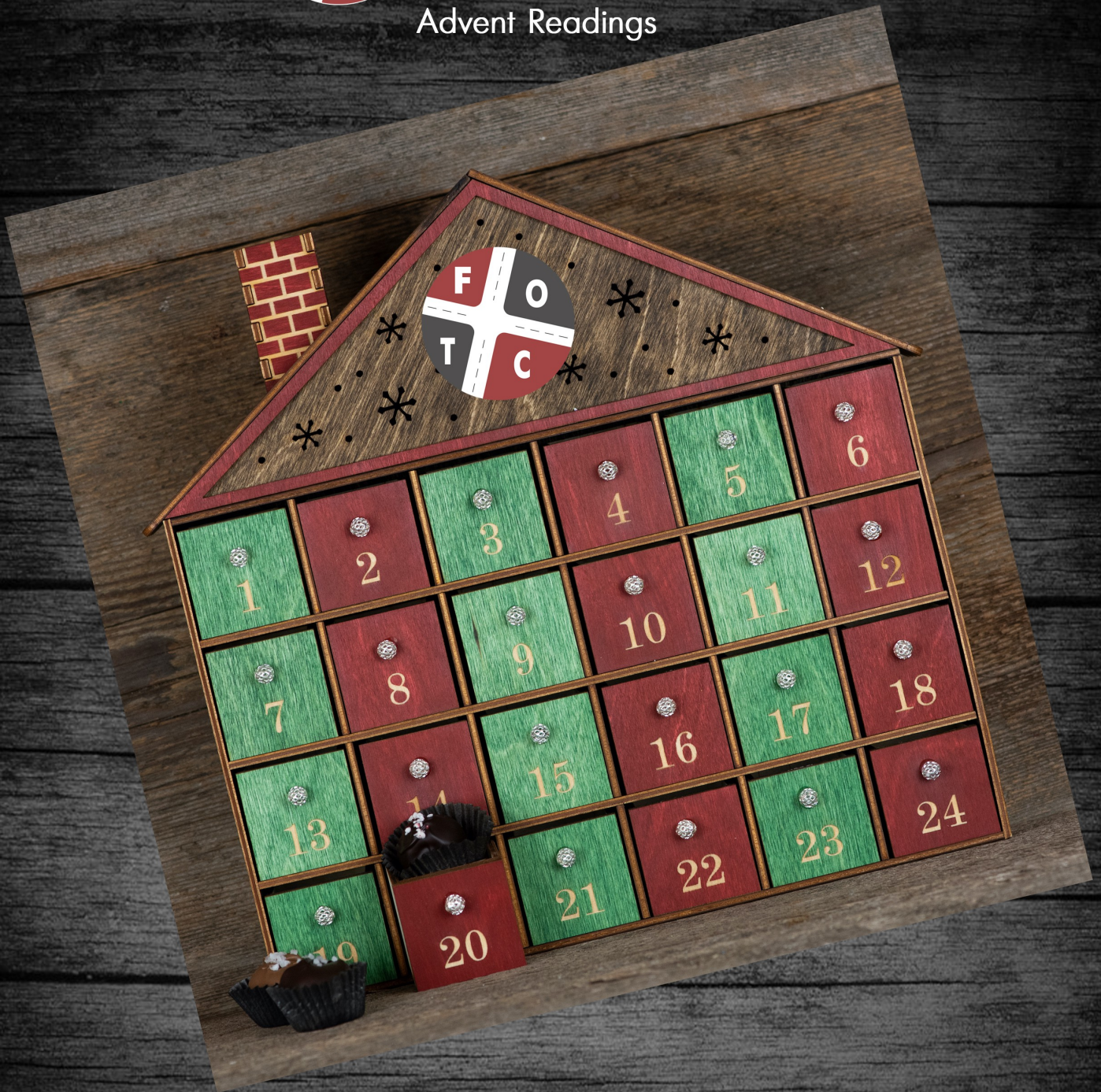




FELLOWSHIP OF THE
CROSSROADS

Advent Readings



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Advent Readings Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 1

Joy to the World

"There were shepherds abiding in their fields keeping watch over their flocks by night when suddenly the angel of The Lord appeared before them and the glory of The Lord shown round about them and they were so afraid. Fear not, the angel said, for behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all people! For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior who is Christ The Lord. This shall be a sign to you, you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men on whom his favor rest."

Luke 2:8-13

I stood in the very field of these shepherds and wondered what that night might have been like. My skeptical mind was put to ease as I stood by a 4,000 year old well, marking the place where shepherds from Bethlehem had rested their flocks for generations. I was in the very place of the encounter that changed everything.

That night the normal was invaded by the divine. The night sky was ablaze with the glory of God. The insecurity of the outcast shepherds was shattered by the God who knows, sees, and has a fondness for the broken.

Standing there my mind raced with the profundity of the announcement. This event...the thinning of heaven to earth changed history. At the center of this announcement was joy. Joy the longing of the human heart. Joy the strength to live and the contagious nature of the human spirit. Joy that we long for and need. Joy that is not found in the circumstances of life but found wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. The angels declared it, the shepherds reveled in it...joy has come and we need it.

During these hurried days, joy seems fleeting. The stress of the season, the pressure of the day crowd joy into a closed jar of unmet exceptions set high on the back shelf of our minds never to be found, much less unsealed and enjoyed. But joy has come. Joy that changes you. Joy that is accessible, unbreakable, and

personal. Joy that is not wasted on selfishness but spread contagiously changing all who taste the sweet broken seal of it.

Go with me today into the fields of the shepherds. Stand with me by the ancient well. Hear the angels...experience the message...hear of the joy...joy to you....joy to the world!

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 2

I Wonder as I Wander

Christmas Whisper

God speaks He whispers

He woos and draws His voice is sweet and low He whispers

He whispers in the garden Asking “where are you?”

He whispers through His prophets I am coming for you

He whispers in the longing

To those who’s burdens are unbearable

To a nation who needs his love

He whispers to a girl....You will carry my infancy

He whispers to a Man...you can trust in my plan

He whispers to shepherds The lowest of these

His angels echo His whisper as they light the sky

His whispers becomes flesh As his cry shatters the night

The messy manger becomes the place where the whisper is not only seen but heard

He walks among us He whispers peace...healing...love and compassion

He whisper and demons flee Blind eyes see....Death is defeated

He whispers on a cross He whispers words of forgiveness and care
He whispers suffering....salvation...sacrifice....

His whisper is silent The voice is stilled
Until the whisper becomes a shout
The stone rolls and life is changed

He whispers again Come to me...follow me...serve me...share my love....
He whispers and my life is changed, my world renewed
For I am captured by His whisper!

Merry Christmas!

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 3, 2022

What Child is This?

My mother's father was a southern gentleman. He loved people and he loved the land...he really loved fox hunting. When you hear fox hunting you might think of well dressed gentlemen riding horses with teaming dogs at their heels...but his expression of fox hunting was far different. There were no horses just old pick up trucks, dusty country roads, and late nights of listening to expensive dogs chasing Mr. Fox.

My grandfather kept this pack of hounds in a kennel just north of the main house. He had around 10 dogs...each with a name and a pedigree...the finest pack of Tennessee Walkers you could find. With a collections of canines that size, there were times of barking...more like the siren songs of the ancient Greeks...or plain old noise...depends on the tune of your ear.

When the ruckus arose from the kennel of kerrs my grandfather would calmly go to the back door and whisper...yes whisper to his pack. He would call them by name in low tones until all was calm...amazing. These dogs were captured by the whisper of the one who loved them and cared for their every need. We long for that whisper especially at Christmas. We long to hear from the one who knows us by name and speaks peace to us in the chaos of our lives. When the hound dogs of our soul howl we need the whisper of the master to bring peace.

Through out history it as been so. In the shame of the garden when the man and woman fell into sin the whisper of “where are you?” floated through the thick air. The whisper was that of concern not location.

Judgment was passed but the whisper of redemption echoed through their forlorn hearts.

Again the whisper was heard in the ears of a man to build a boat...Noah heard and responded. The whisper came to Abraham...go to a land that I will show you...he heard and a nation was born. Over the centuries the whisper echoed through prophets and kings. Many heard it...Samuel, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the list is long and impressive. The promise of messiah, the whisper of redemption filled the ears of those who heard.

In the fullness of time the whisper became flesh. The word of God dwelling in the form of a baby born in a lowly cattle shed in a no name village. The whisper..the wonder...Jesus, God with us. And we beheld his glory, full of grace and truth.

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 4, 2022

Go Tell it on the Mountains

I grew up on the beach. I love the ocean. Every chance I have it is going back to the beach. Every vacation, every mission trip, every excuse, it was the beach. Then God moves us to Canada, to the mountains. Tara loves the mountains. She always wanted to go to the mountains but I had to go to the beach. It's amazing how God works things.

I have grown to love the mountains as well. I think the two environments have one big thing in common, vastness. While in Canada Tara had the great idea that we should climb mount sulfur. Mount sulfur is in the beautiful village of Banff.

Banff is nestled in the glorious Canadian Rockies. Sulfur is not a tall peak but it is a mountain. Tara wanted me to climb it with her. Wow. Being the amazing husband that I am, I agreed. So off we went, mountain climbing. Who would have ever thought?

As we traversed the winding switch backs it became more apparent to me that this was a survival process. There was no joy in the journey. There was sweat, cramps, lack of oxygen, with glimpses of death. Tara was in wonderland of a mountain adventure while I was on the edge of eternity. We finally made it to the summit. The view was amazing. We could see the vastness of the Rockies unfolding before us in a never ending cascade of majesty. The experience was worth the misery. We spent several moments in awe until I remembered we had to climb down. Much to my joy there was a gondola. Yes a beautiful gondola. We could have ridden the gondola up the mountain. We chose to traverse the crooked path instead.

While on the mountain top all I could think of was the Christmas song, "Go Tell it on the Mountain". The lyrics and tune coursed through my mind as this was a perfect place to announce that a hope has come, and Hope has a name...Jesus. This season we will not stand on a mountain but we will declare the arrival of Hope. The Hope of Christmas, the hope that is Jesus! It is the Christmas season and it is time to turn our attention to the hope the season...the savior brings.

Let's go tell it...declare the hope of Jesus.

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 5, 2022

Away in a Manger

We stood in a hushed line in a musty church building ready to see the very place Mary birthed Jesus. My skepticism was at an all time high and my gregarious behavior had the attending orthodox priest more grumpy than normal. I warned Tara not to have her expectations too high. This building was erected by

Constantine's mother in law some three hundred years after the fact. The spot of Jesus birth was at best suspect. In my best pastor/theologian voice I began to pronounced to her, and to all who wanted to drink from my vast knowledge (with tongue in cheek), the historicity of the location and the scholarly division of its authenticity. Never the less we stood for we were looking for the miracle...the place where God appeared from the womb of a virgin and changed the course of human history.

Somewhere in my heart I longed to see, to feel, to embrace the historical reality of Jesus. The standing on line had become a quest. We wound down a serpentine staircase to view a silver star marking the place of the divine birth. The air was thick with incense mixed with hushed prayers of the devout. We were not alone in our quest. Others were looking for a miracle as well.. They huddled in the dark corner of the gratto singing and praying, seeking the divine.

This seeking makes us one in this quest for the miraculous. We share the same desire. We all are in need, will be in need, or remember a time that we needed God to come through. We long to see God, not just the place of his birth, but the intersection of His life with ours. You might have come today with that burning in your heart...you need a miracle. I heard this week that impossible was one of God's favorite words because he love to prove us wrong. Nothing is Impossible for him. Today, look for a miracle as found in Dr. Luke's account of the birth of Christ.

We will not stand on line in a musty old building but we will see the place where God came to be born...be born in you. Are you looking for a miracle...well...he is here... **Christ the Lord.**

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 6, 2022

Silent Night

Can you remember a time when you were at complete peace? Take a moment and reflect. I bet it is not easy to remember. We let the cares of this world choke out peace. Even when peace might creep into our hearts we get distracted and lose focus.

Christmas is the season we declare “Peace on Earth and goodwill toward men”. It seems that peace is fleeting and goodwill is an aberration. We would love to unwrap a package of peace or have a long, deep drink of goodwill. But those longings dissipate into the fog of our brokenness.

The Jewish people have a word for peace, shalom. It is a precious word for the Jews. They greet each other with shalom and wish shalom for one another. They depart with the same words. They really desire for Shalom to be a reality in their coming and going.

Shalom means....wholeness, completeness, health, security, and even prosperity in the best sense. This is the peace that only comes from God. It is unlike what the world gives.

The world bases peace on the absence of conflict or the plenty of resources, but God bases peace on relationships. The Jewish people knew that Shalom was from God.

To the world peace is something you negotiate, purchase, or hope for. To Christ followers peace is the gift of relationship. Know Christ and know peace. Christmas is the clear reminder of the Prince of Peace coming to live with us. Peace was born in a messy stable, lived in a no account village, traveled a small nation, died on a cross, buried in a borrowed tomb, rose again, and changed the world.

During these days of uncertainty and ambiguity we can lose grip on the promise of peace. Today I want you to hear what Jesus says. There is much to say...

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 7, 2022

Mary Did you know?

What would you do for God if you knew it was Him who asked?

I have asked this question of you before. It is a compelling question and most of us answer...I would do anything. Really? The Christmas story is one of obeying God in spite of circumstances, trusting God regardless of consequences, and experiencing God as never before.

This talk has been a struggle for me. Normally I have a clear path of scripture that builds a clarity of thought but this week I have been overwhelmed by the complexity to this simple story. MARY is impregnated by the Holy Spirit and gives birth by the will of God as a virgin. Joseph, a righteous man,

marries a woman who is pregnant with a baby who is by the Holy Spirit. These two spend the rest of their lives living under the suspicion of illegitimacy.

This is a level of trust and obedience that is beyond me. Somehow we remove the humanity from the Christmas account and never dive into the extreme levels of devotion displayed by these two.

What would you do for God if you knew it was Him who asked? The Christmas account takes the answer to that question to a new level. I don't know if I could do what Joseph did. I don't know if Tara could do what Mary did. I don't know if I could believe and behave on the pathway of hope that these two trod.

Maybe I can learn from them and live differently. Maybe their story will inspire my story and the audacious request of God will become normative and I would respond with wonder and obedience.

Let's read their story and peel back its layers to pathway of hope...

the pathway to Jesus!

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 8, 2022

Do You Hear What I Hear?

Do you hear what I hear? What a great Christmas tune. It touches something in our hearts that truly speaks of Christmas. We long to hear...to hear from God...the whisper from the one who knows us by name and speaks peace to us in the chaos of our lives. When the hound dogs of our soul howl we need the whisper of the master to bring peace.

Through out history it as been so. In the shame of the garden when the man and woman fell into sin the whisper of “where are you?” floated through the thick air. The whisper was that of concern not location.

Judgment was passed but the whisper of redemption echoed through their forlorn hearts.

In the fullness of time the whisper became flesh. The word of God dwelling in the form of a baby born in a lowly cattle shed in a no name village. The whisper..the wonder...Jesus, God with us. And we beheld his glory, full of grace and truth.. This is Christmas.

It is time to lean in and listen for the whisper of God...do you hear?

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 9, 2022

God Rest you merry Gentlemen

He was an old man at the edge of eternity. He was the famous JD Grey, former pastor of First a Baptist New Orleans. We was noted as the man who brought the gospel to the heart of the Crescent city.

Throughout his ministry, He stood on truth against the pagan revelry of the culture and made a difference in a hardened city. He was a shadow of his former self...A bent old man in his 90's when he came to speak at our inner city church.

My job was to sing before he preached and to make sure he got back and forth from the pulpit. I did my job. I sang an old gospel song assisted him into his spot and waited in the kingdom chair close behind in case I was needed to hold him up. As he settled into the pulpit, he reached inside his ill fitting suit coat and pulled out a plaque. He affixed this plaque on the pulpit, quoted its content and began to preach like he was twenty years old. His fire, eloquence, and passion was astounding. I had never heard that level of verbosity and clarity. I, along with the whole congregation, was spell bound as this old warrior of King Jesus lit our hearts ablaze with the gospel. He preached for an hour, time seemed to suspend. The passage from which he preached was the same on the plaque he planted on the pulpit....

“Sirs, we want to meet Jesus”

John 12:21

This was his life verse. This passage had driven this Saint of God for the 70 plus years of his preaching ministry. His desire is that those who heard his voice, those who graced his presence, those who's heart were stirred by his preaching...they would meet Jesus!.

Meet Jesus? We did that fine day. Not in a pressing the divine flesh but the reality of the risen savior alive in His church, alive in his man, alive in me.

This morning my desire is that we would meet Jesus. We will travel the pages of scripture to find Him in plain sight throughout the Bible. Jeremiah said this...

“If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me...” Jeremiah 29:13

So, engage your heart and let's look for Jesus. He is waiting on us today...

This is the season of seeking!

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 10, 2022

I'll be home for Christmas

My mother had terrible eyesight. She was vision impaired all of her life. Most of her eye problems could be cured today but being a little girl in the 1930's with bad vision created great challenges.

My mother's parents were very loving and good folks. Because it was the depression and everyone was either poor or struggling, caring for a little girl who need medical attention was difficult. My mom had Cataracts that required surgery. This was a very expensive procedure which created a great hardship for my grandparents. My mom being only seven made things even more difficult. Despite their circumstances my grandparents did what was necessary to care for their little girl.

The surgical procedure was to be done in Jackson, Mississippi.. My mom's family lived in Liberty, Mississippi, some 100 miles away. Traveling 100 miles in the 1930 was a big journey. My grandparents couldn't just hop in a car and take my mom to Jackson. The only way they could get there was to take their mule and wagon to McComb and catch the train to Jackson.

Because my grandfather ran a dairy farm he could not afford to stay with my mom while she was being cared for. He rode with her to Jackson, got her settled in the hospital and returned home to care for the family farm.

My mother's was a little girl facing a terrible surgery and she was all alone. As God would have it my uncle Grady lived in Jackson. He and his wife made sure mom was OK. This was so kind of them but sometimes a little girl just needs her daddy.

Mom's surgery was tricky. They fixed one eye and left the other eye damaged. Cataract surgery was still in the experimental stage during the 1930s. The doctors did the best they could with the technology they had at hand. However, the surgery left my mother incapacitated for several weeks. This incapacitation included not being able to move her head for several days. The physicians placed sandbags

around her head in order for her head to remain motionless I can't imagine how a little girl could endure this procedure.

Soon my mom was able to return home. Uncle Grady took mom to the train station. He dropped her off for my grandfather to meet her in McComb. Uncle Grady entrusted her to a porter. This Porter was a kind black man. I don't tell you that with racial malice but cultural awareness. The 1930's, in the south, were times of great racial discrimination. However, kindness has no color nor race. This Porter extended his kindness to a little blind white girl making sure she got home. This was beyond normal and extended into the divine. It has been told that this man said, "don't you worry about Miss Jane. I'll make sure she gets home." He kept his promise and lovingly delivered my mom into my grandfather's arms.

When my mother passed away, my brother, David, told this story which I retell today. He said just like the days when the kindness of a Porter was extended to our mother so God extended that same kindness to her upon her passing. My brother said that King Jesus left the throne room of heaven and escorted my mom home.. "Don't you worry about Miss Jane. I'll make sure she will get home."

I write to you at Christmas to remind you that we have a God who takes care for His children. We are all little blind boys and girls. We need someone to take care of us. We don't have a porter but a King who was born to save you and me!. King Jesus came so that we could come home...into the arms of our loving father.

Merry Christmas beloved.

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 11, 2022

O little Town of Bethlehem

Expectation gave way to longing and longing gave way to despair. The years filled by and the coming of the promises seemed delayed. The wonder of God was clouded by the hopelessness of man. Sin reigned. Nations attacked, sickness killed, brother turned against brother...all seemed lost...until an infant's cry shatter the still night of a little town in an insignificant place.

God became flesh. Born of a virgin in a cattle stall. Witnessed by a man of faith, outcast shepherds, a barn full of animals. The night sky was ablaze with the angelic announcement that the promise, the wonder of Christmas had come.

Mary pushed God from her womb, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and lay in in a manger. She would nurse him, hold him, Bath him, and be his mother.

The God of all creation was held in the arms of a teenage girl, intrusted to a lowly builder, and living in the fallen world.....

The word became flesh and dwelt among us And we beheld his glory

Glory as the one begotten of the father full of grace and truth.

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 12, 2022

We Three Kings

God has placed a longing deep in the heart of every person. The longing is to seek Him. Many don't know it is the Lord for whom they seek but they know there is something deeper to this life than what meets the eye.

Christmas seems to bring the natural desire to seek to the forefront of our thinking. 'Tis the season to seek. This desire to seek is really born of the image of God. He is seeking God, or better said He wants us to seek Him and He is hiding in the open. God loves seekers. This is what he says...

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

Jeremiah 29:13

This powerful truth is at the center of the Christmas season.

Matthew was writing to the Jewish people proving that Jesus was the rightful messiah. Matthew was showing how Jesus had fulfilled the prophecy about himself. Jesus fulfilled 330 prophecies in His earthly days. It is impossible and unthinkable that this could be done by chance.

Several years ago I noticed a bumper sticker that said... Wise men still Seek Him

I knew what it was referencing. But I want us to consider the deeper truth behind this slogan. Jesus is who he said he was and is. We are wise to seek him but many don't. Jesus accomplished all he said he would. The evidence is overwhelming as to his deity, his power, and his ability to bring life.

The question is what will I do? How will I respond? Will I oppose?

Will I not notice? Will I Worship?

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 13, 2022

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

Have you ever been given a gift you didn't want? Have you ever been given a gift that didn't fit? Have you ever been given a gift and you never opened it? Most of us can say yes to one or all of the above.

Christmas is the season we think about gifts. Gifts that we give and gifts we received. What if I offered you the gift of hope. Would you take it? I am sure many of you are thinking...typical Christmas talk. We are forced to read out of family guilt, tradition, or some other compulsion and now I have to listen to a preacher.

But let's not be typical. Let's consider the greatest need you have. It is hope. This year has been the year that we have needed Hope. We need hope personally, relationally, missionally, and Hope of a new culture. I hope you have been inspired. So on this Christmas season I want to share with you the gift of hope. This is a gift you don't need to exchange or explain. Hope is the gift of God that demands a receptiveness that leads to a changed life..

So extend your hands and allow me to give you the gift of hope...not from my hands but from God's.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 14, 2022

Breath of Heaven

A baby changes everything. Truer words have never been spoken. When I first held our son and then our daughter I knew nothing was the same. My world had been changed.

We gather on Christmas to celebrate a baby who change not only his parents but the world, this baby was God with us. We long to Know God...to hear from God...to hear the whisper from the one who knows us by name and speaks peace to us in the chaos of our lives. When the hound dogs of our soul's howl we need the whisper of the master to bring peace.

Through out history it as been so. In the shame of the garden when the man and woman fell into sin the whisper of “where are you?” floated through the thick air. The whisper was that of concern not location. Judgment was passed but the whisper of redemption echoed through their forlorn hearts.

In the fullness of time God became flesh, a baby changes everything! The word of God dwelling in the form of a baby born in a lowly cattle shed in a no name village. The whisper..the wonder...Jesus, God with us. And we beheld his glory, full of grace and truth.. This is Christmas. It is time to lean in and listen a baby has changed everything and this baby speaks to us from God...

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 15, 2022

O Come. O Come Emmanuel

Have you ever been looking for something, someone? We all have. We have walked through a store hoping to find a spouse or a kid that has seemed to wander off, looked down a road waiting for a loved one, stood on line waiting for a clerk... Tis the season to be looking...

I heard a news story this week that shook me. It seems there is a situation in Spain that has been disturbing. When Franco became dictator he began a practice of removing children from the families of political rivals and placing them into families who were supportive of his cause. This practice continued for several decades but with a economic twist.

From around 1940-1980 doctors, the government, the church, and other authorities would tell families that their children had died at birth only to sell these children to other families for profit. This sickening practice as recently come to light and many families are now seeking their stolen children.

What shook me was one father's diligence. He has gathered the names of all the baby boys born on his son's birthday and sought every child out. His son was born in 1977. This father will not allow the passing of time to quench his passion to be this child's daddy. He said "I want my boy to know that I am looking for him...I will not give up...he was not abandoned...he is loved."

In this Christmas season this is the message of our great God. He has not abandoned us...he will not give up...he wants his children to know they have a daddy who loves them.

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 16, 2022

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

I am a father and a grandfather. I know what it is like to wait on the arrival of children. The process is exciting and fill with anxiety. What if something happens to the baby, to the mother, with the doctors...all those thoughts filled my mind.

Will this baby be a boy or a girl? Will they have brown eyes and look like their mother of blue eyes of previous generations?

Then thoughts turn to deeper things. Will this baby be a success? Will they make good decisions? What path will they choose? Will this baby change the world?

I am sure these same questions filled the minds of Mary and Joseph. However, they had a divine perspective. They know this baby was the one the whole nation had waited upon. This baby was the

promise one of rescue and hope. This was the long expected one.. The preconceived was shattered by the God who came. The nation looked for a warrior...Jesus was a savior. The nation looked for a mighty political hero...Jesus was a servant. The nation looked for a temporary rescue from Roman rule. Jesus came to set them free for eternity.

The expectations of those who waited was revealed in a way never conceived. So it is with us. We look to religion and find hollow repetition. We look to government and find unkempt promises. We look to the baby born in Bethlehem and find everything we ever needed.

Come thou long expected Jesus...born to set you free!

Merry Christmas!

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 17, 2022

“O Come All Ye faithful”

During World War Two Japan invaded mainland China. Many Chinese people were interned in concentration camps. These camps were brutal places of inhuman treatment. Many of those who were intended didn't survive the ordeal and those who did survive were forever changed. One such Chinese man, a Christian pastor, was imprisoned in one of these horrible camps. While in this camp his work assignment was to clean out the camp's cesspool. Everyday he was to wade into the quagmire of human waste and unclog the drainage system. This task was gross and unthinkable but this godly man embraced his vile assignment with joy. How?

Upon this pastor's release he shared that he learned to love the cesspool. He learned to treat it as his private place to meet with God. While in the cesspool he could sing, pray, quote scripture without the harassment of the guards. He called the cesspool his garden. He discovered that while in the cesspool his captors would not interfere or harass. The cesspool was his sanctuary. I have learned that there are times in my life that I have to wade into the cesspool. As a leader making decisions that are difficult can send me into an Isolation that can seem polluted and vile. I have also learned that the cesspool of isolation can become a place where I can meet God. During those difficult times of cesspool living God becomes nearer and clearer. The stench might raise around me but Jesus can meet me there. In the cesspool I can grow to become more dependent on God and His Holy Spirit. The cesspool leads me to desperation and desperation leads me to dependence and dependence leads to deliverance by God. Like most cesspools, I have not created the mess, the mess belongs to someone else. However, as a leader, cleaning up after people is a part of the job. There are times when I have contributed to the problem. I need to admit it and clean it up. The wise Chinese pastor knew that there is no place too vile for God and situation too hard for Him. “O Come All Ye faithful” The next time I sing it I will think about the cesspool. cesspools of leadership isolation and hardship can become sanctuaries for God to speak life to our souls. At Christmas I choose not to wade in the mire of hardship but worship the Lord...

So I will come...joyful and triumphant...worshiping, adoring Christ the Lord!

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 18, 2022

It Came upon a midnight clear

I heard a story of a Russian rabbi who was very discouraged. One winter evening he wandered into the dark cold night contemplating his life. As he wandered he walked into a restricted area.

Suddenly, the dark night was shattered by an intense light with a booming question....“Who are you? What are you doing here?”

Shocked by this sudden change he stammered “what did you say?”

The voice boomed again. “Who are you and what are you doing here?”

The rabbi paused and then asked. “Sir, how much money do you make?”

“What?” The voice replied.

“No offense, but how much money do you make? For I am willing to pay that amount everyday to ask me those two questions.”

The angels appeared to the shepherds that evening to answer the question of that Rabbi.

We are who God says we are...children, beloved, called out, hope givers, peace proclaimers, victorious, forgiven, rescued, restored, redeemed, empowered, sent out, ambassadors...the list is long. On that midnight announcement everything became clear. Hear the angels and embrace the reality of who you are...and...why you are here!

Merry Christmas

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 19, 2022

Have yourself a Merry Little Christmas

Going Home

Psalm 90:1 Moses states *“throughout all generations you (God), have been our home”*.

Moses was a wanderer...he grew up away from home, lived away from his people, and then was called by God to lead the Jewish people into the promised land...to lead them "home". It is ironic that the man who knew no home was the leader toward home. But Moses knew something that we don't know.

This past week I have been home. Back to the only consistent place that I or my family have known as home. The house my parents filled with love and the grace of God. Although my parents are no longer living there, it is still home.

While there, I pondered my past. I remembered hearing the voice of God whispering to me about direction, about love, about following Him. I felt the warm embrace of my mother and the steadying hand of my father. I reflected on the progress of my own family in that place. I recalled the nights I lay in bed and prayed for Tara, my wife, and our future together - praying that she would love me like I loved her; the Christmas gatherings; Calah, my daughter, running backward hitting the wall and the stitches that followed; the nights spent sleeping with Caleb, my son, on a blow-up bed in the middle of the living room. The sweetness of home flooded my heart and filled my eyes with tears.

As I pondered, I could not help but recall Moses'; words....”Lord, you are home.”; We all have a longing to find the place where we belong. But it is not a place, it is a person...a people...a purpose. It is God who is making us a family. We are looking for home and it has been God all along.

God knows our needs and He meets those needs. He knows we need something tangible – something real that we can embrace, name, touch, and declare as our own. The house I grew up in is that space, made sacred by the very presence of the God who filled the hearts of those who lived there.

During this sojourn home I am embraced by my brother and sister, reconnected with my children, and as always accompanied by Tara. I am home - with God and with my family. There is no place like it, and there is nothing that meets the longing of my heart better than it can.

As I lead I must remember that my calling is to direct people to the home found in Christ. This requires me to live with heaven in view. Home is where to heart is....with Jesus.

One day I will be home. God will whisper to me once again and call me to Himself, and I will discover the truth that Moses, the wanderer, knew all along. I think the first words I hear will be “welcome home...”

Merry Christmas

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 20, 2022

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

Christmas is the season of hope, but there are seasons and circumstances in life where hope seems gone. However, God gives us hope even in those seasons.

There was a man who was just overwhelmed with life. His family was falling apart and his addictions were over taking his soul. In at hopeless season his life was suddenly cut short. His unexpected death threw his whole family into a spiral of doubt and despair. The deviation was not just contained to the family. This untimely death rippled throughout the community. A local pastor had been walking with this family before the death of their loved one and now he found himself in the positions to bring comfort and hope in a very difficult and hard to explain circumstances. The day for the funeral arrived greeted by an unseasonably cold and rainy day. The pastor had prayed and prepared. He stood before a grieving family and collections of friends and did his best to explain God's love and grace. He felt his best efforts fell on very broken hearts. He knew that a divine intervention was needed.

He finished the service admits tears and unanswered questions. The gathering was now moving from the funeral home chapel to a graveyard several miles away.

As it were, the rain intensified and the temperature continued to drop. The prospect of a gathering at a graveyard in a cold rain complicated the brokenness of the hearts of those who gathered.

As the pastor drove toward the graveyard, his heart sank knowing the hopelessness of the situation. He whispered a desperate prayer asking God to come though. As he rounded the corner into the graveyard he saw what everyone there was seeing...a rainbow. The rainbow was not normal but seemed to originate from the very grave where this troubled man would be placed.

Only God could give a sign like that. The rainbow promise of God began the healing that hope brings. The pastor changed his message and proclaimed what everyone saw...God gives us His hope even in graveyards of despair. There is no

great promise of God. Christmas is our reminded that God turns difficult seasons into the promise of hope. Jesus' birth was proclaimed by Herald Angels to a people who had lost hope. Jesus was born so that He would defeat death so that we might live in His hope.

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 21, 2022

Angels We Have Heard on High

Divine appointments....I first heard that phrase several years ago and found it compelling. My mind is captured that the God of all would set things into motion that I would come face to face with him. Through out scripture we find these appointments. Each time God encounters people they are changed.

You see it throughout scripture. Noah was changed when God asked him to build a boat for a coming storm. 100 years later the boat was finished and the rain came. Abraham was changed when God promised children to an old couple. Abraham believed God and 25 years later rocked a baby to sleep. Moses was changed when a burning bush spoke to him about rescuing a nation. Moses moved and freedom became reality. A shepherd boy became a king who launched a dynasty.

In a field, on a cold night, in the middle of nowhere, a group of outcast would have a divine encounter. This kairos moment was in perfect alignment with the God of the universe setting things into motion. These divine encounter are not frozen in time but are still active today. This is the season to listen, to look, to expect God to encounter you.

Merry Christmas!

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 22, 2022

Sweet Little Jesus Boy

He was a deserter....a Denier....a man who said one thing but did another. He had followed Jesus for three years and when it came time to stand he allowed a teenage girl to intimidate him into saying "I don't know the man". Sad!. However the one he denied cooked him breakfast and accepted him....His name...Peter!

He was a self inflated scholar. He was on a mission to stomp out this new order of Jesus followers. He had just lead a angry mob to execute an innocent man. He was not fit for anything other than rejection until he had a encounter of acceptance.... His name....Paul!

She was an adulterer....Caught in the very act. She, by law, deserved death. However, a rabbi from Nazareth told Her she was not condemned...accepted...her name...she had no name according to scripture...the rabbi's name....Jesus!

All of these folks and many more have been accepted by Jesus. If they could say one thing, I believe it would be Thank you! Thank you Jesus...thank you that you didn't give up on me, thank you that you over looked my problems and saw what I could be, thank you for loving me when I could even love myself, thank you for accepting me.

One of the most powerful things that happens in a persons life is to be accepted....without condition.

Acceptance is the longing of every human heart. Acceptance is so powerful that the lack of it cripples and the results of acceptance is freedom. We need acceptance, hope for it, expect it, and let it define us.

The lyrics of this song explain how sweet little Jesus boy was more than a boy but the God who accepts us. I can't think of a better way to say Merry Christmas is to say thank you Jesus for accepting me...us.

Thank you Jesus!

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 23, 2022

The First Noel

For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. 2 Corinthians 1:20

This reading for Advent is all about Hope Renewed. It is all about God and a His promises through Jesus! Hebrew culture is all about God.. Although they missed Jesus. One of the great traditions is living under the canopy. When a Jewish couple gets married they stand beneath a canopy. This symbolizes they are under the protection of God. They are under his covering, under his care. The power of God's presence in their lives is expressed by living under the canopy of God.

This is awesome. I loved my father. Many of the happiest days of my life were lived under his care and comfort. I lived under the canopy of my father. When he passed away I felt the loss at the core of my being. For the first time in my life in felt uncovered. Even through I was almost 50 when he died I felt his absence. I miss my dad everyday. I say that to say this. As surly as I lived under his care I have a father who still covers me. I live under the canopy of God almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, the great I am, the Ancient of days, and I call him father. There is hope because I have a Loving Father who's canopy covers me. Life is good under the canopy of God!

As we take this advent journey we have to remember that the presence of God is the launching point to the promises of God. I read a quote for Tim Keller this week....

“Every sin committed is a practice of practical atheism” Tim Keller

Why would he say such a thing. Because we forget that we live under the canopy of God. The intentional understanding of this presence changes me. My sin is out of my lack of understanding that I am under the canopy.

Brother Lawrance was a monk who wrote about intentional living face to face with God. He taught that everything we did from baking a cake to our personal devotional are in the presence of God. Henry Knowen, also a monk who worked

with the mental ill, wrote the same. When I get the fact that I live in God's presence under his canopy then my life changes.

We however are good at compartmentalizing our lives where we shut God out of certain areas. That is ignorant at best. We somehow think that we are only in the presence of God through the formality of prayer...it just isn't so!. God is present. We live under the canopy.

There is great hope in the presence of God...Hope Renewed!

The First Noel was all about the reality that God was covering you...live in His hope!

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 24, 2022

O Holy Night

The most famous Christmas song is O holy night. The lyrics paint a picture of stars, longings, and love. The musical score is demanding and requires vocal dexterity. It's a great song.

More than the song is the truth. The night became Holy because the one who loves us most came fulfilling the promise He made in the garden. He himself was coming to rescue us...fallen man!

Today is Christmas Eve. Use this day to reflect and celebrate the divine rescue and the hope that this session brings. Hope is not the feelings of Nostalgia but the reality that God has come near and we will never be the same.

Maybe hum a few bars of oh holy night and rejoice on this Christmas Eve.

Advent Reading for Fellowship of the Crossroads - December 25, 2022

Christmas poem

What did I miss while I was sleeping?

Did the angels light the sky To lowly shepherds near by?

Did a baby's sweet cry Bring a mother's lullaby?

Did some a King's from a far Choose to follow a star?

Do and evil King's decree Fulfill an ancient prophecy?

Did the Lord of all the earth Visit us with lowly birth?

Did I miss the majesty Of the incarnate deity?

Did I sleep the whole night through Not aware of all He'd do?

The dawn has come again I've awakened to a life transcend

For in that silent night of mine Came the savior of mankind.

So this is what I missed While I was sleeping.