

**Devotions - January 20-26, 2008**  
**by, Pastor Steve Gauger**  
**Calvary Lutheran, Rapid River**

**Sunday, January 20**

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away,  
our inner nature is being renewed day by day. 2 Corinthians 4: 14

The whole world seems to grow darker in these final days of December. The daylight is short, the skies are gray, and twilight seems to set the mood for the final days of the year. In these dark days, God is doing something new. The birth of God's Son is a new beginning in God's plan for creation: a light shining in a land of deep darkness. And so, with St. Paul we can say, "we do not lose heart." In spite of what we see in the world around us, we know that God is at work, redeeming humankind, renewing creation, bringing light into our days of darkness.

With each passing year, the tension between what we see in the world around us and what we know God is up to grows more pronounced. Our parents reach the end of their lives, we start to attend funerals for our friends, our children move out into the world and leave us behind. For some, issues of physical health become a constant concern. We need the light of Christ more and more with each passing day. We need the confident hope that comes from knowing that God is renewing the world and ourselves. Even as the year winds down to its final hours, God's promise in these days of Christmas is that there is a new beginning. It may seem like the passage of time will eventually wear us down, but the gift of Jesus brings new life and new hope. The God of Christmas is the God who is doing a new thing, renewing the gift of life for the world.

*God of life, renew our hope with the light of your Son Jesus. Let the Gift of Christmas brighten the dark corners of our lives. Amen.*

## Monday, January 21

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world.  
Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,  
but will have the light of life." John 8: 12

Following Jesus is at the very core of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. It means that we are serious about learning from his teaching, conforming our lives to his example, letting his love and his truth be the motivating power that shapes our very being. Jesus leads, we follow. I think it is striking that in John's gospel, Jesus is always light. Not just the light for those who believe in him, but light for the entire universe. These words of Jesus echo the opening verses of John's gospel: "What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

Light always overcomes darkness. St. Augustine found this analogy to be helpful in thinking about our life in the world: light shines in the dark, good overcomes evil, love is stronger than hatred, mercy trumps vengeance, kindness transforms cruelty. To have the light of life that Jesus gives means to live in confidence that all of this is true: that God's Son gives us the light that overcomes the darkness of the world. One of the real gifts of 12 days of Christmas is the light of Christ. It is the light that shows us how to live, that points us to God's truth, and that illumines the whole world. We follow the light that always shines in the darkness.

*God of love, help us to walk in the light of Christ each day, confident that his love and truth will shine out into the darkness of the world around us. Amen.*

## **Tuesday, January 22**

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him 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.

Philippians 2: 9–11

I've noticed a new development in the field of naming babies: parents who want to be on the cutting edge are naming their children after cities and states. In the last 12 months, I've baptized an Austin, a Brooklyn, a Dakota, and a Georgia. I think this trend started in Hollywood, but I am waiting to meet the first baby named Escanaba. It will happen sooner or later. We do funny things to our children, but they seem to do just fine with these new names.

What's missing though, is the sense that a child's name conveys meaning, power, and purpose for the life of that child. Biblical names almost always carry meaning and purpose with them: Abraham— "Father of a multitude", Matthew— "gift of God", or Peter— "Rock". The most important name is Jesus— "God saves", the name told to Joseph by the angel. Jesus is God's name for the Messiah, literally a description of what God is doing for the world through the birth of his Son.

On this first day of 2008, eight days after Christmas, we remember the name of Jesus, and the power and wonder of that name, the name of the One that every tongue in the universe will someday acknowledge as Lord. The power of the name of Jesus is also ours to claim, especially when we come before God in prayer, and when we offer our requests in the Name of Jesus.

*Dear Lord Jesus, your holy name gives us strength to live each day for you. Help us always to remember that you are salvation for the world, God's presence among us. Help us to invoke your name for the blessing of people everywhere. Amen.*

## **Wednesday, January 23**

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,  
the conviction of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1

These famous words initiate one of the great chapters of the New Testament, the roll call of the heroes of God who lived by faith. Abel, Abraham, Moses, and so many others who counted on God's faithfulness, who lived and died by faith. These are the examples that inspire us, especially since we have the fulfillment of their hopes in the birth of Jesus. This child of Mary is the "something better"(verse 40) that God has prepared for all of his people.

We live by faith each day of our lives. We have faith in our country's economy, our banking system, our Postal Service. We have faith in our friends trustworthiness, we have faith in television weather predictions. All of this because in the past, our faith has been rewarded. In our Lord Jesus, God has rewarded the faith of all of his people. He is God's ultimate word of love and grace. St. Paul would say that in Jesus Christ, all of God's promises find their YES! That's where our faith is centered. God was faithful. God will be faithful in the future. He has given us his Son, Jesus, as his guarantee.

*Thank you, God, for your never-failing faithfulness, especially in giving us your Son Jesus.  
Help us always to place our faith in your faithful promises, and to rejoice in your gift of love.  
Amen.*

## Thursday, January 24

Know that I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go,  
and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until  
I have done what I promised you. Genesis 28: 15

One of the greatest challenges of parenting (and grandparenting) is sending your children out into the world with the prayer that God would watch over them each and every step of their way. My congregation, like yours, sends its young people out to the four corners of the world: to Iraq and Afghanistan, to England, China, Germany, Italy, to Africa and South America. I know that if God is faithful to his promises to Jacob, God will be faithful to my children and yours.

There is nothing particularly impressive about Jacob's mode of operation. Even his name ("the ankle grabber") suggests that he is a shady character. This is not someone whose moral stature inspires admiration. But God loves him and takes care of him. The promises of God made to Abraham are renewed in Jacob's life. He becomes God's great nation, the children of Israel. And he carries the promise of the coming Savior. He would wrestle with God, and God would bless him. So when I pray for the young people of my congregation, I remember Jacob, and I know that God will be faithful and bless our children and grandchildren. They too share in God's promises to his people.

*God of Abraham, you promise to bless your people of every generation. We need the assurance of your promises to our children; keep them wherever they go, and bring them all home to you. Amen.*

## Friday, January 25

Then God said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." Exodus 3: 4

It was a hot Sunday morning in June, and one of our fifth graders was serving as acolyte for the first time. Everything was going fine, but when she came to the altar to assist at communion, her shoes stayed behind in the pew. Members of the congregation were either amused or shocked when they came up for communion: we had never had a barefoot acolyte before! I suggested that perhaps she was just following Moses' example, and maybe we should all remove our shoes when we come forward for the sacrament.

Both Moses and Elijah have these remarkable encounters with the holiness of God's presence. Today it is often difficult, to say the least, for most of us to reclaim that sense of awe and wonder when we come into God's presence. Our easy familiarity with Jesus as friend of sinners should also go hand in hand with a sense of our own unworthiness for such a great blessing. After all, the baby in the manger is also ruler of the universe. In the presence of such glory and power, we need to remove our sandals and kneel in wonder and amazement. During the season of Christmas, we especially recognize that we stand on holy ground!

*Holy God, you call us into your presence in the humble places of our world: the manger of Bethlehem, the cross of Calvary. Help us to sense that our world is made holy by the birth of Jesus, that we too stand on holy ground. Amen.*

## Saturday, January 26

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,  
let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,  
and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,  
looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,  
who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross,  
disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the  
right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1–2

Was this writer a fan of the Olympic Games? Sports metaphors, so beloved by present-day preachers, do not have much of a role in the New Testament. But here is one to grab hold of: the life of faith is a marathon race, in which we are cheered on by the great heroes of faith who have gone before us, following a path blazed by our Lord Jesus. The race is already won for us; the gold medal belongs to Jesus; we simply follow where he leads.

Faith means following Jesus, and knowing who we follow gives hope and strength in the daily struggles that beset us. Here is the great secret of the Christian life: Jesus leads us and supports us, so that even in our weakest moments, we have strength for our “drooping hands and weak knees” (verse 12) strength that comes from knowing Jesus is our personal trainer. Our lives are shaped each day by the example of the “pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”

*Dear Lord Jesus, we need to know that you are giving us your strength for the marathon of our lives. Strengthen our weak knees in times of trouble, and help us to run our race in the confident hope that the prize is already won. Amen.*