

Good News Daily

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Sunday, December 20

Psalm 24 *Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.* (v.7)

Scholars estimate it would take a person five days to walk from Galilee to Jerusalem. That means, following the church calendar, today Joseph hoisted a very pregnant Mary onto a donkey, strapped their meager belongings on its back, and headed out to his hometown. The King of glory was headed toward the holiest city in the world—to be born in a manger in a small town nearby.

This last Sunday in Advent, as we light the 4th purple candle, let us reflect on the Light that is coming into the world. Let's leave the gift wrapping, cookie baking, choir rehearsals, brass polishing, and last-minute shopping in the back of our minds for a while and simply take time to thank Jesus for his coming to save us from our sins. Open the gates of your hearts so that he may come in.

Isaiah 42:1-12; Psalm 29; Ephesians 6:10-20; John 3:16-21

Monday, December 21

Isaiah 11:1-9 *A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.* (v.1)

I saw a picture on Facebook of a felled tree, lying on its side. The trunk was virtually dead. Yet life still flowed from the old roots. A new, maturing oak tree, lush and green, shot from the old stump. Its expanding canopy spread needed shade over the field.

Never think you are too “dead” in your sins or have been felled by your past. What you may think is a useless stump, God can purpose for His glory.

No matter your age, health, or mistakes, God can flow His Holy Spirit through the roots of your life and bring forth new growth. You can still flourish right where you are through His life-giving love. Just remember that growing into the strength of an oak takes time.

Psalms 61, 62; Revelation 20:1-10; John 5:30-47

Tuesday, December 22

Revelation 20:11—21:8 *And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.* (v.12)

Sort of a grim picture amid the tinsel, glitter, carols, and cookies, isn't it? This is the time to celebrate life, and not death. Jesus is coming into the world. Hallelujah!

Unfortunately, death shrouds the Christmas joy. There are some who will not be at the Christmas dinner table this year. Some will mourn even though angels sing. And we who know the story understand that Jesus was born so that he might die.

But here is the good news. On that Judgment Day that John wrote about in Revelation, we will open our last gift. A bright shiny one inside glittery, white paper tied with a huge golden bow. It is the gift of forgiveness, of life, and of being made righteous. Because, as believers in our Savior, we are not the dead ones standing before the throne. We live, wrapped in his gift of mercy and grace.

Yes, we will be accountable for our actions, but the bail has been paid. There is no condemnation for those who believe in Christ, as Paul stated.

Isaiah 11:10-16; Psalms 66, 67; Luke 1:5-25

Wednesday, December 23

Luke 1:26-38 *The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.* (vv.28-29)

Mary was greatly troubled for a reason. In her time, being in the Lord's presence meant death. As a teenage girl with her whole life ahead of her, that would make her tremble in her sandals. And why would she be so favored?

I can somewhat relate. When God called me into missionary work, I was filled with doubts. Why me? I'm not worthy. Did I hear correctly?

Perhaps you have backstepped a bit when you have felt God call you to act. Maybe you swallowed hard. Surely, He could choose anyone to do this. Why you?

But the old saying that God doesn't call the equipped but equips the called rings true. He knew Mary's heart, her strengths and her faith. He knows yours and mine as well. He also knows how He will grow us for His use. May we respond as willingly as Mary did, even though we have questions, just as she did.

Isaiah 28:9-22; Psalm 72; Revelation 21:9-21

Thursday, December 24

Isaiah 35:1-10 *They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.* (v.10b)

Happy Christmas Eve! Tonight, all over the world throngs of worshipers will gather at the steps of churches as bells toll. Candles will be lit and carols sung. Smiles will be on faces. Tomorrow may be all about dashing to open stockings and preparing for family and friends to arrive, but tonight it is time to rejoice and worship our Savior.

For one or two hours, sorrow and sighing may flee. Maybe. Christmas can also be a very lonely time for those who buy into the commercials' fake representation of what it's all about. Family is still family with all of its issues. Bills still need to be paid. Troubles still exist. Not everyone can afford to give their children the latest device, hottest toy, or brand-named clothing. Maybe that gift you saved up for won't be appreciated. The ham will not be juicy...

Stop! That's not what it's all about, is it? It is about us receiving the greatest gift of all—Jesus.

All else pales. All grudges, personalities, hectic preparations, or disappointments fade into the background. Tonight, lift your candle and sing. Joy to the world; the Lord is come.

Psalms 45, 46; Revelation 22:12-17, 21; Luke 1:67-80

Friday, December 25

1 John 4:7-16 *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.* (v.7)

Merry Christmas! Today we celebrate love...ours for each other, for our Lord, and His eternal love for us.

But we are human, too. The gifts under the tree may be wrapped and pretty, but often our feelings toward our family are not. We still recall the harsh argument we had with a sibling, or how we were mistreated as kids. Aunt Jane is still only concerned with her aches and pains, and Uncle Bob has to be in the limelight. Your brother will go on and on about the fabulous vacation they took that you could never afford, and your grandfather will snore loudly through dessert.

Yes, they are human. So are we all. We are only made perfect in Christ. Let's give ourselves a gift this year. Why don't we box up our past emotions and do not open it again until Christmas is over? Today, let's enjoy those we spend time with. See them, and ourselves, anew—loved by Christ. And have the merriest of Christmases ever.

Zechariah 2:10-13; Psalms 2, 85; John 3:31-36

Saturday, December 26

Acts 6:8—7:60 *When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.* (vv.54b-55)

Stephen was the first martyr of the faith. Today, we celebrate his bold witness of Jesus being Lord in the midst of angry opposition. It may seem strange to have this "red" day of martyrdom the day after the

white and gold of Christmas. Why did the church fathers set St. Stephen's for today of all days? Couldn't we have celebrated the joy of Christmas a little longer?

Stephen's witness shows us that Jesus's gift of eternal peace and life is real. He is the true source of our joy, not external circumstances. His presence is the present we long for.

Despite all our trials and tribulations, we, like Stephen, should take our eyes off our circumstances and look to heaven. God is still on His throne and Christ still reigns to intercede for us. The gift of the Holy Spirit still lives in us.

Yes, the Good News of Christmas is that there can be joy, no matter what each day brings. "Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord" (Psalm 31:24).

Jeremiah 26:1-9, 12-15; Psalm 31; Matthew 23:34-39

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