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2009
The season of Advent
Devotional Thoughts



About *The Season of Advent* the devotional authors

Week One: November 29, 2009

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Week Two: December 6, 2009

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Week Three: December 13, 2009

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Week Four: December 20, 2009

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Christmas Day: December 25, 2009

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December 6, 2009

Del Donaldson

Preparing for the Lord

Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 1:68-79; Philippians 1:3-11; **Luke 3:1-6**

Luke is careful to fix the exact date of John's appearance (Luke 3:1-2). No prophet had emerged in Israel for four hundred years. So as God's spokesperson, John places at the core of his prophetic preaching a message to "do this behavior so that both your heart and your mind will be made ready to do what Christ asks you to do."

In the world in which I work, persons with problems are often seen as ambivalent or double-minded (James 1:8) when it comes to real change. Yet, Advent is a season in which we expect and anticipate a change too important to resist: God's saving forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

I love a story that the late John Claypool told about a man who went to his minister a week after his mother's funeral. He confessed he'd never had a good relationship with his mother and, as a result, had not given her the kind of care in her dying days that she deserved. This man was told of an older woman in the congregation who had no children and was very concerned about how she was going to negotiate her last days. The minister suggested to the man that he start doing for this woman what he could no longer do for his own mother. To make a behavioral decision like this would require the man to make a 180 degree shift away from the hard-hearted and stubborn way of being which had characterized his previous relationship.

The words from Isaiah embedded in today's text point to the reality that, just as for this man, our preparation for the coming of the Lord involves lifting up valleys and lowering mountains. A new terrain is required in our lives so that Christ's influence can permeate every aspect of who we are. The crooked must be straightened and the rough ways must become smooth so that all that we are, or ever hope to be, can be shaped by Christ.

Prayer: Father, because nothing in our lives should deter your son's reign, make us tender-hearted where we have been hard-hearted; make us open to your spirit's leading where we have been stubborn or self-absorbed. Amen.

December 13, 2009

Philip Thompson

Rejoicing in New Hope

Zephaniah 3:14-20; **Isaiah 12:2-6**; **Philippians 4:4-7**; Luke 3:7-18

It may seem odd to see along with three purple candles in an Advent wreath, a lone pink candle. The first time I saw such a wreath, I wondered why the church had not bothered to buy enough purple ones. Only later did I come to learn that the pink candle was there intentionally. Pink represents joy. The third Sunday of Advent is sometimes referred to as “Gaudete.” It is a Latin word meaning “rejoice” and comes from the traditional call to worship for this Sunday, taken from Philippians 4, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! . . . The Lord is near.” How appropriate as Christmas draws near!

Although, Christmas is a joyful time, Advent remains, even on this third Sunday, a season that calls us to prepare ourselves. We are to prepare for the Lord’s coming in glory at the end of the ages even as we prepare to remember his coming in humility at Bethlehem. How then are we to rejoice?

This preparation takes the form of repentance, of turning from false hopes to the true hope that is in God alone. It was to a similar situation that Isaiah addressed these words. The people of Judah had come under the control of the powerful Assyrians, but Egypt and Ethiopia were encouraging the conquered nations to rebel. Against the false hope that the Judeans might, by their own power, cast off the yoke of Assyria, Isaiah insisted that true hope is in God alone. And in that hope, they would find their true joy.

As we prepare for the coming of our Lord, we are called on this day to turn from (“repent” also means “to turn”) placing our hope in lesser gods—gods of nation, class, race, political party, or economic system—and to place our trust and hope in the only one who is mighty to save. And in that hope we rejoice.

Prayer: Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

December 20, 2009

Cecelia Dachtler

Serving, Loving, Testifying

Micah 5:2-5a; **Luke 1:46b-55**; Psalm 80:1-7; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-55

Christmas is a time to testify!

Most of us probably think of Christmas as a time to celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus and less of as an opportunity to share the whole gospel. We gather with friends and family, eat traditional food, exchange a few thoughtfully purchased gifts, and go to church to worship together. Stories of past escapades, great Christmases, and family history are shared over many cups of eggnog, hot chocolate, or apple cider. But there are other stories we should share.

Our texts this week speak of the coming of Jesus from a little clan of Judah. They speak of what Jesus the Lord will do—stand and feed his flock, give us a new covenant, and restore us so that we may be saved. The Hebrew people had long known of this truth, this time that was coming. It was taught and recited over and over with hope and faith. But in the gospel reading found in Luke 1:46b-55, Mary and her aunt Elizabeth speak in the “now.” No longer is the hoped-for one coming, he is here in flesh and bone and carried in the womb of Mary. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed in a loud voice, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear” (Luke 1:42). In response, Mary began to testify in song, “My soul glorifies the Lord . . .” (Luke 1:46b-55). She goes on to share about his holiness, mercy, strength, power, goodness, and salvation. She sings about this promise keeper who is soon to be born.

Every Christmas we can join in this testimony, too. If we look over what has happened to us in the past year, his presence and work in our lives are clearly evident. The song that Mary sang about his strength and mercy and goodness can be sung by each of us. So in these days of celebration, reach out, serve, love, and please . . . testify!

Prayer: Lord, please help me find a way to share your amazing work in my life. Amen.

December 25, 2009

Mike Hagan

Singing a New Song

Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1-4, (5-12); John 1:1-14

I climbed out of my rental car. Puget Sound lay before me with the Olympic mountains reflected across the crystal clear waters. A surge of water swept up the shore and a choir of sound rose. I walked closer to figure out what produced the noise. With each surge pebbles, shells, agates, and driftwood tumbled over each other. The loud and raucous chorus was amazing.

A chorus of “good news” sounds forth on this Christmas day. It tumbles forth as the messenger heralds the news that the salvation of God has come; let all God’s people “break forth together into singing” (Isaiah 52:9). The Lord has done “marvelous things,” the psalmist adds, so “make a joyful noise” and “sing praises to the Lord” (Psalm 98).

Hebrews chimes in with “he has spoken to us by a Son,” a “reflection of God’s glory,” “the exact imprint of God’s very being” (Hebrews 1:2, 3). John clarifies, “The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The son born long ago projected the “glory” of God. He was the “true light,” enlightening everyone, a light show changing the whole world for all time.

Can you join the singing? Can you make a joyful noise, singing praises for the gift of God’s son?

Each surge invites your participation. “To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (John 1:12). Join the basses, sopranos, tenors, altos, and the children of God with joyous singing in a grand musical sound with a new song—our Savior has come!

Prayer: Gracious God, may we join your chorus of new song this Christmas day, tumbling over each other in praise and joy, a full and loud and magnificent swelling of sound to your glory. In Jesus’ name, our Savior, Amen.

