

**WEEK #4 – GOD’S LOVE TRIUMPHANT STIRS OUR HEARTS TO LOVE  
December 14-20, 2009**

**December 14<sup>th</sup> – Monday**

**Centering Breath Prayer: I am...a child of God.**

*God of love and light, thank you for the gift of the Word. As we approach the celebration of Christ’s birth, let me remember the true value of that gift. As we meet together this day, let me bask in your light and refresh myself from your Word. Teach me today and help me understand what it means to be a child of God. In the name of the Word, who made the world and yet was born as a tiny baby, I pray. Amen.*

**Scripture: John 1:1-14**

**Key Verses: John 1:10-13:**

**(10) “But although the world was made through him, the world didn’t recognize him when he came. (11) Even in his own land and among his own people, he was not accepted. (12) But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. (13) They are reborn! This is not a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan – this rebirth comes from God” (NLT).**

I am a child of God! What a glorious statement! I am no longer constrained by the dictates of this mortal world! I have been reborn into the Kingdom of Heaven! But, just what does this mean to you and me as we go about our lives during this Advent season? It doesn’t mean that I can wave my hand and all the presents are wrapped, or the house is clean, or the decorations appear exactly where they would be most pleasing. It doesn’t mean that I never get sick or have someone close to me die suddenly (or slowly and painfully). It doesn’t even mean that I will not suffer pain and die in this mortal body. So, just what do our scriptures today tell us?

First, our key scriptures today tell us that the world God made through Jesus did not recognize him when he came. A tiny baby in a manger in an obscure village in Judea was not what was expected from Almighty God! Even the Jewish leaders, who should have known that God seldom did things in the expected manner, didn’t have a clue that God was in their midst. They didn’t accept him, didn’t receive him with open arms and, in fact, utterly rejected him! But, everyone who does believe in him and receive him, indeed, welcome him, as Lord and Savior is given “*the right to become children of God.*” There are four aspects of this scripture that are significant to me. First, we must believe in him. When a person makes a confession of faith in response to God, two questions are usually asked. Do you believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God? And, do you accept him as your personal Lord and Savior? These two questions are at the heart of becoming children of God. You must first believe Jesus is the Son of God. If you do not believe this, how can you accept him as Savior and Lord of your life? So, belief is the first requirement to becoming a child of God. The second question deals with acceptance or welcome. Jesus is a gift. Perhaps, this is the reason for the giving of gifts at Christmas. Some will say it is because of the gifts given to the Christ Child by the Magi, but, I believe the true reason is thankfulness at the amazing

gift of Jesus himself. When you receive a gift at Christmas (or any other time), how do you accept it? Do you welcome it as a joy and a privilege with open arms, or do you barely acknowledge it and squirrel it away? Perhaps, we do both. But God's gift is the gift of God's own self! And yet, how casually we sometimes take that precious gift! Some take that gift with a perfunctory thank you and casually bury it away in the recesses of their minds. If we want to be a child of God, let's treasure that gift and take pleasure in it daily.

The third thing that strikes me about our key scripture today is that we are given the right to become children of God. In this country, where freedom and the rights of all humans are expressed, if not always applied, we tend to take our "rights" for granted, as if they were something we deserve. But, this right to become a child of God was given to us along with the gift of God's Son. It is something we should treasure and welcome. We are forcefully reminded in the next verse that it is not something we inherited, or earthly (of blood), or given through another, or earned. Each person must receive this gift for him or herself.

Finally, we are told that we can become children of God. Even though it is a free gift, it is also a process. By being transformed into the likeness of Christ, we become children of God. Becoming people who exhibit the essence of God does not happen overnight, it is a life-long process. A part of that "becoming" is found in Matthew 18:1-5. In this scripture Jesus tells us that "*unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 18:3 NIV). As we approach Christmas Day, let us become like the little children in their wonder and anticipation and accept the gift of Jesus as the precious gift that it really is. Then we can believe, accept, and become the child of God that Jesus gives us the right to be!

### **Additional Scriptures: Matthew 18:1-5**

#### **Questions for reflection and/or journaling:**

1. Do I truly believe Jesus is the Son of God and have I welcomed him into my life?
2. How am I becoming a child of God today?
3. How can I be more like a little child today in the way I view the world?

#### **Suggestions for action:**

1. At times during the day stop and capture the wonder and joy present in your life.
2. Give a special prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of God's son.
3. Wrap some of your Christmas gifts and, as you do, say a prayer for that person.

*God of wonder, as one of your children I am humbled anew at the enormity of what you did for me so many years ago, and yet, is fresh and new every day. Help me to capture the wonder of each moment today as I go through the routine of living in this mortal world. Show me how to accept your many precious gifts with open, welcoming arms. Help me to become like Jesus whose birth we prepare to celebrate and, in whose name, I pray. Amen.*

**December 15<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday**

**Centering Breath Prayer: O God...let your face shine.**

*O God of light, let your face shine before me this day. As I spend time with you in quiet meditation, send your light into my life. Continue the restoration that my soul requires in order to become like Jesus. Center me in your love and light and send me into the world refreshed and ready to do your will. In the name of the Christ Child, I pray. Amen.*

**Scripture: Psalm 80:1-7**

**Key Verse: Psalm 80:3:**

***“Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved” (NRSV).***

As we approach Christ’s birth celebration and the worldly whirlwind of activities engulfs us, we recognize a greater need for peace and rest in a relationship with God. Once again, we encounter a plea for restoration in our scriptures. Every time we turn away into the world and forget what we truly have with God, we need to be restored to that perfect peace that only God can give. Yesterday we spent some time with that wonderful opening to the Gospel according to John with its beautiful descriptions of Jesus as both the Word that spoke the world into being and the Light that illuminates our souls. It also speaks of the tragedy of a world that did not recognize him. But, it also gave us wonderful hope. As a part of the ones who receive Christ, we have been given the privilege of becoming children of God. One other purpose for the coming of Jesus is inherent in *“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father”* (John 1:14 RSV). That purpose was to allow us to “see” God. Today we hear from the psalmist a plea for God to *“let your face shine, that we may be saved.”* In all the Old Testament, God never allowed people to see the face of God. The glory would be too great for ordinary people to look at. We would be blinded by the light of God’s glory. But, God became flesh in Jesus, so that we could look at God’s glory in his face without becoming blind.

The psalmist contends that if we could see God’s face we could be saved. I think the psalmist was close, but the salvation comes first, through Christ’s sacrifice. Then, we can look upon the face of God with different eyes; restored eyes; eyes that have been transformed by the Holy Spirit. With these new, restored eyes we see the face of God in each person we meet. When we use these new, restored eyes we see God’s glory in the lives of the people around us. Seeing God in others through the eyes of a new creation brings hope, joy, peace and especially love, both to the one doing the looking and the ones being seen. Salvation has already come, we have only to receive it. Transformation continues every day as we release more and more of ourselves to the Holy Spirit to renew and restore. We, unlike the psalmist of the Old Testament, can see the face of God and we have already been saved!

Of course, restoration comes with a price. We cannot become a new creation without giving up the old. As glorious as the face of God is and as wonderful as it will be to see God face to face, we are reluctant to make the changes necessary to achieve this goal. It is painful to have our old nature stripped away in order for the new to gain

control. Do we really dare to ask for restoration? Do we really want to be transformed into the image of Christ? Are we ready to see God face to face? These are questions that give us pause as we move forward in this Advent season of preparation. God is ready to meet us face to face in the faces of the world's people. Are we ready to "see?" Or, are our eyes too fixed on our own problems, deadlines, stresses and needs to "see" those of others?

There is another way to look at today's scripture. Perhaps, the psalmist does not desire to see God's face, since he knows that God will not show it, but desires illumination. The word "shine" means to give light. Perhaps the psalmist is asking God to send the "Light of the World" to bring salvation? Truly that is what we await in this Advent season, the arrival of the "Light of the World." In the birth of Jesus, God sent the light of God's face to shine on us. For a brief time, God's face was present in the person of Jesus. And, Jesus was the "Light of the World." By that light we receive all of God's love, including salvation. However the psalmist meant the phrase "*let your face shine,*" either as a plea to see God face to face, or a desire for God to bring the "Light of the World," the Messiah, the Christ to the world, the answer is here in the birth of Jesus. God's love is ready to meet us in actions of restoration, transformation and salvation today. With them is the rest and peace we seek. Are we ready to receive God's love Triumphant?

### **Additional Scriptures: John 1:1-14; Isaiah 57:17-19**

#### **Questions for reflection and/or journaling:**

1. Do I really dare to ask for restoration? Why?
2. Do I really want to be transformed into the image of Christ? Why?
3. When I look into the faces of others do I see the face of God? Why?

#### **Suggestions for action:**

1. Find something in your house that needs to be restored. If possible think about restoring it. Let it be a reminder of the restoration happening in your life.
2. Look at the faces of the people you see today and try to see God in them.
3. Look at all the ways light is used in your life today.

*O God, let your face shine. May I be ever open to your light and your restoration of my heart and soul. Transform me into the image of Jesus a little more this day. Open my eyes that I may see your face in those around me. May I see with your eyes and love with your love, full of action in joy and peace. As this day, too, rushes by, show me the opportunities to enrich someone's life with your love. Let me rest in your love, secure in the knowledge that you are working in me to produce your will. In the name of Jesus, the Light of the World, I pray. Amen.*

December 16<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

**Centering Breath Prayer: I have come...to do your will.**

*Holy Lord, teach me to do your will. I come this day to be immersed in your love once again and to sit at your feet seeking to find your will for my day. In the stillness of this time of peace together, search me and find the spark of your love buried in my heart. Kindle anew the flame of your presence and work your will in my life throughout this day. In Christ's Holy name, I pray. Amen.*

**Scripture: Hebrews 10:5-10**

**Key Verses: Hebrews 10:9-10:**

**(9) "Then he says, 'Behold, I come to do your will.' He takes away the first to establish the second. (10) By this 'will,' we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (NAB).**

Give up my will! What if God tells me to go to China or Africa or India or \_\_\_\_? What if God wants me to work with poor people or people with AIDS or visit people in nursing homes? What if God wants me to forgive \_\_\_\_? What if \_\_\_\_? There are a lot of "what ifs" in our lives, aren't there? Giving up our will and saying to God, "I want to do your will" means letting go of a lot of "what ifs." And what, pray tell, does any of this have to do with Advent? Let me give you a few more "what ifs." What if Mary said to the Angel, "I can't have God's child, because I'm too young, too poor, and I'm not married. Besides, Joseph will never understand and my parents will have a fit, and I don't know the first thing about raising a 'special' child like this one would be?" What if Joseph didn't believe the Angel in his dream and "put her (Mary) away secretly?" (Matthew 1:19b NKJV). What if God gave up on humanity and Jesus was never born?

If Jesus was never born there would be no reason for us to be having this conversation at all. Without Jesus, there is no Advent, no Christmas, no salvation and no reconciliation with God. Without Jesus, there is no hope of Eternal life! Advent, then, is all about people who followed God's will. Jesus, himself said, "*For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me*" (John 6:38 NIV). Jesus even told his disciples that God's will was food for him in John 4:34. If our spiritual goal is to become like Jesus, we must be willing to give up our will and do what the Father's will leads us to do. Jesus sacrificed his life to reconcile us to God. In Romans 12:1-2 Paul asks us to be a "*living sacrifice*" for our Lord and to seek the "*good, acceptable and perfect will of God.*" Does giving up my will and following God's will mean that I will go to China, work with people with AIDS or forgive \_\_\_\_? Maybe. Or maybe you'll be asked to pray for people who are in China, have AIDS and forgive \_\_\_\_\_. Perhaps you'll be asked to bring canned goods for the food pantry or clothing and health kits for refugees or food for someone in your church who has lost a loved one or had surgery. Sometimes, following the will of God brings big sacrifices, but most often it is the little daily sacrifices that God really wants of us. Kind words for the harried waitress when your office group goes to lunch, a telephone call or a card for someone who is lonely, a hug for your son or daughter before they leave for school, taking food or a hammer and paintbrush to the Habitat for Humanity site, teaching a Sunday School

class, or visiting someone in a nursing home are all examples of little things God may ask of you when you surrender your will to God's will. For me, the most compelling reason to seek to follow God's will may be found in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (NIV). This may seem harsh, but, there is nothing more satisfying to me than to please someone I love. I enjoy pleasing God. When I accepted Jesus as my Lord, as well as my Savior, I said, in essence, "You are in control of my life and I will seek to do your will in all things." I was a child when I first made that confession, so, I didn't understand that "Lord" part very well. As I have grown in my spiritual life, I have begun to understand that I'm not in control of my life, God is. I still make lots of mistakes and I still get stubborn and try to take over my life, but God is patient with me (and with you). This Advent, let's attempt to be more open to God's will each day. Let's, at least, attempt to follow God's will in any way we are able. Now, I know, you might say to me, "You just don't understand my life. There's no time for me to follow God's will. I can barely keep up with my family or my job or my life." Just remember, you're not really in control anyway. Wouldn't you rather have God in charge willingly than have things happen willy, nilly with no one in charge? At least, that way you can know that things will turn out right no matter what happens! I'll leave you with one more scripture. In Matthew 12:50 Jesus tells the people, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (NIV). Doing the will of God gives entry into the family of God. We can't earn our way into God's family, but, God uses willing people to spread God's Love Triumphant. What if all Christians were open to God's will?

**Additional Scriptures: John 6:35-40, 4:34; Romans 12:1-2;  
Matthew 7:21-23, 12:48-50**

**Questions for reflection and/or journaling:**

1. What "what ifs" are keeping me from opening myself to God's will in my life?
2. How can I accept God's will in my life today?
3. What living sacrifice can I make today?

**Suggestions for action:**

1. Spend a few moments several times today in prayer for God's will in your life.
2. If you feel a sudden urge to do something for someone today, obey it as if God spoke directly in your ear.
3. Make a list of some things God might want you to do.

*Lord of my life, I surrender my will to yours for this day. Open my mind and heart to seek your will in every moment of my day. Calm my fears and lead me in your paths to further your kingdom on earth. Use me as a willing vessel to spread your Love Triumphant. In the name of the Christ Child, I pray. Amen.*

December 17<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

**Centering Breath Prayer: What the Lord has said...will be accomplished.**

*O God, who spoke a world into existence, why am I so reluctant to believe that you will accomplish what you say? Why is my unbelief often stronger than my belief? As we meet again this day, fill my heart and mind with the peace that can accept rather than the chaos that rejects your promises. As the time to celebrate Christ's birth draws ever nearer, open my soul to all the promises that his birth fulfilled and all that still awaits humanity. In the name of the one born in Bethlehem, I pray. Amen*

**Scripture: Luke 1:39-45**

**Key Verse: Luke 1:45:**

***“Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” (NIV).***

What an extraordinary woman Mary, the mother of Jesus, must have been! Woman, did I say woman? She was probably about 14 or 15 years old, hardly a woman in our time! Yet, when she lived, she was considered a woman. Perhaps, part of her ability to believe what the Lord told her was due to her age. She still retained the qualities Jesus has told us to cultivate that are like a little child. She still believed in angels, still believed in miracles and still believed that God could use even a “nobody” like her. She didn’t worry about the consequences such as how to tell her parents and her betrothed. She didn’t worry about what the neighbors would say. She did ask the angel how this could be accomplished, but never denied that it could be. She never asked what she would get out of it, or if it would cost her anything. She just accepted. O, to have that level of trust and acceptance!

What an extraordinary woman Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptizer, must have been! Now here was a woman, not a child! Wife of Zachariah and considered barren, here she is, late in life, “with child” and stuck with a husband who suddenly is unable to speak! Past the time of child bearing, she has been “blessed” with the ability to have this child. She was probably about 4 to 6 months pregnant when Mary arrives at her home. Though she might have been upset to have one more burden put upon her, she, instead, welcomes Mary with open arms and words of blessing. She receives Mary as a favor rather than a burden. How would we react to such a visit? Yet, the scriptures tell us that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Her baby leaped in her womb and joy permeated her spirit (Luke 1:42-44). Both she and her unborn child recognized the hand of the Lord on Mary as soon as she (Mary) entered the room! How discerning are we when someone we encounter has been touched by the hand of the Lord? Finally, she utters the blessing here in our key scripture. This blessing is given because Mary believed what God told her would happen.

Just how strong is our belief that God will accomplish what God promised? A few days ago we explored the consequences of our expectations concerning our petitions to God in prayer. Since we often don’t expect very much, we often don’t witness the miracles God performs in our very midst. But, that doesn’t mean that they don’t happen. Soon after I graduated from college, I worked in a Christian rehabilitation center for drug addicts. I witnessed many miracles there. One, in particular, stands out

in my mind. A young woman had been hooked on 15 bags of heroin a day. This is a very powerful addiction! Withdrawal from such an addiction is extremely painful and usually takes about 3 days when no medical help is used. This is called “cold turkey” withdrawal. Since there was no medical staff at the center, there was no medical help for withdrawal. Prayer and love were all that the staff could offer her. However, those present believed in the power of prayer. They believed that God could get her through this difficult time without the awful symptoms that always accompany this withdrawal. Their expectations of God’s power were high. Like Mary, they believed, “*what the Lord has said. . . will be accomplished!*” The young woman went through the 3 days with no symptoms, which medical experts will tell us is impossible. But with God’s help, all things are possible! Perhaps, one of the reasons that we don’t always believe the promises of God is we don’t know what those promises are. Are we extraordinary people like Mary and Elizabeth, or are we too blind to the power of God that we don’t believe that God will accomplish what God says? God’s Love Triumphant is all around us. Let’s be extraordinary! Let’s believe what God says!

**Additional Scriptures: 1 Peter 1:3-9; 2 Timothy 1:8-12; Romans 15:12-13**

**Questions for reflection and/or journaling:**

1. What is holding me back from believing all of God’s promises?
2. How can I build my faith to believe God will do what God says?
3. What promises of God do I believe? What ones don’t I believe? Why?

**Suggestions for action:**

1. Make a list of God’s promises that you truly believe. Make another of those promises which are difficult for you to believe. Pray about each one.
2. Use today as a day of thanksgiving for the promises of God. Don’t forget to thank God for those which are difficult for you to accept as well as the ones you easily accept.

*Lord of promises, fill me with the same extraordinary faith that Mary and Elizabeth had. Show me ways to build a faith that can sustain me and those around me when nothing else can do so. You are such an extraordinary God! You think of every detail of my life and love me through every one. Keep me focused on you as I go through this day. In each task, let me believe you are there and in charge. Send your Holy Spirit to lead me and strengthen my belief that you will do what you say. In the name of the Holy Child who came that we might have faith and life in you, I pray. Amen.*

**December 18<sup>th</sup> – Friday**

**Centering Breath Prayer: Shed your light...and joy on me.**

*God of light and joy, let me bask in your radiance. My light grows dim and my joy is overshadowed by the burdens of living. As we meet in this place once more, tune my mind and heart to your awesome presence and turn my eyes toward the impending birth of the baby Jesus, in whose name, I pray. Amen.*

**Scripture: Psalm 97**

**Key Verses: Psalm 97:11-12:**

**(11) “Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart. (12) Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name” (NIV).**

Hope, peace, joy, love and light; these seem to be the key ingredients to the Advent season. The first four are represented in the candles of the Advent Wreath and used for the basic message of the four Sundays in Advent. Light would probably be best symbolized in the Christ Candle lit on Christmas Eve in candle light services in many churches.

We begin with hope, because without hope we have nothing to anticipate, nothing for which to look forward. We begin with hope which leads us on into peace, joy, love and light as we explore the God who gives us hope through Jesus, whose birth is so eagerly awaited. *“And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us”* (Romans 5:5 NIV).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday is designated for peace. When we have been assured that our hope is real, we are then able to find peace. Peace comes out of the assurance we have through faith. Interestingly enough, faith is not listed among our five primary topics for Advent, although, we certainly do spend some discussion time on what we believe. Perhaps, it is because it is assumed that we have faith to begin with, otherwise we could not hope, have peace or joy, give and receive love and walk in the light of God's presence. Our key scripture today tells us that God's *“light is shed on the righteous and joy on the upright heart.”* These are only available to us through faith, since we cannot become righteous except by faith.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday moves on to joy, one of today's topics. Joy and rejoicing come from the heart and are present when we take pleasure in the things of God, or more importantly, in God's self. This is the primary topic in Psalm 97, God's self. The Psalm is one of praise for God and regales us with God's majesty, power and glory, all of which are reasons for rejoicing. God's glory is the source of the light which shines on the righteous.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday's primary topic is God's love. When it comes right down to it, all of our topics are different facets of God's love. The title for these devotionals is Love Triumphant, referring to God actively seeking and triumphantly creating a love relationship with humankind in general and you and me in particular. When we enter into that love relationship with God, we respond with love. Just as God's love is shown by God's actions, so, too, is our love response one of action.

The candle we light on Christmas Eve is quite properly known as the Christ Candle. We light this candle as a symbol of the imminent birth of the Christ Child.

Jesus also announces that he is the *“Light of the World”* (John 8:12). As the Apostle John opens his gospel, he announces *“The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world”* (John 1:9 NIV). And, so, we could also call this Christmas Eve candle the candle of light. Many, many churches welcome the Christ Child with services on Christmas Eve in which every person is given a candle to light. We literally light the way for the Christ Child to arrive in our midst.

Of course, these topics, hope, peace, joy, love and light, are all inter related. Jesus brings them all when he enters into our hearts. God’s Love Triumphant is a mixture of all the hope we could need, the only peace that lasts, the source of all our joy, the culmination of the love relationship God has been cultivating since humankind turned away from God and light to illumine our every need. So, let us, indeed, *“Rejoice in the Lord. . . and praise his holy name.”*

**Additional Scriptures: Romans 5:1-5; John 8:12; John 1:1-14**

**Questions for reflection and/or journaling:**

1. What is there about God that fills my soul with joy?
2. Is there one quality of God’s love that stands out to me during this Advent season? Why?
3. Where do I need God’s illumination to shine in my life today?

**Suggestions for action:**

1. Light a candle and praise God for its light and all it represents.
2. Make a list of all the qualities of God’s love you have seen in action during this Advent season. Thank and praise God for each one.
3. Notice all the ways we use light to make our holiday season festive.

*God of hope, peace, joy, love and light, fill my soul today. May I rejoice throughout this day as you bring my attention to all your precious gifts. May my joy in you be evident to others as I go through this day. May the light of your presence so shine in my life that others are drawn to you. Let my love response to you be full of action as yours has been to me. In the name of the Christ Child, who ushers in your light and is the source of my joy, I pray. Amen.*

December 19<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

**Centering Breath Prayer: The good news is...my God reigns.**

*God who reigns, bring forth your messengers. Announce peace and salvation! Bring good news! let everyone know that you reign both in heaven and on earth. Use me to spread the word. Make me a messenger of the glad tidings of peace. As we are together this day, fill me with those messages and bless my feet so that I might bring your message to those around me this day. In the name of the Christ Child, born to reign, I pray. Amen.*

**Scripture: Isaiah 52:7-10**

**Key Verse: Isaiah 52:7:**

***“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who bring good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’” (NRSV).***

How beautiful are the feet of the messengers? Now what kind of a statement is that? Now, I can understand ‘how beautiful the face, or the voice or the visage or even the message,” but why the feet? Perhaps, it is because it’s the feet that carry the messenger to the place where the message needs to be delivered. Even though the feet are insignificant and definitely not beautiful, they still are important because they get the messenger where he is going.

One thing about messengers – they are going somewhere. It may only be into another room to tell someone dinner’s ready or down the street to invite a neighbor to a barbecue. Wherever the message needs to be taken, the feet of the messenger take him there. If the message is a welcome one, the news being brought is a message of good news, such as our key scripture proclaims, then the feet which brought the messenger are of great value and therefore, beautiful. In a sense, our key scripture is a blessing upon the messenger because the messenger is obedient and the message itself is glorious.

So, just what is this great message? As is often the case with Old Testament prophets, the good news in this passage speaks both to the hearer of the day and to the future as well. There are four elements to this message. first, the messenger announces *shalom* or peace (Luke 10:5). We have already spoken of Jesus as the repository of our peace. Even in the song of praise and prophecy given by Zachariah at the birth of John the Baptizer, we are reminded that John came “*to guide our feet into the path of peace*” (Luke 1:79 NIV). (There we go again, talking about feet! We go where our feet take us).

The next part of the message says the messenger brings good news. This could be many things. In Isaiah’s time it might be a battle won or the news that Israel was going back to Judah. For us, the Good News is that Jesus is coming to bring us reconciliation with God eternally. In an earlier devotional message, we spent much time looking at messengers and our need to treat them well and for us to be willing to be a messenger of God. God’s messengers bring good news. Some people may not understand that what we bring is good news, however, God’s messages, even ones that

contain correction, also contain good news. This is truth because God's messages are all intended for one purpose: to bring us back to God.

The third part of the message is to announce salvation. To the Israelites this meant deliverance from their enemies, thus their preoccupation with Jesus as a military King who would defeat the Romans. Instead, Jesus bring salvation through obedience to God and serving us by giving his life for our transgression. He demonstrated his servant-hood to his disciples by washing their – what? – you got it, feet! (John 13:4-17). This was a lowly servant or even a slave's job. Not only did Jesus bring salvation by becoming a servant himself, but he told us to do the same.

Finally, our message reminds us that our God reigns. Despite all earthly "evidence" to the contrary, God is sovereign. God knows exactly what is happening and is in control. When our lives are spinning wildly out of our control, we can rely on God's power and majesty and be confident that despite everything, "*all things work together for good*" (Romans 8:28). Peace, good news, salvation and God in total control; what could be a better message as we approach our celebration. God's Love Triumphant takes many forms, but it is always in action. Even to the washing of our feet!

**Additional Scriptures: Luke 1:79b; Luke 10:5-7; John 13:4-17; Romans 8:28**

**Questions for reflection and/or journaling:**

1. How can I bring peace to the people I meet today?
2. What good news can I bring to those around me today?
3. How does God reign in my life?

**Suggestions for action:**

1. Greet everyone today with a blessing of peace.
2. If you had some incites while pondering the questions above, put one of those ideas into action today.
3. When a situation arises today in which you feel out of control, stop to thank God for being in control of your life.

*Sovereign Lord, who did not disdain to become a servant to bring me life, I praise you. Bless my feet that they may bring me to those who need to hear your good news. Fill my days with awareness of both your peace and your sovereignty and lead me to announce them by my words and my actions today. In the name of Jesus, born anew each time I turn to him, I pray. Amen.*

## December 20<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent

### Centering Breath Prayer: My spirit rejoices...in God my Savior.

*Father God, who chose Mary as the mother of our Lord, be with me in this day. Thank you for the lessons of acceptance and great joy in your will which Mary teaches us. Through this quiet time of reflection with you, teach my spirit how to rejoice in your presence. In the name of the Christ Child Mary once bore, I pray. Amen.*

**Scripture: Luke 1:46-55**

**Key Verses: Luke 1:46-47:**

**(46) “And Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, (47) and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,’” (NRSV).**

Here we are on the last Sunday before Christmas Day and once more we are confronted with Mary. We are winding down to (or is it gearing up for?) the last few hectic days before the main event. Though a few days may have seemed like forever, on the whole the time has rushed past us and we are now down to crunch time. All the things we let slip past us undone are now catching up to us. Hopefully, this special time we have taken together has helped us cope with some of this madness. Whew! Wouldn't it be nice if we could turn back the clock to a simpler time where the stresses and demands on us were easier? Maybe we could go back to the time of Mary and Joseph when things were so much less frantic? Maybe, then, my spirit could rejoice in God my Savior, too! Right – sooo much easier! Let's see, first, we are visited by an archangel of the Lord, who announces we are going to have God's baby (Luke 1:26-38). Piece of cake – right? Then, let's see, we have to tell Mom and Dad and Joseph. The, we'll travel to cousin Elizabeth's to see if she's really going to have a child (and at her age, too)! After that, we get to travel to Bethlehem on the back of a donkey, while none months pregnant! The whole country's on the move since everyone has to go to their own tribal or family city. Then we get there and, guess what, there is no place to stay. So we get stuck in a stable along with all the animals! Well, it's not so bad, at least we have a roof over our heads. Of course, the baby Jesus decides it's time to arrive (Luke 2:1-7). No hospital, no doctor, no medicine, nothing but dear Joseph willing, but how able? Well, the baby's finally here, so now maybe we can rest. But, nooo – now we've got all these shepherds crowding in to get a look at the “special” baby the angels sang about! And what does Mary do? Break down and cry, right? Of course not! Mary ponders everything in her heart! (Luke 2:19). Later, we'll take a trip to the temple in Jerusalem to dedicate baby Jesus and have his circumcised (Luke 2:21-24). Then, we'll have all these visiting magi. And, then, we get to escape all the way to Egypt in order to stay alive. Simple, huh!?

OK, maybe life's not so bad here and now. When we think about our difficulties, maybe, we need to look back to see how God's people have handled theirs. Mary is a wonderful example for us. Her simple, childlike acceptance of God's will for her has earned her praise all through two millennia. God chose well. We could say, “Well, Mary was special, she was the mother of our Savior.” And, that's true, Mary was special and she was the mother of our Savior. But, she was a human person, she was not God. She had free will to choose to accept or reject God's will. She chose to accept. She

could have been like Sarah, Abraham's wife, laughed at the whole idea and complained and whined the whole time (Genesis 18:10-15). But, Mary chose to glorify the Lord and rejoice in God her Savior.

We, too, can choose to complain and whine about the tasks we are given (or choose to accept) during the Advent and Christmas seasons or we can choose to rejoice in the opportunities God gives us to accomplish. We, too, can choose to ponder the things happening around us in our hearts. We, too, can choose to glorify the Lord in our lives with our love gifts of action – our “labors of love” – to God, to family and friends and our neighbors both near and far. Love Triumphant can be reflected in our action of love, and our spirits will rejoice in God our Savior!

**Additional Scriptures: Luke 1:26-38; Luke 2:1-7; Genesis 18:10-15**

**Questions for reflection and/or journaling:**

1. How can I rejoice in the Lord in the midst of my lifestyle?
2. How are my actions reflecting Love Triumphant?
3. What stands between me and rejoicing in God's gifts?

**Suggestions for action:**

1. Review the tasks that still need to be accomplished before Christmas Day. Prioritize them and see when they can be accomplished.
2. Do all the tasks of this day with a cheerful heart and stop often to give God thanks for the ability to do them.
3. Take a few moments sometime during the day to ponder the joy and wonder of the Christmas events.

*God of rejoicing, teach my spirit to rejoice. When I get bogged down in the holiday tasks, show me the joy they can bring to another. Show me how to ponder the wonders you daily send my way. Open my eyes to the joy your Love Triumphant brings into my life each day. May my spirit truly rejoice in you, Lord, as I look forward to the birth of your son in whose name, I pray. Amen.*