” or “Peace to you” instead of “Happy Holidays.”
- Give a gift from your local Christian Book Store
- Send Christmas cards or letters with a bible verse included
- Put a manger scene out in your yard ... hang a lighted star

Finally, pray for:

- Jesus Christ to be glorified
- God’s love and joy to fill hearts and homes
- Heart’s to be prepared to receive what you are offering
- Strength to take a Christian’s stand on the materialism of a secular Christmas

*Prayer of the day: God of Mercy, lift our eyes to the starry sky and fill our hearts with the wonder of it all. Fill us with the spirit to reach out to others in Christian love, to make known the reason Baby Jesus was born. Amen*