

Advent 2020

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**November 29**

A Magnifying Life

***Luke 1:46-55***  
*‘My soul magnifies the Lord,   
and my spirit rejoices in God my,   
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me;   
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.* *His mercy is for those who fear himgeneration to generation.   
He has shown strength with hisarm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.   
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good,   
and sent the rich away empty.”   
He has aided his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,   
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.’ –Mary’s Magnificat*

It is the way of the world to pay attention to the powerful and to focus our efforts on what and who is popular. In the Gospel of Luke, however, the   
Virgin Mary reminds us that God remembers those precisely that the world has forgotten. Mary celebrated that God had looked on her lowly state.

The Lord chose Mary and Joseph to be the family of Christ. The “lowly were lifted” when Christ was born to Mary. “The powerful were brought down from their thrones,” the “hungry were filled,” and the “rich sent away” when a poor girl of Nazareth bore the Christ and not someone from the household of Herod or the Emperor. The Lord remembered someone the world forgot, and in Christ, God came in a way that only the world’s forgotten would   
notice.

This holy season, do we see things in worldly or Godly ways? Do we notice wealth, status and power, or do we look for what God is doing in acts of   
kindness, faith, and simplicity? Mary magnified the Lord, and in so doing she saw the work of God.

In the Dickens classic, A Christmas Carol, there is a conversation between Ebenezer Scrooge and the ghost of Jacob Marley:

*“But you were always a great man of business,” faltered Scrooge . . .*

*“Business? Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business;   
charity, mercy, forbearance, benevolence, were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!”—   
A Christmas Carol, by Charles Dickens*

So may it be that we heed the words of Mary, and praise the Lord for remembering the poor, for scattering the proud, for lifting the lowly, for keeping God’s promise, and for showing mercy to those who fear him. In all we do for others, particularly for the poor, the lost, and the lonely, may God be magnified.  
  
**Rev. Tim Carpenter**

**November 30**

Scripture Matthew 1:20-23

I have celebrated many Advent seasons and believe there have been none (except possibly Dec. 1941) in my lifetime as meaningful as this one will be. We need Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love of Christ as the Advent candles represent to help us live through these most uncertain times.

The whole world has experienced the inability (of man) to control this terrible virus and we find out more and more that only our faith in our omnipotent, caring, and loving Father will help us through this.

How can we use our faith to help us? The longer I live the more I depend on my prayer life. We were taught at a young age to pray at mealtime and bedtime thanking God for what he had done for us that day so we knew about prayers. As we grew older, we learned about praying at other times as well and that gave us background for what I believe is the greatest feeling of hope, peace, joy, and love as we realize that we cannot live our lives without help and the best help we can have comes from talking to God and asking Him for guidance in our lives, but then we must listen! We have so very much to be thankful for and thanking our Father for all He has done for us is another way to feel close to Him.

Obviously, we are going to have Covid with us for longer than we care to think about but thanking God for what we have, asking for guidance in how we handle our lives and remembering that he promised to always be with us, guide us, and love us is a way of using the candles of the Advent wreath to give us Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love that begins and ends in our faith in Christ.

**Ellie Appling**

**December 1**

Matthew 2: 7-10

*Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage. “they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. They saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.*

The star gave the wise men something to follow to find Jesus. Wise men watched and followed until the star stopped, and there they found Him. May not have a star to guide us today, but we do have people in our lives who help show us the way to Jesus. Of the people who show me the way to Jesus are Rev. Tim, Rev. Dr. Brad, Rev. Dr. Erin, Mrs. Callie, Mrs. Lisa, Mrs. Natalie, (and my Mom, Mrs. Natalie), Mr. Brian, my Dad Mr. Jim, and Mr. Bill are just the people who help me; we have so many leaders and teachers in our church who show the way to Jesus for so many., this Christmas, think about who the “stars” are in your lifetime you see a star decoration, think about the people who point you to Jesus.  
  
**Bradley Duncan**

**December 2**

“*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”* (Isaiah 9:2, 6)

*“Suffering produces endurance, and endurance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”*(Romans 5:3-5)

“*Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”* (Romans 12:12)

The Advent Season is a time of planning and reflection as we prepare our hearts and homes for Christ’s birth. In the world as it is today amid Covid, Advent will be quite different. Many of us have experienced a difficult 2020 in which we have felt isolated, and this might continue through the holidays. As we reflect on this past year and the many challenges, look to the light of Christ and rejoice in the hope that comes from him, and be prayerful of the promise of 2021.

For me, 2020 has been especially difficult, as I lost my mother quite suddenly and unexpectedly in September. As I think of my mother and all that she has meant to me, I reflect on her unconditional and eternal love. Just as my mother sacrificed for me and always did her best to make me feel safe and secure, Christ also offers us a similar love.

In the midst of your struggles, know that you are building endurance, character and hope. Turn to prayer during these tough times and know that Christ is with you.   
Rejoice in the coming of the Christ child and that through him our lights will eternally shine.   
  
**Dawn Carpenter**

**December 3**

I don’t believe it is an exaggeration to say that Christmas is the most popular holiday in our country. People patiently wait all year for the day that they can listen to Christmas music and put up their lights and trees! However, in the midst of Christmas presents and wonderful family fellowship, it is incredibly easy to lose sight of the reason we are all celebrating. Christmas is the celebrating of Jesus’s birth in Bethlehem, but we can go so much deeper in understanding the significance of this season. John 1:14 says,” *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* We often fail to understand the amount of love God has for us by sending his only son to dwell among us. ‘Dwell among us’ doesn’t just mean he walked with us, but he decided to endure suffering, ridicule, horrendous physical pain, and all the temptations that humans feel in order to save us and pay a debt that we would never be able to pay. Therefore, in this Christmas season, let us rejoice in the fact that we have an all-mighty God who desires to know us and love us on a deeply intimate level and that He sacrificed His only son so that we could be with Him forever. Let us rejoice in the fact that Jesus didn’t come to give us more laws, commands, and raise the bar on how good we have to be, but to defeat sin and death and give us eternal life when we don’t deserve it. Let us rejoice is God’s love for us this Christmas season!  
  
**Scott Wicinski   
Junior, University of Arkansas**

**December 4**

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

For many of us, 2020 has been a dry place. As I’m writing this, a quarter of a million people have perished from the coronavirus and millions have lost employment. This is not how we envisioned the dawn of a new decade. Once, the children of Israel lived in a dry place waiting for the day when they might see freedom from Egyptian bondage. The children of Israel continued to live in that dry place while waiting for the coming of their Savior. There are so many things we’re waiting for in this season...a vaccine, financial relief, normalcy. While we wait, we can find hope and peace in knowing that God’s deep love for us never ceases and that God walks alongside each of us especially in the darkest valleys. The season of Advent poses as a reminder of God’s love and concern for His children. We are reminded that God’s gift that we are awaiting shines so brightly in the darkness and nothing can overcome it. Have hope in this season and find rest in God’s promises. Celebrate the gift of Christ. Celebrate each and victory that comes with his birth. Jesus comes to restore the dry and broken places of this world. That’s something to celebrate.  
  
**Rev. Dr. Erin Beasley**

**December 7**

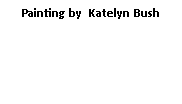
When I was about 8 years old, I wanted to start a garden in my backyard. I spread some seeds way back in a dark corner by our fence. I waited and waited and no flowers ever came. Based on that, I knew I didn’t have a green thumb. Since then I’ve learned that it takes the right environment, nourishment (Miracle Gro) and special care to grow flowers. Now when I plant anything and watch it grow and bloom, it makes me happy and thankful for these gifts from God.

Every year about this time, I anticipate the bright dark pink blooms on my Christmas cactus. It’s so much fun to see the first tiny buds appear. Then it’s like an explosion of color when it’s in full bloom in December. This coincides with Advent, when we as Christians anticipate the birth of our Savior. While we wait, let’s “stop and smell the flowers” and take time out to read the word. For me, taking a Bible Study keeps me focused and in a healthy environment. I am nourished daily from reading my morning devotional from The Upper Room and other sources.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us the joy of growing flowers – they make our lives so beautiful. Help us to nourish ourselves so we can grow and bloom as better Christians…. especially during this time of Advent.

Luke 12:25,27 *And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? Consider the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

**Anne Bush**



**Painting by Katelyn Bush**

**December 8**

Isaiah 11:1 *“Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch from his roots will bear fruit”.*

One of our favorite Advent traditions when the boys were at home was to have a lesson about the Jesse tree for our daily devotional. The tradition came from a booklet I read called, *The Real Christmas Tree: The Family Tree of Jesus*. Each day, we read a passage from Scripture about the spiritual heritage of Jesus, beginning with Adam and Eve. The book came with a daily Scripture reading and reflection, plus patterns to make a Jesse tree and all the “ornaments” that went on it. Each ornament was a symbol of the Scripture reading for that day. The readings traced the lineage of Jesus from Adam to His birth. We had not only a Bible lesson each day, but the hanging tree and symbols reminded us of the cumulative daily readings.

The Jesse tree is a symbol of the family tree of Jesus. Just like we have a record of our family tree, our ancestors, so the Bible records the family tree of Jesus. Jesse was the father of David and could trace his lineage back to Adam. David was the man chosen by God to become the second King of Israel and was anointed by the prophet Samuel to establish a royal family. A thousand years later, Jesus was born into that family line in the city of Bethlehem, the city of David. Jesus is referred to as “the son of David”, “the righteous Branch”, and “the root of Jesse”. He fulfilled the prophecy we read in Isaiah, that “a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse and a Branch from his roots will bear fruit”.

We, too, are shoots of that Branch, for as Jesus lives and works in our hearts, we bear fruit for Him – spreading His message of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Those are the gifts Jesus gives to us and that He wants us to give to others not only during the Christmas season, but all throughout the year.

Prayer: O God, help us to cherish our own family heritage, and to grow into the heritage of Jesus – His faithful followers spreading his message and gifts wherever we go. Amen   
  
**Beverly and Don Rhoads**

**December 9**

*In days to come  
mountain of the’s house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
shall be raised up above the hills.  
Peoples shall stream to it,  
many nations shall come and say:  
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the,  
the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
that we may walk in his paths.”  
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the Jerusalem.  
He shall judge between many peoples,  
shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;  
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
shall they learn war any more;  
but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,  
no one shall make them afraid;  
the mouth of the hosts has spoken.  
For all the peoples walk,  
in the name of its god,  
but we will walk in the name of the God  
and ever.* **Micah 4:1-5**

During the long nights of Advent what do you long for? – an afternoon with a friend, an evening out with a spouse, free babysitting for an evening. The prophet Micah longed for a time when God’s people would turn again to God. We are not so very different from those Hebrew people of ancient days. We have lost our way during these days of COVID and feel separated from one another. As we make our hearts and homes ready to celebrate the birth of the Christ child, may we prepare to pattern our lives after Christ’s example.

One of my favorite poems is by Ann Weems from her collection of poems, **Shalom.**

***Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”  
There were no conditions:  
Least of all, Feed my sheep if they deserve it.  
Feed my sheep if you feel like it.  
Feed my sheep if you have any leftovers.  
Feed my sheep if the mood strikes you.  
if the economy’s OK . . .  
if you’re not too busy . . .  
No conditions . . just, “Feed my sheep.”  
Could it be that God’s Kingdom will come  
when each lamb is fed?  
We who have agreed to keep covenant  
are called to feed the sheep  
even when it means the grazing will be done  
on our own front lawns.***

Ann Weems like the prophet Micah speaks of a time when the people return to God and individual greed will be replaced by the community of faith. All will be welcome; and *we will* *walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.*

Please pray:

Eternal God,

We come before you dismayed at our divisions. We have struggled as your church to come to live in unity; but we are divided – along all the fault lines of our societies. The ruptures in our families, among friends, among denominations, among nations are wide and deep. When we attempt to get on the same page, we build taller walls and dig deeper trenches. God, help us! We know that Christ is not divided. We know that it is your baptism to which we have been called. It is your service to which we are compelled. You have called us to proclaim the gospel, but we even fight about what this is. Help us, God! Help us to give up our power and our privileges. Help us to yield for the sake and cause of the cross of Jesus. Help us to embrace and to live the   
foolishness of a life emptied of power and given to service, in the likeness of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Help us to walk in salvation – in the name of the Servant Christ, Amen.

-Valerie Bridgeman Davis, The Africana Worship Book, Discipleship Resources, 2006 **Leanne Bailey**

**December 10**

An Exerpt from Mary’s Song

In a world as cold as stone,  
Must I walk this path alone?  
Be with me now,  
Be with me now.

Breath of heaven,  
Hold me together  
Be forever near me,  
Breath of heaven.  
Breath of heaven,  
Lighten my darkness  
Pour over me your holiness,  
For you are holy.  
Breath of heaven . . .  
 Amy Grant

“*Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.* “Psalm 69: 1-3

Life is a busy beautiful journey full of activity and learning and love, but waiting and quiet is a part of life’s journey as well, and perhaps especially this year of 2020. “Be still. “The words echo everywhere.

I’ve always enjoyed advent and spent the season in celebration. Even as Amy Grant’s lyrics touched my heart and inspired deeper understanding for Mary’s story, my activities remained those of a busy mom preparing for all the joys a child would anticipate in the weeks leading up to Christmas. I love this time of year. It adds an extra bustle to our schedule, to look forward to special events at church, time with friends, gifting and special meals, but I find myself, this year, grappling with the reality of the world into which Mary was bringing her baby. His birth was truly miraculous. He was born into a very violent world. He was born under threat of death. There had to be palpable uncertainty and fear in the journey Mary and Joseph made, yet it’s the peaceful quiet of a newborn life coming into the world, the essence of a gift, that resonates in the manger story. The Christ child’s beauty heralded by angels and honored by kings who traveled to see him was the stuff of my Christmases. There is such beauty in the story of Joseph and Mary, but there is honor and valor and personal sacrifice too. This year I am in awe of the couple in the manger. They understood how to let things happen in God’s time.

Waiting is hard, and it is usually unwanted. I can’t actually think of a time when I’d choose waiting over the activity of life, yet we devote this season of advent to waiting for the birth of the Christ child, and we teach our children to wait for the

Joy of opening gifts and singing carols, being with family and having special meals. It is a gift –not having what we want. It is beautiful - being somewhere with nothing to do but wait, and there is no waiting on this earth like waiting for a baby. There is no quiet like the first quiet moments of a little life in arms. I was blessed with three children and in one case enjoyed a Christmas being pregnant.  I love the Christmas story in all its beauty, but through a lens of this current year, lived out with a rising pandemic, I feel better able to understand Mary’s prayers and can relate to her fear. Sometimes, it’s just not easy to know what’s best to do. Sometimes, it feels like God is far away.

My parents didn’t get blessed with the joyful pregnancy and birth that I had with my own but had a child that didn’t open up to life and spent her first days in an ICU on life support. Fortunately, a miracle happened, but I’ve always had the belief that I was here on God’s time.   The fragility of life and the beauty of it too is in the waiting moments.  Those days, my grandmother watched as my daddy stood over me, touching an arm no bigger than a bird’s leg; his warm hand cupped over my tender skin warming me, stroking me because the doctors said it would matter. He didn’t know she was watching and he didn’t know if I could feel him, but he did it and I lived.

The times when we aren’t able to be busy and full of activity and learning and loving and doing what we want - That’s God’s time.  And in God’s time are His moments and the love we have for our family,  those closest to us, and for Him.  It’s when we feel His love.  Advent to me represents a great season of waiting.  A closing in of all the activity and busy-ness of life, for a little while, as we contemplate the deep and abiding love of God and the ultimate gift of the baby’s birth, in a stable, alone, with no one but his parents and the animals to witness his entre into this beautiful thing we call life.  Christ was born into a violent world and his parents were nothing short of heroic in their actions, yet the story of his birth, of Mary’s singularly important yet lonely role in the Christmas story, doesn’t play itself out in a frenzy of chaos and confusion.  It doesn’t feel riddled with uncertainty and drama.  Joseph and Mary were steadfast.   Life itself is the greatest gift we are given by God.  It is short and we engage in a beautiful dance being a part of it, but there are quiet times and waiting too that are part of His plan and in these moments we can draw closer to Him, if we can be still.

My youngest child loves the story Waiting is NOT Easy.  An elephant is told by his best friend, a pig, that there is a surprise.  Elephant then engages in a stress-filled 30 pages worrying about an ever-darkening day and the possibility of missing the surprise.  Piggie is calm.  The book is funny.  Elephant realizes his waiting is over when he has the gift of the night sky above, to enjoy with his best friend Piggie.  Waiting doesn’t always end in the gift of a beautiful night sky, but waiting for God’s promise is like that huge sweep of stars.   And we are reminded of how like those stars we are, each and every one of us, his children.  Our lives matter.  They are a gift.   Great sacrifice brought Christ into this world.  Trusting in God and sacrificing all the things we want, to live instead on God’s time will surely bless us in 2021.

**Cara Ortiz**

**December 11**

Silence is often hard to find. In the run up to Christmas in this hurry, scurry world, silence is even harder to find. Silence, though, is part of our spiritual birthright. Think of the silence before creation. There is a moment of silence before God reanimates the “dry bones” in the vision offered the prophet. I imagine that part of the temptation of Jesus is to embrace noise as his norm. C.S. Lewis in his The Screwtape Letters notes that two things are forbidden in Hell, music, and silence. In being silent we may hear the rustle of angel wings hovering over the land, preparing for the Second coming. In silence, we may clearly hear the whisper of God, supporting, instructing, expressing Divine love for us. Prophets and all other lovers of God report the importance of silence in one’s spiritual journey. Perhaps that was one reason the Desert Fathers and Mothers of early Christianity sought wilderness, desert, silent places, the better to hear God’s voice.

We, though, we live in a land rich and lush with vegetation. We live in a bounty of farmland where back yard gardens are common, and flowers of an infinite variety give color to houses big and small. May we find a desert place here? Certainly. Deserts are not always a place, but they are always a condition of the soul, the heart, the mind. Find a room, close the door, and sit in silence. Think of your favorite hymn or carol or piece of scripture. Imagine, again, the Christ entering your life as a gift. Christmas is present in such a place, in such an opening. Give thanks.

Psalm 37:7 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices.

**Rev. Dr. Brad Gabriel**

**December 14**

Luke 2:10-11 says, "And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’

The Christmas and Advent season means spending time with family and thinking about the baby Jesus being born. To spread the good news during the holiday season we ship off our shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child so that other children far away can learn about Jesus. We write messages in our boxes to show them we are thinking about them at Christmas."

**Mary Carol Westbrook,**

**4th grade**

**December 15**

**Christmas Eve**What can I give Him,  
Poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd,  
I would bring Him a lamb;   
If I were a wise man,  
I would do my part;  
But what can I give Him?   
Give Him my heart.

**By Christina Rossetti**

**December 16**

Theme: Joy

Scripture: “*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*” Romans 15:13

Reflection: There are two paths; one of joy and happiness, one of anger and sadness. I find my joy by praying to God and asking him to guide me through each day. I see joy in the grace of my teacher, the kindness of my friends and the love of my family. I like to choose Joy! I hope everybody will one day choose joy and let Jesus come into their heart.

Daily Prayer:

Dear God,

I thank you Lord that you made joy even possible. I pray that everyone will open their hearts to you and find their inner joy. In Christ name I pray.

Amen

**Lillian Bendure   
9 years old, 3rd Grade**

**December 17**

A Christmas Prayer

Lord Jesus,  
Master of both the light and the darkness,  
send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.  
We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day.  
We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us.  
We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom.  
We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence.  
We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light.  
To you we say, “Come Lord Jesus!”

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

**December 18**

1 Timothy 1:15-17

New Revised Standard Version

15 *The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. 16 But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. 17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Since the beginning of the pandemic, people have been forced to face their imperfections like never before. This crisis has been difficult for the perfectionists, the over-achievers, the planners. Little by little we’ve watched our plans come undone as things tend to change so rapidly. Perhaps the word “grace” has taken new meaning in our lives. The stressors of the pandemic can make life more difficult at home, with friends, and even in the workplace. There are moments when its necessary to give ourselves room to be imperfect. We should also give others room to be imperfect, especially now. I celebrate the grace that comes with the birth of Jesus and the pandemic should serve as a reminder of how important it is that we offer grace and patience to others. There truly is something about God’s grace.

**Rev. Dr. Erin Beasley**

**December 19**

Christmas is a time of joy and spending time with your family. One of my favorite parts about Christmas are the traditions. My family has many of them including my favorite, the decorating of the Christmas tree. Every year on the weekend after Thanksgiving my family gets together to start putting up decorations. We play Christmas music and hang up all the ornaments on the tree. Each ornament has a special memory connected to it, and I love each and every one. Sending time with my family is one of the greatest things I could do and I’m just so glad that Christmas allows me to do that. But the main thing that everyone loves about Christmas is that it is a time to celebrate Jesus. We all gather together to sing songs about Jesus and to read the story that all Christians memorize at a young age. 2020 has been a crazy and overwhelming year and now we need Jesus more than ever. So this year while decorating a tree, or going caroling just remember that God is with you and that his love for us is greater than any love.

Colossians 3:15 *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you are called to peace. And be thankful.*

**Evelyn Jones**

**Grade 8**

**December 20**

Christmas Movie, Anyone?

I love Christmas movies! I watch them all year long snuggled up in my favorite

blanket with a cup of tea and Biscoff cookies. The Hallmark Channel broadcasts them on demand through their app and Lifetime is showing them all day right now. They all have the same themes…love, families, joy, anticipation, and miracles. When my youngest son was a little boy, my husband told him that the guy always gets a kiss at the end…and so, there is always a kiss at the end of all of these stories…some with mistletoe and some without.

As I was watching one of the movies the other day, I thought, “Here we go again. Somebody is in trouble and about to lose something, so the entire movie will be about how they get that miracle.” Just as I was about to get even more cynical, I thought about the meaning of the season.

The world was in trouble and we needed a miracle… a savior, and God in his infinite mercy, gave us Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior…Emmanuel…God with us. Nothing was the same after Christ entered the world. Nothing is the same when He enters our lives. The joy we feel no matter what our conditions is simply unparalleled to any other human emotion. In Paul’s words…

11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:11-13

The Christmas movies get it right all year long, and that’s why so many of us enjoy them… in and out of season. Like Christ, they elicit the feelings of love and joy yesterday, today and they will tomorrow.

**Yolanda Toney**

**December 23**

Have you ever had a bad Christmas? Well if you have what made it bad? Your mother-in-law is complaining about not getting enough time with her grandkids? You got the wrong type of cheese that your mom will get sick from that’s in her mac-and-cheese? Your grandfather bought the wrong color of socks for you so now you have neon green instead of the chartreuse green color you asked for? Well that’s from the adult’s point of view and if anything my mom’s.

You know what makes a Christmas bad for a child? I can tell you because I texted four of my friends and asked “Have you ever had a bad Christmas? If you have, why was it bad?” Two of these people I asked go to church here, one is in my Current Events class at school, and the last one I asked is my neighbor. One of the two people that go to church here said “Well… Last year didn’t feel like Christmas” I asked what made it not feel like Christmas and she responded with “There just wasn’t that feel of Christmas spirit inside of me.” I thought about it and if you don’t have that little fire of Christmas burning inside you like a Bath and Body Works candle then Christmas cannot get better. Unless you somehow get a nice little lighter from amazon and take in that good ole Vanilla Bean Noel scent but it takes a little bit for that lighter to come in. The girl in my Current Events class said that she had the stomach bug in 2017. Which I don’t think is very pleasant. And not only that but her hamster died on Christmas Eve! My neighbor said she doesn’t think she’s ever had a bad Christmas. The other person that I asked still hasn’t answered so I’m just going to say that all of her Christmases were terrible and doesn’t want to talk about it.   
But since you’ve heard an adult’s and a child’s point of view you probably think Christmas is never perfect, and it's not. But can you believe there are people out there, and yes some of you, that think Christmas is flawless? Well not to ruin the Christmas spirit but some people can’t pay for Christmas gifts for their kids, so their kids don’t get Christmas. Some people don’t have any family to celebrate Christmas with and are sitting on the streets with nothing to eat and are cold as a freezer.

Jesus wasn’t perfect either, well he was. But that doesn’t just mean that he didn’t cry his head off after all that pain Mary had to go through. Jesus was a miracle but that doesn’t mean that everything was automatically amazing at the snap of a finger. In reality, the “wise men” didn't see Jesus until years later. That wasn't a perfect image “Wow you’ve don’t look like you were just born”. I’m sure Jesus got straight A’s and didn’t get grounded over the break like some people do. But you aren’t going to be perfect and Jesus doesn’t care if you are on the best baseball, football, cheer, soccer, softball, or whatever else sports team you're on or if you live in a big house or in a small house. Jesus doesn’t care if you go to Houston or if you go to Collierville (Go Mustangs).

Someone on biblereasons.com said “Being a Christian demands constant progression, not perfection.” I think that can apply for everything you do no matter if it’s sports, school, or a job. You should look for getting a 93 on the mini quiz about the Mongols, not an overall grade of 100 in history. You should focus on being able to do a back walkover without a spot and not winning the national championship the first time. You can’t be the best there ever was and it doesn’t matter and even if you don’t get the chartreuse green color that you wanted then it doesn’t matter because the younger kids don’t even see that like Jesus. Even if your mom gets a little upset stomach Jesus will help her through that anyway.

Because Jesus gives us hope (Trust Jesus) Don’t be the one that purposely makes Christmas terrible but don’t make the goal of perfection even if it is for God. I can tell you from experience that the biggest expectation isn’t going to get you anywhere; it's only going to put you under more stress then you were already under. And don’t you dare go brag to people about how perfect your Christmas was because it wasn't and John 1:8 says “If we say, “We aren’t sinful” we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

So moral of the story don’t say you can when in actuality you can’t. Thanks, and Merry Christmas!   
  
**Cecilia Adkinson  
Grade 7**

**December 24**

Christmas has a darkness  
Brighter than the blazing noon,  
Christmas has a chillness  
Warmer than the heat of June,  
Christmas has a beauty  
Lovelier than the world can show:  
For Christmas bringeth Jesus,  
Brought for us so low.

Earth, strike up your music,  
Birds that sing and bells that ring;  
Heaven has answering music  
For all angels soon to sing:  
Earth, put on your whitest  
Bridal robe of spotless snow:  
For Christmas bringeth Jesus,  
Brought for us so low.

**Christina Rossetti**

**December 25**

***Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!***

Charles Wesley

Hark! the herald angels sing

Glory to the newborn King!

Peace on earth and mercy mild,

God and sinners reconciled!

Joyful, all ye nations, rise;

Join the triumph of the skies;

With th’angelic host proclaim

Christ is born in Bethlehem!

Hark! the herald angels sing

Glory to the newborn King!

Hail the heav’n-born Prince of Peace!

Hail the Son of Righteousness!

Light and life to all he brings,

Ris’n with healing in his wings.

Mild he lays his glory by,

Born that man no more may die;

Born to raise the sons of earth,

Born to give them second birth.

Hark! the herald angels sing

Glory to the newborn King!