

WEEK #6 – THE CELEBRATION CONTINUES IN ANTICIPATION OF NEW JOURNEYS
December 29, 2008 – January 6, 2009

MONDAY – December 29th – 5th Day of Christmas

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: Help me to remember...the mentors of my faith.

Holy Christ Child, born in the fullness of time to bring salvation and everlasting life to us, I worship you and give you honor and glory this day. As we continue the celebration of your birth, I acknowledge you as my Lord and Savior and thank you for allowing me to be adopted as a child of God. I ask you to be with me in this special time of peace and joy as I learn more of you and your ways. In joyful worship and praise of your wonderful name, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 4:4-7

KEY VERSES: Galatians 4:4-5:

(4) “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, (5) in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children” (NRSV).



“The fullness of time had come.” Only God knew that the day had come for the Son to be born. But for centuries there had been people of the covenant who knew that the Son would come and bore witness to that fact. This 5th day of Christmas is in remembrance of all the faithful prophets and people of God. The Old Testament of the Bible is full of people of faith who were also people in a covenant with God. They taught the next generation about God and the covenant. And they continued to do so down the line from generation to generation. Even when the majority of the people had forgotten about their God, there were always a few faithful people to continue the covenant. The “the fullness of time” came and “God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.” Without those faithful people of God, we would not have learned of God’s covenants nor would we have even heard of Jesus and all that he means to us. The people of God did not end with those whose names we find in the Bible. The “good news” of God’s love for us is still handed down from one generation to another.

Our banner today consists of a fish with the acrostic of the Greek letters symbolizing Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior. In the early years of the church it was often very dangerous to be recognized as a Christian and the symbol of the fish was one of the first symbols used for one Christian to recognize another without giving him or herself away to an unbeliever. The “good news” was passed on from one person to another. This old Christian symbol is a reminder to us of those many, many people who kept the “good news” alive, even in the face of death. In our land it is not usually dangerous to be a believer, but many people still make fun of faith and those who profess their faith openly. There are places in this world where it is still dangerous to be a Christian. There are still people of faith who dare to express their faith boldly even in such places. Are we willing to pass our faith on to future generations? Are we boldly proclaiming our faith, or are we afraid of what our friends might say if they know we are

Christians? Do our lives proclaim Jesus or do we live just like everyone else. I know many people who taught me about my Lord and I value the faith they showed to me. I'm sure you, also, can remember many mentors to your faith. On this 5th day of Christmas, let us honor those who have gone before us as people of God and remember them. If they are living, you may want to contact them and tell them just how much you appreciate the way they shared their faith with you. If they have gone home to be with the Lord, thank God for them and their examples.

Now it's our turn to share the "good news." What will we do with it? God has adopted us as his children. How are we going to thank him for this? Today we are celebrating people of faith who shared the "good news" to those they knew. Can we do any less? We have received the greatest gift of all. Let's share that gift with all we meet. Let's spread the "good news" to everyone. Let's begin with those at home and continue with those further away. Hallelujah! Christ is born!

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Hebrews 1:1-2; Hebrews 11:32-12:2

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. Who are some of the people who taught me my faith?
2. What are some ways I can share my faith with others?
3. Who are the people with whom I want to share my faith?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Send a thank you note to someone who shared his or her faith with you.
2. Make a list of the people you feel impacted you with their faith. Pray for each one still living and thank God for each one specifically.
3. Talk to someone today about your faith.

Dearest Lord, thank you for my mentors in the faith. Without them I might never have learned of your great love and why Jesus was born in the first place. Help me to share your love to others the way they shared theirs with me. Your love is the most important gift I ever received. I want to share it with others, but I often feel inadequate. Your presence and your help are very important to me. Use me this day to spread the "good news" that Jesus is the answer to all that we need. Teach me thy ways, O Lord. In your great name, I pray. Amen.

TUESDAY – December 30th – 6th Day of Christmas

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: Renew my faith...in eternal salvation.

Child of God, born of Mary, thank you for redeeming me. No matter how many times I hear your story, I am amazed that you would die for me so that I could be adopted into your family. As we meet today in this special time together, renew my spirit and remind me of all that you came here to do. This I ask in your precious name. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 31:7-14

KEY VERSES: Jeremiah 31:11-12a:

(11) “For the Lord has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. (12a) They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord” (NRSV).



Hallelujah! Christ is born to bring us salvation! He has come to redeem his people. From the manger to the cross and beyond, Christ has come that we might live. If that is not something to sing and shout about, what is? On this, the 6th day of Christmas, we celebrate the salvation which is the reason for Christ’s coming. In these devotions we have talked before about Christmas being the beginning and not the end of what God was doing for humankind. Jesus gave up heaven to come to earth and redeem his people. God chose to send his Son to live among the common, everyday people rather than the elite, remote rulers. God chose this to show that God is not just for the rich and elite rulers, but for everyone. The salvation Jesus brings is for everyone who will accept him. In the early part of our journey together through Advent and these devotions, I once asked you to consider whether you had truly accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior and suggested that if the answer was no, you consider making that decision while you continued through these devotions.. I mentioned this again

a few days ago. Jesus came to bring us life, eternal life, abundant life. It is a free gift, we have not earned it. We have chosen to go our own way and God never coerces us to follow his way. When we acknowledge Jesus as our Savior, we admit that we are sinners and cannot come to God through our own efforts. We then confess our sins and accept the salvation, the gift that God has given to us. We are then *“justified by his grace, (so) we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life”* (Titus 3:7 NRSV). All of this is accomplished by Jesus Christ, who was born, lived, taught us, healed us, suffered for us, died for us and was raised, again for us, and now rules in heaven, interceding for us so that we might join him there!

This is the “good news” that Christ’s birth proclaims! Don’t leave Jesus in the manger! Don’t leave him on the cross! Jesus is reigning in heaven for us now! Both the manger and the cross are now empty because Jesus has moved beyond them and so can we. The banner today depicts both the manger and the cross because they are forever linked. Without the cross, there is no reason for Jesus to have been born. But they are empty. There is no baby in the manger, there is no body on the cross. Jesus is risen! So, let us celebrate with great joy! Let us sing the songs of gladness and thanksgiving! Let us accept and proclaim him as Lord and Savior! Let us not hide the truth from others, but share it in some way everyday. Let

us allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to the people who need to hear and see the salvation of the Lord. Let us let the Light of the world shine through us! If you have never accepted Jesus as your Savior, do it now. If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, renew that allegiance now. Your Lord and Savior loves you more than you can possibly imagine and has many wonderful gifts to share with you each and every day! Hallelujah! Christ is born! Hallelujah! Christ has risen!

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Titus 3:4-7

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. What is my response to the salvation Jesus offers me today?
2. What are some ways I can share that salvation with others?
3. What does the hope of eternal, abundant life mean to me?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. List some ways you may wish to share the salvation message to other people during the coming year.
2. Ask some people you respect for their faith to share their message of salvation with you and share yours with them. Ask them how they share this message with others.

Dear Lord and Savior of humankind, teach me how to share your "good news" with others. I accept your love and salvation and desire to be a witness of that love and salvation to others. Fill my mouth with your words and my whole self with actions that speak louder than my words of your glory. Accept my praise and worship of your majesty today. Help me to remember your Son, born so long ago and yet living still in my heart. Help me to never try to keep Jesus in the manger or on the cross, but to hold him lovingly in my heart. Help me to put you first in all that I do and say in this day and the coming year. In your precious name, I pray. Amen.

WEDNESDAY – December 31st – NEW YEAR’S EVE – 7th Day of Christmas

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: Help me to reflect...on the old and the new.

God of the universe, hear my prayer. As I stand at the brink of a New Year, I wonder what the future holds. I know that you have many blessings for me, yet, I am fearful as well. Hold me close as we prepare to move into new realms. In the name of the Lord I love, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 1:3-14

KEY VERSES: Ephesians 1:11-12:

(11) “In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, (12) so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory” (NRSV).



During this night we will pass from one calendar year to another. Many of us will celebrate this passing with revelry and joy, others will celebrate it quietly at home with family and possibly a few good friends and still others will go to bed and treat this night like every other night. The banner for this 7th day of Christmas shows the seasons of the year which move ever forward without regard to our desires. Time is passing and regardless of how we spend the night, tomorrow will be a New Year. It is a time of new beginnings. It is a time of reflection of what has passed and what we might like to yet accomplish. Many of us make New Year’s resolutions which we may or may not be able to keep. It is a good time to review some of the lists we have made in the last few days of people we wish to contact or pray for, service projects we wish to pursue, etc. It is a good time, as we talked about yesterday, to renew our commitments to the Lord. Without Christ leading us through the Holy Spirit, all our good intentions will be in vain. As our key scripture above reminds us, Christ is the one “*who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will.*”

Ecclesiastes 3:1 reminds us that “*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven*” (NRSV). Verses 2-9 go on to list many things that have an appointed time and we need to remember that we cannot change them. God is the one who is in control of time, not us. We so often believe that we are in control of ourselves and our surroundings until God allows circumstances to show us the truth. We are not in control, God is. So, why do we keep fighting God for control? Let’s work with God during this coming year and let God direct us to the people, projects and ideas in which God wants us to share. There is a popular phrase among God’s people that says, “Let go and let God.” It would seem to be a good phrase to follow. God desires to work through us and when we get out of the way, God will do just that and the results will be glorious! In his 1st letter, Peter reminds us that, “*You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God*” (1 Peter 1:23 NRSV). He then reminds us that everything perishes “*but the word of the Lord endures forever. That word is the good news that was announced to you*” (1 Peter 1:25

NRSV). And, of course, John spoke very eloquently of Jesus as that same word made flesh in John 1:14-18.

Each New Year reminds us that we have been given a new chance to be right with God. We can renew our commitments and renew our allegiance to the Lord. Let's start fresh with this New Year as children of the Lord, proclaiming our faith aloud to the world and living with a renewed commitment to the kingdom of heaven on earth. It won't be easy, but with God beside us, who can be against us? Hallelujah! Christ is born in us!

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Ecclesiastes 3:1-9; 1 Peter 1:22-25; John 1:14-18

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. What are some things in my life that I need to get rid of for this New Year?
2. What do I need to renew in my life?
3. How can I get out of God's way so that God can work more powerfully through me?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Spend some extra time in prayer asking God what priorities need to be in your life through the coming New Year. Listen with your heart and write down those things which God places within you.
2. Set aside some quality time to spend with the Lord each day throughout the coming year for renewal and worship.

Ever-present and never-ending Lord, be with me as I prepare my heart for the coming of another New Year. I know that I have let you down many times in this past year and I want to renew my commitments to you and your will. Help me to get out of your way so that you may use me as the vessel I was intended to be. Be with my family and friends this coming year and let them see you reflected in me as I go about the business of living. Be with our world leaders, so that they may see you and your purposes for them and the lands that they govern during the coming year. All these things I ask in the name of the one born so long ago and yet new each year, I pray. Amen.

THURSDAY – January 1st – NEW YEAR’S DAY – 8th Day of Christmas

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: May your wondrous name...fill my heart and soul.

Lord of heaven and earth, I humbly ask the blessing of your wonderful name. As we move into another year, may your hand be upon me. Be with me in this hour as I seek once more to worship you and learn at your feet. In all of your wonderful names, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:21-40

KEY VERSE: Luke 2:21:

“After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb” (NRSV).



January 1st, the 8th day of Christmas is the festival of the Name of Jesus. According to Luke *“After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.”* Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem (remember the Magi have not yet come and Herod is not yet looking for the child). While there, Anna and Simeon both proclaimed Jesus as the promised Messiah who would bring salvation. It was at the time of Christ’s circumcision that he was formally given his name. Names are very important in the Bible. A name is part of the identity of a person. Biblical names have a meaning which helps to define just who this person will become. In Matthew 1:21 Joseph is told to name the child Mary will bear Jesus. In verse 23 Matthew quotes from Isaiah 7:14 and tells us that Jesus means Emmanuel, God with us. In Numbers 6:24-26 we are given a beautiful blessing from the Lord which is still used often as a benediction when people of God are parting one from another. *“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his*

countenance upon you, and give you peace” (NRSV). Verse 27 goes on to tell us that this blessing places the name of God on the people. We are often told to pray in the name of the Lord or in the name of Jesus, because there is power in the name of Jesus. And certainly there is power in having God with us.

Our banner today is very simple, but meaningful. It is made up of the two Greek letters Iota and Chi which are the first letters in Jesus Christ. This symbol also evokes the concept of God reaching to humankind and humankind reaching up to God. Both of these longings are fulfilled in Jesus, who is the point in which these two meet. Not too long ago a congregation in which I was a member had some bookmarks available which listed Names of Christ and the Biblical references for each. Here are a few of those; Bread of Life (John 6:35), Savior of the World (John 4:42), Deliverer (Romans 11:26), Good Shepherd (John 10:11), Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14), Hope of Glory (Colossians 1:27), King of Kings (Revelation 17:14), Lamb of God (John 1:29), Light of the World (John 8:12), Lord of All (Acts 10:36), Master (John 13:13) and The Mighty God (Isaiah 9:6). There are many more, but these give us a taste of the many names and aspects of our Lord that are evoked by the name Jesus. What a glorious celebration we have when we celebrate the Name of Jesus! When you remember your Lord,

remember that he has many names. Each one is holy and each one shows us a little more of himself. No matter which of the many names we use when we address our Lord, God is always there to hear us and to answer us. Hallelujah! Christ is born, no matter which name we use!

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Numbers 6:24-27

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. Which of the many names of Christ do I think of when I think of my Lord?
2. Which names of Christ have the most meaning for me at this time?
3. How can I celebrate the name of Jesus?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Make a list of all the names of Christ which you can think of and using a concordance find their scriptural references.
2. Send a blessing to someone who needs comfort or sustaining. Include one of the names of our Lord in your blessing to give it the power of God.

Dearest Lord Jesus, I celebrate all your wonderful names. I praise your name in all of its many forms. I only understand a little of what these names mean, but I am so thankful that you care for me in all of them. As I continue to celebrate your birth, help me to remember the importance of your name. I need your continued presence, Emmanuel. I am not capable of being the person you desire me to be without you. Fill me with your presence and overflow to those around me. In the name of Jesus, my Lord, my Savior and my friend, I pray. Amen.

FRIDAY – January 2nd – 9th Day of Christmas

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: Help me to store...treasures in my heart.

Holy Infant, born to save not only the Jews, but the whole world, including me, I thank you with my whole heart. Thank you for identifying me as one of your own and giving me the opportunity to be a part of the kingdom of heaven. Be with me in this quiet time of sharing your Word and storing up treasures in my heart. In your name, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:15-35

KEY VERSES: Luke 2:19, 29-32:

(19) “But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (NIV). (29) “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to Your word; (30) for my eyes have seen your salvation, (31) which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, (32) a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (NRSV).



Mary and Simeon are an unlikely pair to be linked together. Mary, of course, we have spent some time with before. The mother of our Lord was a very special person. Simeon only met Mary once as far as we know. Simeon had been promised that he would see the Messiah before he died. When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to be circumcised, Simeon saw him and proclaimed him to be the Messiah for whom he had been waiting. But Simeon understood something that very, very few did understand. Simeon knew that Jesus was not only the Savior for the Israelites, but for the Gentiles also. Even though Jesus was to declare that he had come for all who would come to him, his disciples and others still did not understand until long after Jesus had died. Here was Simeon, while Jesus was an infant, declaring that Jesus would save the Gentiles as well as the Israelites! Our banner today on this 9th day of Christmas is a symbol of the Christ who came to save the whole world. The cross is superimposed on the world showing that he died for everyone. Simeon was the first to declare this. But Simeon also had words for Mary. *“Then Simeon blessed them and said*

to his mother Mary, ‘This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul, too’” (Luke 2:34-35 NRSV). How difficult it would be for Mary to be the mother of the Christ!

By this time Mary has already gone through much to be the mother of Jesus, which we discussed once before. She has also seen wonders which few people have ever been blessed to see. When the shepherds came the night Jesus was born she treasured their words and *“pondered them in her heart.”* Memories like these would sustain her later when Jesus would be crucified. I’m very certain that when the Magi appeared later, she also stored those memories in her heart and pondered on all the things which were said and done at the conception and birth of Jesus. Mary and Joseph knew who Jesus was, and yet, they were

often amazed at the reactions of people around them who understood that God was doing something new and wonderful in their presence. These words of Simeon's were both wonderful and terrible for Mary. They were both a promise and a warning. We are not told in the Bible what became of Joseph, but he was not present during Jesus' ministry or death. We can probably assume that he had died sometime after Jesus was found in the temple at age 12 and when he began his ministry around the age of 30. He certainly was around long enough to teach Jesus carpentry. But he was not there to sustain Mary during Christ's death on the cross. She had her other children and she had John whom Jesus asked to care for her. Perhaps what sustained her most were the things she stored as treasures in her heart – all the things that the angel, the shepherds, Simeon, Anna and the Magi had said and done, and all the things that Jesus had said and done during his ministry as well. Are we storing things that the Lord has done around us and through us as treasures in our hearts? Like Mary, they can sustain us through the hard times of our lives. Let us store up treasures in heaven and our hearts and let us begin with the birth of our Lord. Hallelujah! Christ is born! He is the first and greatest treasure in our hearts!

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Luke 12:32-34; 2 Corinthians 4:6-10

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. What are some of the things I have treasured in my heart that sustain me in times of trouble?
2. What are some of the swords that pierce my soul?
3. Am I truly thankful that Jesus came for all the world, including the Gentiles, and not just the Israelites?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. As you begin to take down the decorations, etc., think of the memories this Christmas season has given you to treasure in your heart.
2. If you have not tried journaling, try writing down some of your treasures, the things you store in your heart. When troubles begin to overwhelm you, bring out your list of treasures and ponder on them.

King of heaven, born as a little Babe, instill in me a heart that treasures you and the wonderful things you have done for me. There are many times in my life when I feel overwhelmed by the circumstances that surround me. There are times when I feel that my heart and soul have been pierced by a sword. Be my shield and bring me into your rest. Lead me to the still waters that only you can find. When the times are good, help me to store up treasures in my heart that will sustain me later. Help me to put my trust in you and not in family, friends or things, for they may disappear, but you will be with me forever. I am so grateful that you chose to save the whole world and not just the Israelites. In the name of Jesus who chose me, I pray. Amen.

SATURDAY – January 3rd – 10th Day of Christmas

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: May I find hope...in your plan for me.

Child of hope, who brings God's plan, I worship and adore you. Thank you for the hope you bring with your birth. As we spend these brief moments in quiet companionship, renew my spirit and fill me with the joy of your presence. In hopeful expectations of the promises you have for me and in your precious name, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 3:1-12

KEY VERSES: Ephesians 3:5-6:

(5) “God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now he has revealed it by the Holy Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets. (6) And this is the secret plan: The Gentiles have an equal share with the Jews in all the riches inherited by God’s children. Both groups have believed the Good News, and both are part of the same body and enjoy together the promise of blessings through Christ Jesus” (NLT).



Hope! The 10th day of Christmas might be called the festival of Hope. The mystery has been made known to all! Jesus came that we might have hope. Before Jesus came, salvation and redemption were only available through the law, which was impossible to keep fully, and for the Israelites. We Gentiles were without even that hope. With the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for everyone and the resurrection that followed, hope was given freely to both Jews and Gentiles. Our banner today is a butterfly, symbol of the resurrection. As a butterfly is changed from a caterpillar to a butterfly, we are changed from sinners with no hope to beautiful vessels full of the Holy Spirit. We are wiped clean by the blood of Christ and instilled with hope for eternal life with our Lord. Early in the New Year, we still have that feeling of starting over that each New Year brings with it. We have placed our hopes in our resolutions and our lists of changes we are going to make for the better. The only true hope lies in Jesus, whose birth we have nearly finished celebrating. Although the celebration may soon be over, the reason for the celebration is not. Our hope is not promised for a season, it is forever! Each day we can begin again to change more fully into that beautiful butterfly, that lovely vessel of the Holy Spirit. Each day we can confess the things we didn't do right or at all, what we did that we wish we hadn't and start anew with a fresh slate because Jesus was born. Isn't that what hope is all about?

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he wrote about hope as the end product of suffering, endurance and character. Then he wrote, *“and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us”* (Romans 5:5 NRSV). Isn't it awesome to realize that our hope is not in vain because of the love of God? First Jesus was born into our world of flesh, then he taught us all that we need to know to come back to our loving God, then he healed our souls, then he died for us, was raised from the dead and intercedes for us in heaven. But, he didn't stop there, he also sent us the Holy Spirit to dwell within us to guide and comfort us daily! What more could we possibly ask of God?! God has given us the opportunity, the means and the motive to return to God. We

have already committed the crime of sin. God has given us the way out! There is no greater hope than that! Just from where does that hope come? Why, Jesus, of course! We keep coming full circle to Jesus – the beginning, the ending and all things in between. Perhaps, that is one reason he is called the Alpha and the Omega (Revelations 1:8). Jesus and all that he represents is all that we need. So why do we celebrate his birth? Because who could possibly imagine God loving us enough to become like we are to make us like God is? Our hope is in this; God loved us so much that God became a man, Jesus, sacrificed himself to save us from our sinful nature, and gave us the means to become heirs with Jesus. The birth is the beginning. There is no ending! Hallelujah! Christ is born and he lives forever!

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: 1 Peter 1:3-5; Romans 5:1-5

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. Can I see any signs of the changes being made in my vessel?
2. Is my hope in the Lord a confident trust or just wishful thinking?
3. Am I living an expectant hope-filled life of trust in eternity or am I just clinging to a hope-against-hope existence without real expectation of fulfillment?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

Keep a record of the things that you feel God is doing in and through you during the year. You may use a diary, a journal or a small notebook just for this. You are intentionally looking for changes in you that God is effecting. They may seem small and insignificant when viewed alone, but when you look back at this next year you should see something special happening. Sometimes we miss what God is doing because we don't think to look for what God is doing.

Lord of forever, my hope and trust are in you. I may act like I don't believe this at times, but I am still incomplete, as you well know. I don't see the butterfly you are creating in me. All I see is the grubby caterpillar crawling around in the dirt seemingly getting nowhere. Help me to see your handiwork in me. Let me know that you have not yet finished with me, but let me see some progress. It gets discouraging to see growth in others, but not in myself. I love you, Lord, but it is hard for me to understand just how much you love me. Help me to love others the way that you love me. In the name of the Christ Child who became my Savior, I pray. Amen.

SUNDAY – January 4th – 11th Day of Christmas

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: Child of Light...shine along my path.

Child of light, sun of righteousness, bathe me in your glory, illumine me with your wisdom and send me forth in your power and majesty. I would seek understanding as we spend these few moments together again today. I praise you and rejoice in your presence. Shed your light on all parts of my day. In the name of Jesus, Light of my world, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 60:1-6

KEY VERSE: Isaiah 60:1:

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you”
(NIV).



Our light has come. Jesus, the Light of the World has been born and we will never be required to live in darkness again. In Jesus we have seen the glory of the Lord. Epiphany, the festival of light, will begin in just a couple of days. On this, the 11th day of Christmas, we look ahead by looking at the many ways God has used light as a symbol of the life that Jesus brought into the world. In the beginning, when God created the world, the first words were, *“Let there be light, and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light ‘day,’ and the darkness he called ‘night’”* (Genesis 1:2-5a NIV). God knew that light was essential for life. Light was the very first of creation. Light is a part of the essence of God. Many times in the Bible God is revealed in light – the burning bush which was not consumed and the pillar of fire to name a couple. Prophets such as Isaiah refer to the Light which is to come. When Moses came down from the mountain of God his face shone with the glory of God so brightly that he had to cover his face so that people could look at him. The sun is our source of light for the earth. Malachi

gives us one more reference to light. *“But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings”* (Malachi 4:2a NIV). Our banner today has a circle with rays for the sun of righteousness with the Greek letters for Jesus Christ, Savior inside. The symbol recognizes Jesus as the sun of righteousness. John, as has been said before, is often called the Apostle of light and love. In his gospel, John opens with a beautiful prelude to the life of Jesus in which he speaks a great deal about the light for which John the Baptizer was preparing the world to receive. *“He himself (John the Baptizer) was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world”* (John 1:8-9 NIV). Jesus also referred to himself as the Light of the World in John 8:12.

Without light, photosynthesis cannot occur, which means that plants could not grow, carbon dioxide would not be replaced with oxygen and therefore animal life, including humankind could not live. Without plants we also would not have food. Light is essential for sight. You can probably come up with many other reasons for the essential need for light. Jesus is the Light we need for our spiritual life. He gives us food and illumination. Jesus has

given us that light and has told us not to hide the light but to place it where it can be easily seen. "...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven? (Matthew 5:16 NRSV). Jesus illuminates our spirits and in turn expects us to share that light with others. With so much need for light, how can we not rejoice in the Light? And yet, so many still prefer darkness! So many still do not receive Jesus who can do so much for them! We must let our light shine before them so that they may find their way to the Lord. And how can we do that if we, ourselves, do not rejoice in the light Jesus has brought us and live in such a way that God is not glorified in us? Let's stop hiding our light under bushels and let it shine forth in all God's glory! Hallelujah! Christ is born! Let him shine!

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Malachi 4:1-2; John 1:1-14; Matthew 5:14-16

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. How do I need light in my life?
2. What are some of the ways I can reflect the light of Jesus?
3. How am I hiding the light of the Lord from those around me?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Sit in front of a fire or lit candles and contemplate the need for light in your life.
2. As you go through the day, note how many different things you would not be able to do without the light around you.
3. Be joyful as you go about the activities of your day.

Author of light, shine through me this day. I am so good at hiding your light, but I truly want your glory to be seen in me. I have received so many blessings from you and I am thoroughly thankful for each and every one of them. Let me be the lamppost to hold your glory high and the lamp for it to shine through. Teach me more of your ways so that I may reflect them in all that I do and say. Show me the ways that I am hiding your glory so that I may shine more brightly each day. In the name of your Son, Jesus, born anew each day and shining so brightly before me, I pray. Amen.

MONDAY – January 5th – 12th Day of Christmas

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: Light of the World...lead me to yourself.

Dearest Christ Child, as the celebration of your birth reaches the end and we prepare to enter into Epiphany, I would ask you to continue to grow and reveal yourself both within me and through me. Teach me daily through your Word and establish me within your will so that those within my world might be aware of your presence in my life. Use me to reach those who seek you and reveal yourself to them as you continue to be revealed to me. In your precious name, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 2:1-12

KEY VERSES: Matthew 2:10-11

**(10) “When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.
(11) On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (NRSV).**



They could hardly contain themselves; they were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time! The Magi had followed the star from the east and spent months on the road. They might have wished for a place to freshen up first, but they could hardly contain themselves! They couldn't wait another minute to worship the Christ Child, born to be king! And, they were Gentiles! For the first time, Gentiles responded to Christ, yet, he was still a little child. The Magi were “wise men.” They studied the writings of all the people who kept written records. So, they knew the prophecies concerning the Messiah, even though they were not Jews. They were also students of the stars. They knew the importance of the star they followed to Jesus, which is pictured in our banner for the 12th day of Christmas. It is the eve of Epiphany, sometimes called “Twelfth Night.” In many countries, this was the main celebration for Christmas. This was the day in which gifts were exchanged and major parties were held. We may no longer celebrate “Twelfth Night” or the Twelve Days of Christmas as in the “older days,” but....

We are in the right place! We have arrived at the right time! Jesus is here! We have followed the signs, studied the Word and struggled to understand God's message, but, we made it! We have come to our time of response. We have been receiving with both hands and now it is time to give. Are we, like the Magi, having trouble containing ourselves? Are we overcome with joy at finding the Christ Child? Are we kneeling at his feet in worship? And, where are our gifts for the Christ Child? We had gifts for the children, for our spouse, for the boss, the hairdresser, the teachers, the neighbors, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters, secret pals and just about anyone else we could think of! But, what have we given to the Christ Child? As we have said before, our gifts are things like faith, trust, obedience, love, prayer, and action. They are poor gifts in return for what God has given to and for us, but they are all we have.

Our banner for this, the 12th day of Christmas, is a star with rays of light leading us to the Christ Child. The Magi were Gentiles, as are we. The Magi recognized the Baby Jesus as the King of kings and fell down to worship him with precious gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. This was the first manifestation of Jesus to the Gentiles proving that Jesus was for all of humankind, not just for the Jews. Jesus had now been revealed to the world. It would be many years before he would begin his ministry and many more years before his disciples truly understood the meaning of this revelation. But it would finally sink in. Jesus, and all that he is, is given for all humans, not just a select few! This is why the Magi are important. We are now moving into a season of revelations. When we think about Epiphany (if we think about it at all) we usually think about the visiting of the Christ Child by the Magi and that is the event which is commemorated by Epiphany. However, the Epiphany is not so much about the Magi visiting the Christ Child, as it is about the fact that God “revealed” the Christ Child to the Magi. All of us have had the Christ Child “revealed” to us in some manner. God had at last revealed the mystery that God’s love was not for a select few, but for everyone who believes. It is now for us who have received this revelation to continue to reveal it for others. What a wonderful gift we received when the Christ Child was revealed to us! And, what a wonderful gift we have for others when we reveal that same Christ Child to others! We are the church which God intends to use to reveal the Christ and all that is meant by that term to the world. The Christ Child came into the world in order to reveal God’s love for all and to bring God’s healing and salvation to all. And we are the tools of that revelation.

Epiphany is a season, just as Christmas is a season. Epiphany gives us a way to continue what we have begun during these Advent and Christmas seasons. Hallelujah! Christ is born! And he lives in you!

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Acts 10:44-48; Romans 15:7-13

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. Am I still celebrating the birth of Jesus or have I put him away with the tree and decorations until next year?
2. How aware am I of the special privilege I have as a Gentile to be welcome to worship the Lord?
3. What gifts am I giving to the Lord in return for all that God has given me?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Do something special today for someone as a gift to the Lord.
2. Keep one decoration (an ornament, a candle, a Baby Jesus from a nativity, etc.) where it can remind you that what has begun with Christmas is still continuing.

King of kings, your gifts to me can never be repaid, but I choose to give what I can to you in return, not because you require it, but because I desire to please you in every way. I give you praise because you only are worthy of praise. I give you my heart because it is of more value to you than to me. I give you my love because you first loved me. I give you myself, please use me for your purposes. In the name of Jesus, my King of kings and Lord of lords, I pray. Amen.

TUESDAY – January 6th – Epiphany

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: Help me continue to travel...in the light of your love.

God of love, who is always with me, I praise and revere all that you are. As we continue this Holy celebration for one last day. I take great joy in the special time we have had together. Help me to always hold onto the knowledge that you are with me. Teach me the lessons I need to show your glory to those around me. In the name of the one who showed love in his every action, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: John 1:10-18

KEY VERSE: John 1:18:

“No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (NRSV).

Epiphany, the festival of light and the appearance or manifestation of God in Jesus has come. As our key verse states, *“No one has ever seen God.”* So it is through Jesus we see God. *“It is God the only Son...who has made him known.”* The Epiphany season will last until Lent begins and during these next few weeks we will see Jesus baptized and proclaimed God’s Son openly, choose his disciples, announce his authority from God to heal, have his name proclaimed among the people, forgive sins, announce his purpose in coming – to save sinners, and be transfigured in glory. All of these are revelations of the glory of God made known to us through the Son.

The Christmas season is over. The tree will be taken down (if it hasn’t already), and the decorations will be stored for another year. Life will go back to normal, or will it? Will normal be the same, or have we discovered more of Christ in ourselves and each other? The Epiphany season is sometimes called normal time. And yet, it is during this “normal time” that the Lord’s Son is revealed to us in all his glory. As we move away from the holidays and into everyday life, let us remember the wonder of the Christ Child and the lessons we have learned about ourselves during these last few weeks. We have prepared our hearts to receive our Savior once more through scripture, music, reflection or journaling and various actions. We have rejoiced through all our preparations and learned to savor the experiences life brings our way. We have celebrated Christ’s birth in many different aspects of our lives. Now we need to carry the knowledge into our everyday lives.

God gave us all that God is, can we do any less? As we bring our celebration of the Christmas season to a close, let us re-evaluate our priorities. Are we giving freely to God all that we are? We have received everything we need to live the life God intended for us. Now we must give it to someone else. As James reminds us, *“For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead”* (James 2:26 NRSV). We are not saved by our actions, but by our faith, however, our faith is not complete unless it leads to action. If we have truly made Jesus the Lord of our lives, we will be moved by God’s Spirit to do something. It will not always be the same action by each person. What God leads you to do will not be the same as what God leads me to do, but God will lead each of us to do something. And whatever that action is will reflect the glory of God and will witness to the presence of God in the world through the Son, Jesus. We are faced everyday with many opportunities to act out our faith. Are we watching for them? Are we responding to them or are we ignoring them as irrelevant to our lives? We say we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. We say that we believe Jesus is our Savior and Lord of our lives. What are we doing to make

these beliefs a part of our everyday lives? If someone were to arrest us today for being Christians, would there be enough evidence to convict us? As we advance into Epiphany, normal time, let's build that body of evidence. Let's prove to everyone around us that we truly believe what we say we believe.

Let us also remember that we are not in this life alone. One of the most precious gifts we were given through Christ was the Holy Spirit. We must always remember that the Holy Spirit works in us and through us both *"to will and to work for his good pleasure"* (Philippians 2:13b NRSV). The love of God, given to us through Jesus is eternal and at work in us. Let's face this New Year of "normal time," this time of revelations about the Christ, with the love of God shining through us in all that we say and do. Love is the key and Jesus holds it. All we have to do is turn it. Hallelujah! Christ is born! Hallelujah! Christ is born in us! Hallelujah! Christ is alive and at work in us!

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: James 2:14-26; Philippians 2:12-15; Romans 12:9-21

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. What evidence is in my life of my beliefs in Jesus, the Christ?
2. Are my actions reflecting light and life, or indifference and death?
3. How have I grown through these last few weeks in my walk with the Lord?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Find a good devotional book or booklet with thought provoking devotionals to continue your daily growth. These devotionals were modeled after the books "15 Minutes Alone with God," and "15 Minutes of Peace with God" by Emilie Barnes, Harvest House Publishers. Her books are written for women, but there are many devotional books available both for men and women. Some books include or have companion journals.
2. Continue the devotionals of Chalice Dove Spiritual Enrichment Ministries found at: www.chalicedovemin.org
3. Find someone to be an accountability partner, someone with whom you can share your problem areas and work through them without worry about betrayal of trust.

Dearest Lord, thank you for all the things I have learned about you and myself through the Advent and Christmas seasons. Help me to continue to grow through the rest of this year. I'm not always good at continuing the things I start. Help me to remember that the journey with you is the most exciting journey I could make and that you are always with me to guide and sustain me. Help me to show evidence of my deepest beliefs so that your glory will shine forth to all who come in contact with me. Although I often stumble and fall, I know that you still love me and forgive me. Help me to remember that the same applies to everyone I know and they, too, are in need of your love and forgiveness. Let me be a conduit of that love and forgiveness. In the name of the God of love, born again in my heart, I pray. Amen.