

Christmas Season 2023

Bellringer Devotionals

*Dear Corps Officer,*

*We know Christmas is the busiest season of the year so, in some small way, we hope this takes one thing off your list. We pray these short devotionals will give your kettle workers (Women’s Ministries members, nursing home residents, etc.) a quick thought to turn their hearts toward God. Feel free to personalize the information for your location. As you can see, many have contributed to this work—be assured of their prayers for you!*

*May God bless you this Christmas!*

***Major Deb Pascoe***

*Territorial Spiritual Life Development Secretary*

*USA Central Territory*

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Thank You to the Contributing Writers



**The Salvation Army | USA Central Territory**

**Commissioner Evie Diaz, *Territorial Commander***

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Day One

November 10, 2023

***RED KETTLES***

***“Each person should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*** 2 Corinthians 9:7

Every year, from November through Christmas Eve, bellringers stand next to The Salvation Army kettles around the world and encourage people passing by to donate money for those in need. The donations are used throughout the year to extend a variety of assistance to members of the community.

This holiday tradition began in 1891 when Salvation Army Captain Joseph McFee placed an empty crab pot outside a San Francisco ferry landing to collect money and provide a free Christmas dinner for the city’s destitute and poverty-stricken. Beside the pot he placed a sign that read, “Keep the Pot Boiling.” As the boats came in, people tossed a coin or two into the pot, and soon he had all the money needed to purchase the community meal.

The idea soon spread to other cities, and it continues today. Red kettles are iconic Christmas season fixtures at locations such as shopping malls and downtown corners. Volunteers and paid workers who believe in The Salvation Army’s good works stand near the kettles and ring a bell to help attract people’s attention and encourage donations.

These special workers withstand the winter weather to raise money for their neighbors. By giving their time, they help support people in need and ensure that hope marches for anyone facing hard times.

***https://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/red-kettle-history/***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for all the services The Salvation Army can provide that are so dependent on public support and giving. We pray your blessing on those that can make donations to our red kettles. Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day Two

November 11, 2023

***LOVE***

Thank you for being an important part of The Salvation Army team as we raise monies that fund the ministries that happen here. You need to know that everything we do here is motivated by our love of God. We believe that God loves all people so much that He sent His Son Jesus to bridge the gap between God and man that sin had created.

***“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life”*** John 3:16. Jesus was sacrificed on a cross so that our sins could be forgiven and our relationship with God restored. That’s true love.

Love is an intense feeling of deep affection. It has been said, “Love is the greatest force in the universe. It can endure, persevere and suffer. Love hopes where everyone else despairs. Love shuts the door on doubt and carries the feeblest in its arms. It encourages when all the world would discourage. Love is faithful.” (The Officer, 1917)

We’ve all experienced love in different ways, but God’s love is pure. God’s love is uncon-ditional and has no boundaries. God is love. We pray today that you know God and have experienced His forgiveness and love personally.

The Salvation Army puts all our hope and trust in this One True God of love and peace. We are an Army of Salvation that desires everyone we meet to come to know the saving power of the Lord. This is The Salvation Army that you represent when you stand at a kettle and ring the bell. The chiming bell is a call for people to give so our programming will continue to help those in our community. Please say a word of thanks as people drop donations into your kettle. Our prayer is that God would multiply those gifts so we can help even more with food, everyday necessities, rent as well as programs for families, children, single parents while, at the same time, we share with them the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thank you again for being a part of our ministry today.

***Major Deb Pascoe***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for your love. Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day Three

November 13, 2023

***A CHEERFUL SPIRIT***

As a bellringer, how many times would you guess that you say, “Merry Christmas!” in a day?  Are you able to smile and wish someone a Merry Christmas even when your heart isn't necessarily feeling merry?

It’s no secret that for some, maybe even for you, the holiday season is not always merry and bright. For some, this time of year can be painful. Maybe it is for you, maybe it is for the people you see as you ring the bell.

Maybe someone you encounter today has lost a loved one. They may have wayward children, poor health, broken relationships, or addiction. Or maybe they're struggling with the darkness of loneliness.

What do we do when we can’t find any holiday cheer?

2 Corinthians 1:3 refers to God as ***“the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort”*** (NIV). He comforts us so that we, in turn, can cheer and comfort others. When our hearts feel heavy at the holidays, God stands ready not only to soothe our sorrows but also to help us seek out the discouraged and do something to show them that we care — and that He cares.

Maybe, then, the holidays really can be “the most wonderful time of the year”: a time for cheering others with the love of God, in spite of how we feel that day.

Perhaps you will be the face and the heart of Jesus to someone today.

***Major Jan Sjögren***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Help us to be cheerful as we wish those passing by our kettles today a merry Christmas! Thank you, Lord, for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day Four

November 14, 2023

***The God Who Sees Me – El Roi***

Genesis 16

A number of years ago my husband got a devastating medical diagnosis. This diagnosis meant that our lives had to change. We had to move to a new place and start new jobs. Eventually it meant that we both had to retire. At the time, I wondered where God was and why all of this was happening to my husband and me.

During this very difficult time, I came across the story of Hagar in Genesis 16. She was the servant of Sarai who was the wife of Abram. Sarai and Abram had been married for many years and had not had a child. Because of this, Sarai told Abram to go to her servant so they could have a child though her. So, Abram did as she asked, and Hagar became pregnant.

The Bible says that once Hagar was pregnant, Sarai treated her harshly. After Hagar had taken all the abuse she could, she ran away into the wilderness. An angel of the Lord found her by a spring in the wilderness. The angel asked why she was there, and she told him the reason. He told her to return to Sarai and went on to say that she would have a child and she would call him Ishmael. He also promised that Ishmael would become the leader of a nation.

Then Hagar said, ***“You are the God who sees me”*** (Genesis 16:13). In the midst of her despair God saw her and sent someone to minister to her.

This was of great comfort to me because God is *the God who sees*. He knew my situation. It was not a surprise to Him. Because my husband was sick, I often felt like few people saw me. But God did!

God sees you, too. He sees all of us in the good times and bad times. That doesn’t mean He changes our circumstances or fixes all our issues. All these years later my husband is still sick, but we are not in it alone. He walks along with us. He also sends people to minister to us.

Today, remember that God sees you and is walking with you; you are not alone. Go with the God who sees in all you do, knowing He will send people to minister to you as well.

***Major Robin Rutledge***

*Father God,*

*Thank you for seeing me in all the situations of my life. Thank you for walking with me and knowing what I need when I need it. Thank you for sending people to me to minister when I need them. Help me Lord today, in all I encounter as I stand by my kettle, to reflect You. Amen*

Day Five

November 15, 2023

***Light of the World***

***“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

***“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.”*** Genesis 1:1-4

***“In the beginning was the Word… He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made… In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness and not overcome it.”*** John 1:1-5

Have you been in a cave or perhaps a closet with no lights on and it was so dark you couldn’t even see your hand in front of your face? That can be kind of spooky and fun…until it’s not. If you’ve been trapped in a sin or in a season of the dark night of the soul, darkness is destructive, overwhelming, and isolating.

From the very beginning, the world has been a dark and chaotic place. But God broke through the darkness and the chaos with light. And that light was good. The apostle John beautifully illustrates God’s revelation of Himself as light, and this light is Jesus. It was through Jesus that light was created, and He alone is the Light of the World. He continues to break into our darkness, our despair, our confusion, and our chaos. His light dispels evil. He illuminates our pathways when we are lost and directionless. He enlightens our understanding of His Word. His light brings color and depth to our otherwise purposeless lives.

Worship the Light of the World, meditating on this Christmas song (by We the Kingdom):

*Light of the world, treasure of Heaven
Brilliant like the stars, in the wintery sky
Joy of the Father, reach through the darkness
Shine across the earth, send the shadows to flight*

*Light of the world, from the beginning
The tragedies of time, were no match for Your love
From great heights of glory, You saw my story
God, You entered in, and became one of us*

*Sing hallelujah, sing hallelujah
Sing hallelujah for the things He has done
Come and adore Him, bow down before Him
Sing hallelujah to the light of the world*

Songwriters: Andrew Bergthold / Edmond Martin Cash / Franni Cash / Martin Cash / Scott Mctyeire Cash

Light of the World (Sing Hallelujah) lyrics © Capitol Christian Music Group, Capitol CMG Publishing

***Major Beverly Best***

Day Six

November 16, 2023

***THE Word***

***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.***

***“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*** John 1:1, 14

Jesus is The Word that became flesh. He has always been and will always be.

As you think about Jesus as a baby, born in Bethlehem, do not lose sight of His divinity. This baby who grew up and became a Man-Savior is also God Almighty! It could not have been otherwise. Christ’s sacrificial life and death would have been insufficient if Jesus were not God. So rejoice in knowing The Word, who entered the world as a helpless infant, is the same One who brought the world into existence.

***“Though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.”*** 2 Corinthians 8:9. No Christmas present could ever compare with the treasure you have in Christ! He has removed your sins as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12); freeing you from all condemnation. He gifts you with unimaginably glorious Life that will never end! The best response to this astonishing Gift is to embrace it joyfully and gratefully.

***Jesus Always-Embracing Joy in His Presence, by Sarah Young,***

***p.376, Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2016.***

*Lord Jesus,*

*We believe You are the Word of Life who gives us life eternal when we simply ask. Thank you for wanting to have a relationship with us. Today we give thanks for each of these bellringers as they have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle. Amen.*

Day Seven

November 17, 2023

***positive interactions***

Philippians 1:12 & 14 tells us, ***“Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.”***

A bellringer once made a comment about a customer as they left the store with a cart loaded with all kinds of things, but didn’t stop to make a donation in the red kettle. The customer stopped and confronted the bellringer. It was not a very positive interaction…

We have no idea what is happening in the lives of people who pass us by. We have no right to judge their lack of giving. Matthew 7:1 reads, ***“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.”***

How we interact with people reflects how we advance our mission and God’s Word. How we deal with unfriendly potential donors represents how they see Christ in us. The Lord could be giving us an opportunity to bring joy into someone’s life, or to even present the Gospel. Our interactions with the people passing by can have just as big of an impact as a donation in the kettle.

In this scripture verse, Paul was chained to the prison wall, yet he took the opportunity to witness for Christ through his conduct and attitude. Paul looked at his situation through the lens of his service to Christ and his mission. Do we respond to those who walk by our kettle in this way—through the eyes of Jesus?

Some days you may feel like you’re ‘chained’ to your kettle stand. Remember Paul’s jail experience and as you are ‘chained’ to your kettle, see it as your service to Christ and your mission to witness of God’s love to all people.

***Major H. Treve Pascoe***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Help us to be mindful of how we see others and view them through your eyes and heart. Help us to speak up if given the opportunity to share about You. Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day Eight

November 18, 2023

***Snowflakes***

**“Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous – how well I know it.”** [Psalm 139:14](https://www.biblestudytools.com/psalms/139-14.html) (NLT)

In 1885, Wilson “Snowflake” Bentley was the first person to ever photograph a snowflake. It is from his research that we learned as children, that no two snowflakes are alike. Bentley captured over 5000 pictures of intricate snowflakes, finding each one to be unique. In 1925, Bentley commented on his study saying, “Under the microscope, I found that snowflakes were miracles of beauty, and it seemed a shame that this beauty should not be seen and appreciated by others. Each crystal is a masterpiece of design and no one design was ever repeated…”

Snowflakes, at times, are underappreciated. On their own, they are simply a combination of water vapor, ice crystals and dust. They often are clumped together with other snowflakes and go unnoticed separately. Yet, when you take the time to stick out your hand to catch and examine an individual flake, its beauty is noticed. This is exactly how God made you. You are a special and unique piece of work. There is no one else just like you. You are more than dust and water. In each person, God invests His own workmanship. A unique and beautiful creation, a work of art, if you will, is the result.

In addition to understanding that we are each unique and beautiful creations of God, it is also important to appreciate others. They, as well as you, were made for special purposes, not simply to be a part of the crowd. When you take the time to look, the unique beauty God created will stand out.

[***www.crosswalk.com***](http://www.crosswalk.com)***, Kelly McFadden, December 2021.***

At Christmas time we often think of and experience snow. Many even like to decorate with ‘snow’. Even today you may see it floating down. Be reminded that God made you very special like each unique snowflake.

*Heavenly Father,*

*As we see the snow, please remind us that You created each of us intricate and unique like individual snowflakes. Thank you today for each of these special bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle. Amen.*

Day Nine

November 20, 2023

***PEACE***

One of the gifts that God tells us he will give us is the gift of His peace. Psalm 29:11 says, ***“The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.”*** As we think about this gift of peace, ask yourself these questions:

Who is God to you? Your protector? Maybe your provider? This season, have you allowed Him to be your peace? We live in a world with a world with very little peace. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote in the poem, “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”:

*And in despair I bowed my head;*

*“There is no peace on earth,” I said;*

*“For hate is strong,*

*and mocks the song*

*Of peace on earth, good-will to men!”*

When we think of God, we often paint a picture of a “wish granter” or some sort of Santa figure who gives us things when we ask for them. Though God is not Santa, He does want to bless us. He offers us so many things free of charge.

Your day-to-day circumstances might be hard, and you may not always have peace. That doesn’t mean that God doesn’t care or understand. He loves you and wants to provide His perfect peace for you. As you think about the gifts you need to buy, the things that need to be cleaned or the food that needs to be cooked, don’t forget that only God can provide you with the quiet strength that only comes from His peace. Longfellow responded to his own cynical paragraph later in his poem, writing:

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:*

*“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;*

*The Wrong shall fail,*

*The Right prevail,*

*With peace on earth, good-will to men.”*

***Melissa Roemer***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for the gift of real peace that we can only find in You. Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day Ten

November 21, 2023

***Peppermint Mochas & God***

I love the first snowfall of the year. There is a fresh crispness in the air that is so refreshing. There is joy as families go to nearby parks for sledding. There’s fun in pulling out the winter wardrobe items of cute furry boots, pretty woven scarves, and warm hats. There’s beauty in the trees as they glisten with icicles hanging from them. Then, there is that wonderful aroma of peppermint mocha to warm me up.

All these things make me want to curl up on the couch with a cozy blanket, and a good book. As I watch creation transition into a new season, I find that winter is a beautiful time to pause and reflect. It’s a time to see where our heart is with God and remember his goodness.

Psalm 145:5-7 says, “***I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wondrous works. Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, and I will declare Your greatness. They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, and shall sing of Your righteousness.”***

God’s word reminds us of the abundant blessing he gives us, of his steadfast love and the hope that we can find in him. 1 Timothy 4:4-5 says, ***"For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer."***

Use this season to thank God for all he has given you. Thank him for the beauty of creation and the earth he has blessed us with. Find time with family and friends and enjoy each other's company. Take the peaceful, quiet moments to pray and read God’s Word. Enjoy your peppermint mocha latte as you move into this new Season, admiring the beauty and goodness God has given every one of us.

***Captain Stephanie Hartley***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Help us to pause and be thankful for what we have and for your goodness to us. Thank you, Lord, for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day 11

November 22, 2023

***THANKSGIVING***

***“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him and bless His name.”*** Psalm 100:4

When you are thankful, you worship God acceptably—with reverence and awe. Thanksgiving is not just a holiday celebration once a year. It’s an attitude of the heart that produces JOY; it is also a biblical command. You cannot worship God acceptably with an ungrateful heart. You may go through the motions, but your ingratitude will hold you back.

Whenever you’re struggling spiritually or emotionally, pause and check your ‘thankfulness gauge’. If it is reading low, ask God to help you increase your level of gratefulness. Search for reasons to thank God; jot them down if you need to. Your perspective will gradually shift from focusing on all that is wrong to rejoicing in things that are right.

No matter what is happening, you can be joyful in God your Savior. Because of Jesus’ finished work on the cross, you have a glorious future that is guaranteed forever! Rejoice in this free gift of salvation—for you, for *all* who trust Jesus as Savior. Let your heart overflow with thankfulness, and the Lord will fill you with His JOY.

***Jesus Always-Embracing Joy in His Presence, by Sarah Young,***

***p.340, Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2016.***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for the Thanksgiving holiday. Help us to be joyful and give thanks for all your goodness. Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day 12

November 24, 2023

***WE CAN BE RICH***

***“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”***

Philippians 4:19

***“I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord.”***

Psalm 116:17

***“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”***

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Jesus is the greatest gift imaginable! When you have Jesus Christ, you have everything you need—for this life and the next. Jesus has promised to meet all your needs according to His glorious riches. Yet His loved ones sometimes fail to enjoy the riches I provide because of an ungrateful attitude. Instead of rejoicing in all that they have, they long for what they do not have. As a result, they become discontented.

The Lord wants you to practice the sacrifice of thanksgiving—thanking Him in all circumstances. First, give thanks for the blessings you can see in your life. Then stop and ponder the awesome gift of knowing Christ. He is your living God, your loving Savior, your constant Companion.

No matter how much or how little you have in this world, your relationship with Jesus makes you immeasurably rich. So whenever you are counting your blessings, be sure to include the infinite wealth you have in Christ. Add Christ into the equation, and your gratitude will grow exponentially. Whatever you have + Jesus = an incalculable fortune!

***Jesus Always-Embracing Joy in His Presence, by Sarah Young,***

***p.377, Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2016.***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Remind us to count our blessings and to be thankful. Help us to remember that when we have You in our lives we can consider ourselves rich. Thank you today for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle. Lord, bless the donations given today. Amen.*

Day 13

November 25, 2023

***RING THE BELLS***

The stores are busier than normal, and people are rushing here and there looking for the best deals and the perfect present. It’s that time of year, a time when it seems that in our efforts to find the perfect present that we become almost indifferent to everything around us. Horns are honking, people are pushing and shoving, everyone is in a hurry and forgets to take time to remember what it is all about.

In Luke 2:4-7, we read the incredible story of the birth of Jesus*.* ***“4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.”***

In the quiet of the night with only the sounds of the animals around them, Mary and Joseph welcomed into the world the Son of God. Later the Angels told the shepherds, and they came to see, but the city of Bethlehem didn’t seem to pay any attention to the baby’s cry that night. The next day business went on as usual in the crowded streets—people were pushing and shoving to get where they needed to go. It was business as usual, even though Jesus had entered the world.

There was an exception to this. The shepherds went through the city telling everyone they saw about the birth. This clarion call of the shepherds is the reminder that we give today. With each ring of the bell, we declare the birth of the one who came into the world to save us from our sins and to show us the way to God. There is an old song that reminds us of this story.

Come On, Ring Those Bells

Everybody likes to take a holiday; everybody likes to take a rest.

Spending time together with the family, sharing lots of love and happiness.

Celebrations come because of something good; celebrations we love to recall.

Mary had a baby boy in Bethlehem, the greatest celebration of them all.

*Come on, ring those bells, light the Christmas tree; Jesus is the King born for you and me.*

*Come on, ring those bells, everybody say, “Jesus, we remember this your birthday.”*

*- Andrew Culverwell*

The streets will be busy, the stores crowded; people will be pushing and shoving to get where they want to go. They may even be indifferent to everything around them in search of their treasures. We can remind them that Christmas is here and it’s time to remember Jesus’ birthday. So come on, ring those bells!

***Major Tim Pascoe***

*Heavenly Father, thank you for the opportunity we have to ring the bell today to call people’s attention to the Christ Child. Thank you, Lord, for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day 14

November 27, 2023

***THE BEST PLACE TO START…AT THE BEGINNING***

John 1:1-14

A song from “The Sound of Music” says, “Let’s start at the very beginning, the very best place to start.” And that is exactly what John did as he started his gospel. He began at the very beginning of creation with God… ***“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God”*** (John 1:1). ***“And the Word was made flesh and lived among us”*** (John 1:14).

The ‘Word’ is the one who made everything, the one who created the heavens and the earth. John’s approach in telling the story of redemption was to reach both Jew and Gentile by speaking of bringing the universe into existence and leading to point out that Jesus was God’s self-expression to our world. In God’s plan the Word became flesh. A BABY WAS BORN…JESUS! Jesus was the total message from God to all of mankind.

He appeared to be an ordinary baby coming into this world just like us. But ordinary he was not. He grew up and lived among the people of his day, and as he did he revealed the character of the Father. In Old Testament times people understood and related to God as ‘almighty’, ‘all-powerful’, and ‘holy’. Jesus turned the world upside down as he healed the sick, taught and enlightened the people regarding the scriptures, cared for the poor, as he addressed those who were against him, and by showing others how to live and love. He showed God’s love and compassion for all of mankind. Through his life on earth, he revealed God as our loving Father—a father interested in us; a father who cares personally for us.

God, in human form, came and lived among us. He was fully human yet fully divine—God’s perfect revelation of himself. He stepped into humanity to break the curse of sin and became human to win us back to himself. He became our example and broke the curse of sin through the shedding of his blood and carries in his body our sin and iniquities (1 Peter 2:24). The baby in the manger was one of us. He knows us, He understands us. His birth brought hope into the world and still brings hope into our world today for all people.

As you behold the babe in the manger this Christmas season, contemplate what his birth means to you personally and give thanks. THANK GOD FOR HIS INDESCRIBABLE GIFT!

**1.**

O little town of Bethlehem how still we see thee lie!

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.

Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;

The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

**2.**

How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given!

So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven,

No ear may hear His coming; but in this world of sin

Where meek souls will receive Him, still

The dear Christ enters in.

**3.**

O holy Child of Bethlehem descend to us, we pray;

Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;

O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.

*- Phillips Brooks*

***Commissioner Nancy Roberts***

Day 15

November 28, 2023

***PROMISES***

I love to study God’s promises in the Bible and to see how they all connect. God promised Noah that he would never again destroy the whole earth with a flood and left the rainbow as a mark of his covenant. God promised Abraham he would be the father of many nations and blessed him and Sarah with a son in their old age. God promised to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and He fulfilled this with Moses leading them to the promised land.

These promises and more are written throughout the Bible connecting to the ultimate promise of giving us a Savior. Isaiah 9:6 (CSB) says, ***“For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”***

As you put up your Christmas tree, hang the stockings by the fireplace, and drink hot cocoa, remember that Christmas is a season of fulfilled promises from God. We celebrate the birth of Jesus, a gift from God to humankind. Through Jesus, we can ask for forgiveness for our wrongdoings and give our lives to God so we can spend an eternity in heaven. So, as you see the Christmas lights outside and hear the Christmas carols this season, know that God loves you and that Jesus is a fulfilled promise for all of us.

***Captain Stephanie Hartley***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for the promises we find in Your word, especially of your promise of a Savior. Thank you, Lord, for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day 16

November 29, 2023

***THE christmas tree***

1 Peter 2:24: “***He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”***

Isaiah 2:5: ***“Let us walk in the light of the Lord.”***

There are different legends of Christmas trees. One tells of St. Boniface of Crediton, who left England to bring the good news of Jesus to the tribes of Germany. One night he rescued a boy who had been tied to an oak tree to meet his demise. He pointed to his followers a nearby evergreen green. They put their candles on its branches. By the light, they listened as Boniface told them of a loving God who had brought light to the world through His Son.

Another legend shares it was Martin Luther, the great sixteenth century reformer, who first brought the lighted Christmas tree indoors. The story goes as he was walking through the forest one night, he looked up to see the stars shining through the branches. It was so beautiful he went home to tell his children how the lighted tree was like a picture of Jesus, who left the starry heaven to bring light to earth.

***The Lion Christmas Book, Mary Batchelor,***

 ***p. 28, Lion Publishing, 1984.***

As believers, the evergreen tree can remind of us of the everlasting life we have through knowing Christ as Savior and Lord. Our new life in Him begins when we believe that He came to earth as a babe, grew up to be a man who died for our sins on a cross made from a tree. He rose again and intercedes now for us at the right hand of God. The Christmas tree lights can remind us of the light of Jesus in our lives and how we need to shine for him. As you view Christmas trees around you this season may they remind you of a much deeper meaning.

***Major Deb Pascoe***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for the beauty of the Christmas tree and the deeper meaning it can have to us as believers in Christ. Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day 17

November 30, 2023

***Waiting***

Do you remember Christmas Eve as a kid, trying to go to sleep but excited for what the next morning was going to be? Maybe you sat up hoping to catch a glimpse of Santa, or you went to bed early so that he would come. There are two kinds of people when it comes to Christmas presents. The first is the person who waits anxiously, but patiently. Content with dreaming up the possibilities and waiting for the moment when presents can be opened. Then there is the second kind, the kind who shakes every package under the tree. The kind who hunts through the house for weeks looking for gifts before they are wrapped.

The word Advent means ‘expectation’ or ‘waiting in moments’. Waiting is hard! We all have dreams and hopes, but we live in a fast-paced world. We can place an order on Amazon and have it on our doorstep within 24 hours. The Advent season is about waiting and faith. The Jews waited years and years for a messiah who would save them. Then, when the Messiah did come, He came as a baby! He would need time to grow and become a man.

The Christmas story gives us the reassurance and hope we need, because Jesus came at just the right time! Galatians 4:4 tells us, ***“But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.”***

As you finish your bellringing shift today and wait anxiously for the next ringer to come or your ride to arrive, remember that Advent is a time of waiting and anticipation. Just like your ride, Jesus came at the right time and in the perfect way.

***Melissa Roemer***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for this Advent season. Help us to prepare our hearts as we wait for your coming. Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day 18

December 1, 2023

***Incarnation:  Rediscovering the Significance of Christmas***

James 1:17 (KJV) tells us, ***"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights.”***

It took my breath away as I walked into the chapel to where the young loves were going to exchange their wedding vows. The man and woman were soon to make a life-long covenant with God at the very foundation of their marriage. The candlelight in each stained-glass window reflected the flickering of the white candles. There were white lights along the walls, the platform was draped in white satin, and candles at each row of pews were lit by ushers who were handsomely dressed in black tuxedos, walking in step to begin the processional. As the sanctuary lights were dimmed, the candles did exactly what was expected by the families and guests—the glow was breathtaking!

I am not sure that we, as children of our Father God, experience such breathtaking experiences as He plans for us. We might live in an area where the rains provide beautiful and amazing sunsets or rainbows, but we see them so often that it becomes common.  We might travel to where we see mountains and landscapes that are gorgeous, so we capture it all enroute, but on the return drive it is taken for granted because we've already seen them.

The Season of Christmas certainly provides wonder, excitement, and opportunities of surprise to all ages. During the season we see the signs of gift giving, evergreen trees aglow, decorations, and lights. Lights in the windows of homes, red and green lights by garage doors or porches. Strings of lights wrap each tree branch ever so carefully. The lights convey to people warmth and brightness that comes with the darkness of winter.

The Father of lights looks into our souls, embraces His children and loves us.  He gives to His own the desires of our hearts—not always what is wanted, but what is needed. Our Father provides what is best for us. When the 'season of darkness' creeps into our lives in ways we do not anticipate, desire or welcome, it is then that our Father has already gone before us. He knows us. Our Father assures us that He is bigger than the darkness. He created us and He will guide us into the light—His light, His presence, and our delight.

***Lt. Colonel Rebecca Sjögren***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Help us to see Your light and goodness around us. Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day 19

December 2, 2023

***ADVENT***

Think, for a moment, what it’s like to prepare your home for a special guest that’s coming for a visit. Sometimes it’s hard to wait for their arrival while you are busy preparing for them.

The Christian church calls the four weeks before Christmas ‘Advent’ and that word means ‘coming’. It is the time of year when we get ready for the coming of the most important Guest of all time—Jesus Christ.

Advent reminds us of three different ‘comings’ of Jesus. The first is in the past. It happened long ago at the first Christmas. Jesus, God’s Son, who made our world, came to live in it as a baby, then as a boy, and a man who gave His life to bring us lose to God. The second ‘coming’ belongs in the present because Jesus is waiting to come now to every person who invites Him into His or her heart and life. The third ‘coming’ of Jesus is still in the future. One day Jesus will come back to our world, not as a little, helpless baby, but as King and Judge of all.

So Advent is the season for getting ready; ready to understand the true meaning of Christmas, ready to ask Jesus into our lives and ready for the day when he will come again.

***The Lion Christmas Book, Mary Batchelor,***

***p. 10, Lion Publishing, 1984.***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for this Advent season which helps us focus on the coming Christ. Thank you, Lord, for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day 20

December 4, 2023

***Immanuel – God with us***

Matthew 1:23 tells us, ***“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel—which means, ‘God with us.’”***

Joan was born to a wild and inattentive teenage girl. From her first breath life was dangerous and cruel. Her own mother had no interest in caring for her; a lonely beginning. But she did not stay alone for long. Grandfather and grandmother stood in the gap. They were saddened for their rebellious teenage daughter. Prayers were a constant in their household for her to come home to them, but more importantly to Jesus.

In the meantime, they ran to the rescue of this helpless little baby. They became her first living picture of a Jesus who was Immanual, God with us. When she was without hope they brought light, love, and safety. They were with her.

I think about this story often because that baby was my mother. And I never got to meet that grandfather on this side of heaven. But I know about his act of love. I know about his presence in my mother’s life.

God sent Jesus for us. It was another teenage girl, this one loving God and being obedient, who birthed a baby. Her obedience made it possible for the great Immanuel (God with us) to enter our lives. This Immanuel would be safe, steady, true, consistent, loving, and ever-present. I love Jesus Immanuel.

We are called to be representatives of the great Immanuel; to be truly with others.

I know that as a fact. A great part about this account is that my great grandfather’s name was Immanuel Hackworth. Yes, that grandfather who interceded in my mother’s life. May my life be an expression of the great God with us. Jesus!!

***Commissioner Sue Swanson***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for the gift of Immanuel, God with us. Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day 21

December 5, 2023

***QUIETNESS***

Whenever a royal prince is born, there’s a great celebration with a lot of pomp and circumstance by all of the citizens throughout the kingdom. The good news is shared and is spread everywhere, and a sense of new promise with excitement fills the air. No one in the kingdom is immune to its contagion.

Not so much was the case when the Babe of Bethlehem was born—at least not by humanity at large whom this same Babe, Jesus Christ, came to seek and to save. They were just too busy to notice and to even turn their heads to pay attention to what was occurring “in their own backyard” (so-to-speak).

No preparations were made in advance for the prophesied arrival of the Babe of Bethlehem by anyone from His family tree. None of His earthly relatives gave an indication of interest, even though they were all in town together—by decree—to file for taxes. The night was quiet and uneventful in their humdrum lives.

But Jesus Christ’s birth wasn’t ignored by everyone, as noted in the Bible (Matthew 1 & 2 and Luke 2). In Matthew 2:9-10 we notice that a giant star in the sky was Jesus’ birth announcement. The following song gives us a summary of the scenario:

When talking of Christmas we think of ice and snow,

Gifts with wrappings and that mistletoe;

Trees and houses decorated with lights

And that jolly old fat-man who comes Every Christmas Eve night.

But there’s more to Christmas than just these lines,

For you’ve heard of a star that so did shine

Above a stable in Bethlehem;

“Peace on Earth and goodwill to men.”

The shepherds and kings who came from afar

Were guided by that glorious star;

As they knelt and praised the King of kings,

All around angels voices did sing:

*“Glory to God in the highest,*

*Glory to the newborn King;*

*For on this night a child is born*

*Who will save the world from sin!”*

So, when talking ‘bout Christmas,

Think of Christ who so did come

To save the world on that first

Silent as well as holy night.

*Songwriter: Russ Sjögren*

Let’s not ignore the Christ found in the word Christmas, whose birth we celebrate. As Christ entered the Earth and was born man, so does He enter our hearts to be born again—doing so in the sound of silence. Reflect on the words of this Christmas carol by Phillips Brooks:

*How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given!*

*So, God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His Heaven.*

*No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,*

*Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.*

***Major Russ Sjögren***

Day 22

December 6, 2023

***CHRISTMAS LETTERS***

***“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”***  Psalm 119:105

***“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”*** 2 Timothy 3:16

For many years when our kids were younger, I would put together a Christmas letter that would be included in the many Christmas cards we sent out. It wasn’t very long but conveyed our family news, the children growing, over that year. We would later hear from family and friends how much the note had meant to them.

I love watching Christmas movies. One of my favorites is *The Christmas Card* (RHI Entertainment, LLC 2007). It’s the story of a young woman who, through a church activity, writes Christmas letters to be mailed to service men and women overseas. She had done this for many years, but this year was different. A serviceman who received her letter was coming home. He still carried it, bent and faded in his pocket. I’m sure you can guess that eventually, through different circumstances, they met. The young man then has the opportunity to express to the young woman how much her Christmas letter had meant to him. The letter had brought them together. A great Christmas love story, right?

God has written us a love story too...the Bible! The Word of God is His love letter to us. If we read it and believe it, it will change our lives. His Word is living! When we memorize it, it is always in our hearts and at a moment’s notice can be in our thoughts. One of the best verses to know and believe is John 3:16: ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”***

***Major Deb Pascoe***

*God our Father,*

*Thank you for the Bible, your love letter to us. Help us to apply it to our lives and share it with others. Today, thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettles. Amen.*

Day 23

December 7, 2023

***FEAR NOT!***

I have had the privilege of helping my daughter and her family during the Christmas season. Last year, I started a tradition with my granddaughters. I found a small Christmas ornament of Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus. Each morning I would hide it somewhere in the house and the girls would look for that ornament during the day. Once found (and after celebrating), we would talk about the angel’s proclamation found several times within the Christmas story: ***“Do not be afraid!”*** We would then spend a few moments talking about specific fears (to a 2- and 4-year-old and to a retiree), ending with a prayer for courage.

When we read the Biblical accounts of Jesus’ birth in Matthew and Luke, we see that fear was present for each of the main characters: Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. While we can’t fully comprehend the fears at that first Christmas, we can relate to many reasons for fear. For instance:

**Unanswered prayer** (Luke 1:5-24). Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were righteous, older, and childless. Can you imagine the angel of the Lord saying he and Elizabeth would bear a son after so many years of disappointment, discouragement and doubt? It’s easy to lose hope after our prayers go unanswered for a long time (healing, freedom from addiction, salvation of a close friend or family member). But, just with Zechariah and Elizabeth, God may answer in an unexpected way. By believing in who God is and what He promises can and will help us not be afraid when we live with unanswered prayer.

**Unimaginable purpose** (Luke 1:26-34). When the angel appeared to Mary, her initial reaction was one of confusion. Her life would be changed forever. This is not necessarily what she had planned. Then other fears would have surfaced: telling her parents, telling Joseph, her reputation, etc. Her response in verse 34 states, ***“How can this be since I am a virgin?”*** Unlike Zechariah, she doesn’t doubt the angel’s words. Her question is more “How?” Many things overwhelm us in our daily lives. In this Christmas story, God tells us to **fear not** when it comes to the impossible.

**Unknown future** (Matthew 1:18-21). When Joseph hears that Mary is pregnant, He is unsure what to think. Mary’s story seems unbelievable. He doesn’t know what to do and he struggles with making the right decision. We also live with uncertainty and fear of the unknown. Joseph believed the Lord and did what the angel told him to do. Corrie Ten Boom once said, “Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”

**Unexpected news** (Luke 2:8-12). While Zechariah, Mary, and Joseph responded with fear to one angel, the shepherds were surrounded by a *host* of heavenly beings!! The angel’s message to the shepherds was, ***“Fear not, for behold…”*** Interestingly, the Greek meaning for behold can be translated *‘see, look and perceive’*. In other words, LOOK BEYOND WHAT FRIGHTENS YOU!!! No wonder the shepherds hurried to see the baby Jesus. Despite their fears, they needed to see this Savior who would bring peace to everyone.

The most powerful message of Christmas for us today is **FEAR NOT**.

*Adapted from Carla Gasser @ AT THE CROSSROADS, carlagassor.com*

***Major Julie Aren***

Day 24

December 8, 2023

***Elizabeth – It’s Never Too Late to Catch a Break***

Have you ever met someone who couldn’t catch a break? Whose life seemed to turn out the opposite of what they had dreamed of, but kept on going without complaining even though they had every reason to?

Well, please meet Elizabeth—she’s very involved in the birth story of Jesus. In fact, she’s related to Mary, Jesus’ mother. Elizabeth and her husband, Zechariah, lived away from Nazareth, down south in the Hill Country of Judea. Zechariah was a Priest of the Lord and they both belonged to Priestly families, so they really were of the most important family line in Jewish culture. They had served God faithfully (according to the scriptures) but lived in Israel, a country occupied by Rome, and in a time when God had been silent for 400 years. He had not sent one prophet to them in all that time. Zechariah had been serving a God who seemed to be unhearing of their prayers and their people were suffering under Roman Rule.

Yet one day, when both Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah were already very old, way past childbearing age, Zechariah was chosen by lot (by dice) to be the Priest who had the honor of going to the temple and burning the incense, a fragrance especially designed to be pleasing to God. The people who were worshipping that day were praying outside while Zechariah was alone in the temple—or was he? Suddenly an angel appeared to him! You can read about this in Luke chapter 1, but the outcome was that he and Elizabeth would soon have a son, whom they were to name John. The name John means “God has been Gracious” or “Gift of God.” His mission would be ***“to bring back the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he would go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”*** (Luke 1:16-17)

In those days it was so important for a family to bear children, especially a son, so you can imagine the agony that Elizabeth and Zechariah had gone through prior to this message from the angel. Here they were, serving God all their days, and yet they couldn’t have children—something so close to their hearts, their identity as a family, and to favor with God.

In fact, when Elizabeth became pregnant, she went into seclusion for five months. We wonder why, but her answer was: ***“The Lord has done this for me. In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people!”*** (Luke 1:25). In one moment, God erased her lifetime of shame and disgrace and she became a woman favored by God Himself. She would become a mother of a son; a son who would be a ***“joy and delight to her, and many would rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord”*** (Luke 1:14). This child would be known as John the Baptist who would announce the coming of Jesus, the Messiah for Israel and for the whole world.

And even today, Jesus is our Messiah, our Savior and friend if we have asked Him into our lives. His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is the ever-present One who helps us in our times of need. He changes everything about us, from sadness to hope, from loneliness to being a part of His family, from being unable to catch a break, to being favored by the King of the universe. I invite you to meet Jesus today through prayer. May God Bless you.

***Colonel Dorothy Smith***

Day 25

December 9, 2023

***Noel***

***“Sing a new song to the Lord! Let the whole earth sing to the Lord! Sing to the Lord; bless his name. Each day proclaim the good news that he saves.”***  Psalm 96:1-2

***“He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see what he has done and be astounded. They will put their trust in the Lord.”*** Psalm 40:3

Music is an important way for us to express praise and worship to God. It was instituted by Him before the creation of the earth and is referred to some 839 times in the Bible.

Everyone has heard the word *Noel* in carols, seen it written on store windows, and found it adorning Christmas cards. It has become such an overused term that we risk forgetting just what it means. Here the carol writer holds up his hand and shouts, “Stop! Time out! Pause and consider what this *noel* business is all about.”

The word *noel* literally means ‘birth’. Amidst the simple story, the writer explains that the noel the angels were so excited about was that of the King of Israel.

*Noel* has also come to be synonymous with Christmas and Christmas carols. This song really deals with all three meanings: the birth of Christ, the advent of his coming and the music associated with it. As we celebrate the wonderous events surrounding the first noel, the writer points to its significance and calls us to lift up a new noel, to sing together a song of praise to the one who has purchased us with his blood.

***Christ in the Carols by Christopher and Melodie Lane, p. 103.***

***Tyndale House Publishers, 1999.***

The first Noel the angel did say

Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;

In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,

On a cold winter’s night that was so deep.

They lookèd up and saw a star,

Shining in the east beyond them far,

And to the earth it gave great light,

And so it continued both day and night.

And by the light of that same star,

Three wise men came from country far,

To seek for a king was their intent

And to follow the star wherever it went.

This star drew near to the northwest,

O’er Bethlehem it took its rest,

And there it did both stop and stay

Right over the place where Jesus lay.

Then entered in those wise men three,

Fell reverently upon their knee,

And offered there in His presence

Their gold and myrrh and frankincense.

Then let us all with one accord

Sing praises to our heavenly Lord,

That hath made Heaven and earth of naught

And with His blood mankind hath bought.

***Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel, born is the king of Israel.***

*Heavenly Father, thank you for the Holy Noel of your Son, Jesus. Help us to proclaim loudly Noel! Thank you today for each of these special bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle. Amen.*

Day 26

December 11, 2023

***STOCKING SIZE***

Luke 12:15: ***“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”***

Edwin was looking forward to Christmas. He liked hanging a sock, which he hoped would have apples, oranges, nuts and candy in it on Christmas morning. The present he wanted this year was a Sampson superhero action figure. He went through his drawers looking for the biggest socks that he had, but none of them was of the size he really wanted. He thought of going to the shoe store and asking Mr. Petersen if anyone had bought a size 16 shoe—they would have to wear a very big sock! However, Mr. Petersen said he hadn’t sold any size 16 shoes. Dejected, Edwin went back home. A pleasant surprise came his way when his mom came into the room talking about her new pantyhose. WOW, Edwin thought, if I could get ahold of one of those, I could get a half dozen oranges and apples, a large bag of mixed nuts in the shell, and at least a pound or more of candy!

While his mom fixed breakfast, Edwin seized the opportunity to get one of her pantyhose. A smile snuck across his face as he returned to the front room fireplace. How to hang the pantyhose was the next problem he faced. He settled on two clothes pins with a string in between. His mind toyed with the idea of playing with his very own Sampson superhero action figure.

That afternoon, his dad returned early from work and went immediately to the kitchen and plopped into one of the chairs after grabbing a cup of coffee. Edwin’s mom noticed the sadness in her husband’s eyes. Tears formed as he started to speak. “The boss called us all in and said that the company wasn’t doing well, therefore no Christmas bonuses this year. Covid was the villain that caused the slump in sales.” Edwin’s mom, with her usual sparkle said, “We can still make it one of the best Christmases ever.” Her words seemed to rally her husband.

Later in the afternoon, Edwin’s dad retreated to his workshop. Edwin asked him to make six or seven strips of wood 2” x 4” for a project he had in mind. His dad gave him the strips of wood and Edwin went to his room. The smell of burning wood filled the air and the family thought that the house was on fire, but in checking Edwin’s room they found he was busy with his woodburning kit. The thought of the Sampson superhero action figure slipped out of his mind as he focused on his projects. He stopped and remembered the pantyhose. He ran down the stairs and removed them from the fireplace.

His mom had gone into the den to do something, but no one knew what she was going to do. Sally and Randy had given up hope for the things they wanted for Christmas, knowing there would be no Christmas Bonus this year.

Christmas day finally arrived. As they sat around the table for breakfast, Edwin’s dad read the story of the first Christmas. As He explained that God loved the people of this world so much that he asked his Son to step down from his place in Heaven and to die as a sacrificial lamb for the sins of all people everywhere. A light popped on in Edwin’s mind: Christmas wasn’t about apples, oranges, nuts and candy. It wasn’t about getting or giving presents. It was about God’s love expressed in sending a Savior.

After breakfast they retired to the front room fireplace. To everyone’s surprise, on each of their chairs was a 2” x 4” piece of wood with the words, “I love you, (their name),” and Edwin’s name scrawled on it. The woodburning wasn’t the best, but each person appreciated the sentiment. Then dad stood and walked over to Edwin and handed him a package wrapped in newspaper. What could it be? Edwin wondered as he tore it open. It was a wooden statue with the name ‘Sampson’ carved in the base. It wasn’t the shiny plastic one, but it was the greatest gift, because his dad had made it for him. His mom stood up and handed each person a small, folded package. They tore them open and inside was a handmade napkin embroidered with their name on it and the words, “Best Christmas ever because of God’s gift to us.”

Oh yes, Sally got a doll that dad had carved for her. It didn’t cry or wet, but it was a doll made especially for her by her dad. Randy didn’t get a new bike, but dad had repainted the old one, and oiled and adjusted it. Randy said it rode like a new bike and had been remade by dad.

Suddenly Edwin noticed a small sock hanging where the pantyhose had been. The small sock had a note sticking out of it. He took the note out and it read: *Be not greedy for things of this world. – Dad 1:1.* At the dinner table everyone agreed it was **The Best Christmas Ever!**

***Major Myron Wandling***

Day 27

December 12, 2023

***Lamb of God***

***“Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, ‘Father?’ ‘Yes, my son?’ Abraham replied. ‘The fire and wood are here,’ Isaac said, ‘but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?’ 8Abraham answered, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.’ And the two of them went on together.”*** Genesis 22:7-8

***“The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect…all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight.Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs…The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you.”*** (Exodus 12, selected verses)

***“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’”*** (John 1:29)

Throughout the Old Testament, lambs are offered for the sacrifice of sin. These lambs were to be spotless, without defect. Over 1700 years before the birth of Jesus, God told Abraham to take his one and only son and to sacrifice him. Abraham went forward with God’s command, but God intervened. Unlike the “gods” of the surrounding nations, God would not demand a child’s sacrifice. But He Himself would provide the perfect sacrifice, the spotless, blameless Lamb of God, His Son, His one and only Son, Jesus.

Around 1300 years before the birth of Christ, when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, God commanded that they take a lamb or goat, perfect without blemish, and sacrifice it. They were to then take some of the blood and put it on their doorposts. The blood of the lamb would be a sign to the angel of death, and he would “pass over” their household, saving their precious sons from death.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a small town outside Jerusalem, where shepherds could be found raising sheep. Many of these lambs would become sacrificial lambs for the annual Passover celebration. How perfect that God chose this place to be the birthplace of the spotless Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world! As I ponder the birth of the Lamb of God, I recall the words to a lullaby from “The Witness Musical” which Mary sang to Jesus at His birth and at the foot of the cross. Can you imagine her singing to the Lamb of God?

*The night is here my little lamb, try not to cry.*

*Soon the sun will shine again and light the sky.*

*And though the night seems dark, my Child,*

*The morning will come again.*

*Now close Your eyes and sleep for a while—*

*Don’t be afraid. Morning will come, so sleep.*

“The Lullaby” from The Witness Musical, Carol Owens

***Major Beverly Best***

Day 28

December 13, 2023

***THE Great shepherd***

About 15 years ago, I served on a Salvation Army mission team to the country of India. We were there for almost three months, traveling around the country doing various ministries and service projects. We conducted different meetings such as church services and kids’ programs and so much more. Every day was a physical and spiritual challenge.

The temperature there on average was about 120°F with heavy humidity. We walked through slums and prayed with prostitutes and the dying. There are memories from that place that will stay with me forever. Some good and some bad. But one thing I will always remember is how the Lord has blessed me. Psalm 23:1-4 says, ***“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are wit me; you rod and your staff, they comfort me.”***

This Christmas I am so grateful for the blessings God has given me. The greatest blessing in my life is Jesus. I first believed in Jesus when I was about five. However, I didn’t really understand my faith or really accept Christ until I was about 15 when I fully surrender to his will for my life. Things haven’t always been easy, but he has always been there.

When I was working in India, this became more evident than ever before. How could I complain when the people there had so little and so much more to complain about, yet they trusted God to provide for them. They truly trusted him with their entire lives and fully surrendered to his plans for them.

This Christmas, if you don’t know Christ as your Savior—if He’s still just the baby born in a manger and nothing more—I invite you to read His Word. Find out as much as you can. Attend church and find answers so that you can know Him as your Savior, too. With Him you will find a peace that passes understanding, and experience the joy of Christmas.

***Melissa Roemer***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for being our shepherd and for providing for us. Thank you for the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day 29

December 14, 2023

***Amazing Love***

***“This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they’ve done to our relationship with God.”*** 1 John 4:10 (MSG)

God sent His Son to die for us. That is amazing love. I can’t understand the kind of love that would do that. We’ve reached the end of Advent and if we were lighting an Advent wreath this last candle would be love.

I believe I could lay down my life for my child, partly because of my experience caring for mothers of gravely ill newborns in the neonatal intensive care unit. Many of the mothers told me that if they could trade their life for their child’s, they wouldn’t think twice. They meant it and I believed them. The world doesn’t work like that though, no matter how much they wished it could.

Their love gave me a glimpse of God’s love. For me. For us. For each precious one of us.

Maybe God loves each of us with a love as fierce, no, even fiercer than that. Each of us, destined to die in our sins without a savior—Jesus too loves us that much.

***“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfector of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross,”*** Hebrews 12:2 (NIV).

Yes, I know this is Advent, not Easter. A time of preparation. For making room. Love, this last of the Advent Season, reminds us that the sending was preparation for the sacrifice. We are loved.

***Suzanne Davenport Tietjen, Mornings with Jesus,***

***Guideposts, Vol. 9 No.6, Nov./Dec. 2023***

*Lord,*

*Today we thank you for your amazing love! Thank you that I can know this love and share it. Heavenly Father, thank you also for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle. Amen.*

Day 30

December 15, 2023

***Nobody Wants to be Joseph***

Matthew 1:18-25

There’s a story of a pastor who was getting ready to cast the annual Christmas Play. The children were all excited about being Mary, the angel, or the shepherds. Little Ben was selected to play Joseph. When he heard the news, he looked up at the pastor, with tears forming in his eyes and a frown on his face and declared, “Pastor, nobody wants to be Joseph.” Ben told the pastor he’d rather play a donkey than Joseph who is too simple, not smart, not a leader. He was only a carpenter.

Nothing about Joseph’s life speaks of glory or power or fame. His life was out of control: he lived in a small backwater town that was often ridiculed. He was engaged to a young girl who became pregnant, and he wasn’t the father. He was trapped by tradition, the engagement then the marriage. He was forced to live as a fugitive. We might even characterize him as a loser today. He hadn’t planned for the future, and forces beyond his control dictated his future. Of course, nobody wanted to play Joseph.

There’s a lesson in the life of Joseph. Even when his life was out of control, sad, full of anxiety and uncertainty, his life was and would never be out of God’s control. Joseph became part of the greatest love story ever told. He became the earthly example of a father. When Jesus was a boy—2, 3, 6, 8 years old—he was learning, and Joseph was setting the example. Joseph taught Jesus what he knew: how to work with wood and care for customers and keep the business’s books. With calloused hands, he taught Jesus about sacrifice and love. Joseph had to let go of his feelings about himself and his situation to learn the beautiful lessons of letting go and allowing God to lead him.

Certain things may be out of our control: lack of education jeopardizing a job, poor health may rob us of opportunities, family members may make decisions that affect us adversely. We may never climb the mountains, but we can be content in the midst of our confusion. Joseph willingly used the gifts he had. He may not have been as gifted as someone else, but that didn’t stop God from blessing him. He served as a good example of a godly man. Jesus isn’t interested only in superheroes. He desperately needs men and women willing to stand faithful, who, despite their obscurity, are willing to be a Joseph.

***Major Carol Wurtz***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for the gifts you’ve given each one of us. Help us to be willing to do what you ask of us today. Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day 31

December 16, 2023

***Don’t Miss the Extraordinary Amid the Ordinary***

Luke 2:9-20 (NIV)

***A shepherd’s thoughts:***

It was an ordinary night, just like every other night. Well, there might be animals to fight off to keep the sheep safe; but for the most part, the nights were the same. Gather the sheep and keep them close or in a pen. Listen for sounds. Read the skies for the weather. Chat with other shepherds. Doze off. Love on and protect our sheep and lambs.

This night began as an ordinary night. BUT. SOMETHING. VERY. DIFFERENT. HAPPENED. A bright light, a person out of nowhere, an announcement of a birth; many people singing songs about God; and then just like that, they were gone! What was that? Who were they?

We talked with one another about what we thought had just happened and what we should do.

***“Today in the town of David, a savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*** (Luke 2:11-12)

Should we go? Should we stay? Should we tell anyone? Should we forget about it?

We chose to believe and to go and see. This was not an ordinary night. Well, yes it was, and yet amid the ordinary night something extraordinary happened.

***“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”*** *(*Luke 2:20)

***Colonel Janice Howard***

*Lord,*

*May I always be alert to where you are changing the ordinary into the extraordinary. May I see and experience and tell. I pray for Your nearness as I work my kettle shift today. Amen.*

Day 32

December 18, 2023

***THE MAGI and the STAR***

Read Matthew 2:1-12 (NLT)

This scripture account is often used during the Advent season because it has several things for us to consider as we ponder the greatest gift ever given: Jesus Christ! So often we focus on the Magi, and rightfully so, it is impressive when you think of their sacrifice of time, resources, and energy to follow their heart. Let’s focus for a minute on what the Magi were following—the star!

The star is a wonderful reminder that even in the darkest of times, the Lord offers hope, help and healing. The Magi followed the star because of the prophecy from Micah. It is no surprise that Jesus in His adulthood promised to be the Light of the World! The star led the Magi to the One who would be light. John 8:12 (MSG) reads, ***“Jesus once again addressed them: ‘I am the world's Light. No one who follows me stumbles around in the darkness. I provide plenty of light to live in.’"*** The star led the way to what the world desperately needed, the Savior!

The star is significant in the Christmas story, but so are the Magi. The Magi understood that the gift they were seeking was for the world! They were people of faith and courage. I wonder how many may have ignored the bright star. It is believed that the Magi were men of influence. They were well taught, and probably men of authority. They were skilled in a variety of ways: philosophy, science, religion, and possibly astrology. The Magi were wise men, following the desires of their heart. Oh, that people in the world today would seek Jesus who can meet every need of their heart. Jesus reminds us why He came in John 3:16 (MSG),***"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life.”***

One of my favorite songs that fits the Christmas season is, “Here I Am to Worship” (HC#146). May the thought of the Christmas star and the Magi draw you closer to the gift of Christmas – Christ Jesus!

***Major Joseph Wheeler***

Light of the world, You stepped down into darkness

Opened my eyes, let me see

Beauty that made this heart adore You

Hope of a life spent with you.

King of all days, oh, so highly exalted

Glorious in heaven above.

Humbly You came to the earth You created,

All for love's sake became poor.

*Here I am to worship, here I am to bow down,*

*Here I am to say that you're my God.*

*You're altogether lovely, altogether worthy,*

*Altogether wonderful to me.*

*And I'll never know how much it cost*

*To see my sin upon that cross.*

*And I'll never know how much it cost*

*To see my sin upon that cross.*

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*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for the greatest Christmas gift of all—Jesus! Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day 33

December 19, 2023

***GIFTS OF THE MAGI***

***“Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be.”*** Luke 12:34

*We Three Kings*

We three kings of Orient are;

Bearing gifts we traverse afar,

Field and Fountain, moor and mountain,

Following yonder star.

*O star of wonder, star of night,*

*Star with royal beauty bright,*

*Westward leading, still proceeding,*

*Guide us to thy perfect light.*

Born a King on Bethlehem’s plain

Gold I bring to crown Him again,

King forever, ceasing never

Over us all to reign.

Frankincense to offer have I;

Incense owns a Deity nigh;

Prayer and praising all men raising,

Worship Him, God on high.

Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume

Breathes a life of gathering gloom;

Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,

Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

Glorious now behold Him arise,

King and God and Sacrifice:

Alleluia, alleluia!

Earth to heav’n replies.

In creating this popular song, John Henry Hopkins skillfully wove together swatches of scripture, church tradition and legend. The Bibe actually tells us very little about the men who came from the East to visit Christ. It never mentions how many there were, their names or that they were, in fact, kings. It simply calls them ‘magi.’ Some Bible scholars believe that this term refers to a caste of Persian priests or sorcerers who were experts in astrology, divination, and the interpretation of dreams. While they could have been rulers of sort because of their priestly offices, we have no reason to believe that they possessed great wealth.

What we do know is that these Gentiles traveled some distance, intent upon worshiping the newborn King of the Jews. With them they brought gifts of great worth. As Hopkins poetically explains, these gifts foretold who and what this child would be. Gold prophesied of His kingship. The frankincense spoke of the purity of His life. Myrrh, a spice used to embalm the dead, predicted His coming death.

Viewed from another angle, these gifts comprise that which the Lord desires us to offer Him today. The *gold* symbolizes our most precious treasures, our hopes and dreams. When we give these to Jesus, we are giving Him our heart. The *frankincense* denotes the pleasing fragrance that arises from a life of holiness. Here we offer Him our obedience. The *myrrh* proclaims the fact that we have died to self and that we now live to Christ. It means giving Him our very life.

***Christ in the Carols by Christopher and Melodie Lane, p. 165.***

***Tyndale House Publishers, 1999.***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Help us to be mindful of how these precious gifts can be applied in our own lives. Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day 34

December 20, 2023

***A Surprise***

***“May Jesus himself and God our Father, who reached out in love and surprised you with gifts of unending help and confidence, put a fresh heart in you.”*** 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (MSG)

Have you ever been surprised with a Christmas gift when you didn’t have one for the giver? When it happens to me, my first impulse is to think fast and try to save face by presenting a gift too. I don’t know who I think I’m fooling. I’m sure my facial expression shows the truth. Instead of being honest, my impulse is to prop up a false image of myself, revealing my sinful heart—selfish and proud.

God surprised humanity with the gift of His Son. Those who came to see Baby Jesus humbly worshipped. The shepherds ran to see Him—it never occurred to them to shop. The wise men, told ahead of time they’d be meeting a King, came bearing costly gifts. All were well received.

Jesus has surprised us with the gifts of unending help, love, and salvation, extravagantly and freely given. But what can I offer in return? Christina Rossetti’s famous poem, “In the Bleak Midwinter,” speaks of my feeling of inadequacy:

*What can I give Him, poor as I am?*

*If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;*

*If I were a Wise Man, I would do may part;*

*Yet what can I give Him: give my heart.*

My heart. A fitting gift. Just what Jesus wants.

***Suzanne Davenport Tietjen, Mornings with Jesus,***

***Guideposts, Vol. 9 No.6, Nov./Dec. 2023***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for the amazing gift of Jesus. Help us to remember the best gift we can give Him is our heart. Thank you today for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle. Amen.*

Day 35

December 21, 2023

***INDESCRIBABLE GIFT***

Let’s be honest. One of the things that everybody enjoys about Christmas is the gifts! Whether giving them or receiving them, they represent a warm connection with another person, and that in itself feels good.

Children of course discover the joy of this amazing custom at an early age. Before they are capable of understanding what the word “Christmas” could even mean, they have discovered it is a day when wonderful things happen: songs, games, people visiting, special entertainment in the form of music, television, and movies, and lots and lots of FOOD. Not to mention Christmas presents!

Most people carry memories so strong they can still feel, taste and smell the Christmases of their childhood, no matter how long ago or far away it may have been. But, in fact, the actual gifts we received are usually soon forgotten. Toys break. Clothes are outgrown. Stuff gets lost. Styles and fashion changes. Very little of what we’ve been given lasts for long. What does last is the feeling of it all: I love, and I am loved. You could almost call that kind of gift indescribable.

The Bible speaks about another gift that is indescribable. It is found in the book of 2 Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 15. It says, ***“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”*** The apostle Paul is writing to one of the churches and praising them for being generous givers and showing concern for others who were suffering. Those people, in turn, were grateful and praying for the Corinthians. There is a chain reaction of blessing going on as a result of God’s “surpassing grace” first given to the Corinthians in the form of financial resources.

Divine grace can be defined as letting God do for me what I cannot do for myself. We experience this when Jesus, out of love, offers us the free gift of eternal life. In the process, we begin a relationship with God and experience the forgiveness of our sins. God has done for me what I could not otherwise do for myself.

Grace is the indescribable gift Paul is talking about. It is the original Christmas gift given to the whole world when Jesus was born. It is the gift that cannot be lost, stolen, broken, or go out of fashion.

Don’t try to describe it. Just accept it with thanks and share the good news with someone else. Keep the blessed chain reaction going.

***Commissioner Barry Swanson***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for the greatest Christmas gift of all—Jesus! Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day 36

December 22, 2023

***NO ROOM***

Luke 2:7 – ***“…and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him I cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”***

Philippians 2:6-7 – ***“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”***

Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown

When Thou camest to earth for me;

But in Bethlehem’s home was there found no room

For Thy holy nativity.

Heaven’s arches rang when the angels sang,

Proclaiming Thy royal degree;

But of lowly birth cam’st Thou, Lord, on earth

And in great humility.

*O come to my heart, Lord Jesus;*

*There is room in my heart for Thee.*

- Emily Elizabeth Steele Elliott

Can you imagine Mary, a pregnant teenager, traveling to her husband’s hometown to take care of business, and going into labor? It’s her first child. It was scary and there was no lodging available. Bethlehem was full of travelers. There. Was. No. Room. Finally, a guilty feeling innkeeper tells them they can sleep in the stable (the cave out back with the animals). No room for God’s Son to break into humanity, to break into our world. The Son of God would be born in a lowly, smelly, dirty barn.

Jesus was King of kings and could have been born in a palace with the best of everything. But instead, God chose a faithful young maiden to carry Him, give birth and raise Him so He could relate to us. He knows what it’s like to be hungry, to be without. He knew death and what it was to be alone. Still, He chose to come, to live, to die, and come back to life again so that you and I can experience forgiveness and new life through Him. That’s some kind of love!

Do you have room in your life, in your heart, for Jesus? Call out to Him in prayer, believing and His Spirit will enter your life. There’s no better friend then Jesus. Make room for Him today!

***Major Deb Pascoe***

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for wanting to have a relationship with us and for making the way through Jesus Christ. Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. Amen.*

Day 37

December 23, 2023

***THE Priceless Gift of Christmas***

Now Christmas is a season for joy and merrymaking,

A time for gifts and presents, for giving and for taking;

A festive, friendly, happy time with shoppers on their way—

But have we ever really felt the greatness of the day?

For through the centuries the world has wandered far away

From the beauty and the meaning of the Holy Christmas Day.

For Christmas is a heavenly gift that only God can give,

It’s ours just for the asking, for as long as we shall live.

It can’t be bought or bartered, it can’t be won or sold,

It doesn’t cost a penny, and it’s worth far more than gold.

It isn’t bright and gleaming for eager eyes to see,

It can’t be wrapped in tinsel or placed beneath a tree.

It isn’t soft and shimmering for reaching hands to touch,

Or some expensive luxury you’ve wanted very much.

For the priceless gift of Christmas is meant just for the heart,

And we receive it only when we become a part

Of the Kingdom and the glory which is ours to freely take,

For God sent the Holy Christ Child at Christmas for our sake

So man might come to know Him and feel His presence near,

And see the many miracles performed while He was here.

And this Priceless Gift of Christmas is within the reach of all,

The rich, the poor, the young and old, the greatest and the small.

So take His Priceless Gift of Love, reach out and you receive,

And the only payment that God asks is just that you believe.

*- Helen Steiner Rice*

***“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life,”*** John 3:16.

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for the free gift of salvation we can receive when believing in Jesus Christ. Thank you for each of these bellringers that have joined our ministry to bring hope and help to this community. Warm their hearts and keep them safe as they stand by their kettle today. May they know and share the Christ of Christmas! Amen.*

Thank you to the Contributing Writers:

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