

WEEK #7 – LOVE TRIUMPHANT OPENS NEW HORIZONS – Jan. 4-6, 2010
January 4th – Monday – 11th Day of Christmas



Centering Breath Prayer:
God's glory...shines on me.

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:

"Rise up in splendor! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you" (NAB).

On this 11th Day of Christmas, let us *"rise up in splendor,"* not on our own, but, secure in the light of Jesus! Our Christmas celebration is nearly over and we are approaching Epiphany, the festival of light. Without the light that the Christ Child brings, we are in darkness. When we walk in the darkness, we are furtive, tentative and fearful. Things around us are shadowy, unwholesome and unknown, even evil. We grope around, stumble and fall, bump into things and very little is accomplished. Have you ever been deep in a cave when the lights were turned off? I never really understood the phrase, so dark you couldn't see your hand before your face, until I was on a tour through some caverns and the guide, warning us first, turned all the lights out! The darkness was complete. I could see absolutely nothing, including my hand in front of my face. If left like that, I would have perished, because I could not have found my way anywhere! It gave me a healthy respect for the blind, who have learned how to survive in the darkness. But, darkness does not just affect our vision. Light is essential for life to exist.

The sun is the source of light for our earth. Without the light from the sun, including the non-visual spectrums such as ultraviolet and infrared, life as we know it could not exist. Plants would not grow and photosynthesis could not take place so there would not be oxygen for us to breathe. Without plants there would be no food. Need I say more? Even most of the light we have in the night comes from the sun, reflected off the moon. Malachi pays tribute to the earth's source of light when he names the coming Messiah the *"sun of righteousness"* (Malachi 4:2). Of course we know, Jesus referred to himself as *"the Light of the World"* in John 8:12. Just as we need light to live, even if we are blind and do not need light to see, we need spiritual light to survive in the spiritual world. *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light"* (Isaiah 9:2) begins a wonderful passage of scripture which includes the words, *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given"* (Isaiah 9:6a). Jesus is that light. We have walked

in spiritual darkness, groping, stumbling, falling and bumping into things, fearful of everything around us. Now, we walk in the light of Christ!

Our banner for the day represents Jesus as the “*sun of righteousness*,” rays of light extending out from a sun with the Greek letters for Jesus Christ, Savior emblazoned in the center. We, like the moon reflects the earth’s sun, can reflect our “*sun of righteousness*.” The glory is not ours, we only reflect his glory. Christ’s light gives us food for our souls and illumination so that we no longer need live in fear, stumbling and groping around in the darkness of our sins. We are not meant to live in the dark. Humanity has learned to create light for illumination at night, and even to grow plants, but it will never replace the sun. Jesus reminds us that lights for illumination should not be hidden away, but placed where they will give the most light. So, we must place our reflected light where it will give the most light. We must not hide that light, but place it where it can lead others to our Lord! “...*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). So, let us “*rise up in splendor!*” Our light truly has come and shines on us in all the glory of the Lord! Before we say goodbye to the Christmas season, let us take up the light we have been given and shine before others in joy. The light has come in the form of a little baby and it burns brighter and brighter as each one of us embraces it and lets it shine forth in our lives. That’s Love Triumphant burning brightly in you and me to open up new horizons both for ourselves and those around us!

Additional Scriptures: Malachi 4:1-2; Isaiah 9:2-7; Matthew 5:14-16

Questions for reflection and/or journaling:

1. How do I see Jesus as my light?
2. How can I reflect the glory of the Lord?
3. Where can I place my light so that it is best seen to reflect God’s glory?

Suggestions for action:

1. Keep a candle near you today as a reminder to let your light shine. Light it when you can.
2. Ask God to show you where you need to let your light shine most.
3. Let your joy in God’s light show in your life today.

Child of light, shine on me so that I may reflect your glory to all those around me today. I rejoice in the light that you bring to my life each day. As we prepare to leave the Christmas season for another year, fill my life with your light and your love, so that those who see me live my life will be drawn to you. Help me to rise up in splendor so that your light is seen by everyone and your glory is evident to all. In the name of Jesus, sun of righteousness and Light of the World, I pray. Amen.

January 5th – Tuesday – 12th Day of Christmas



Centering Breath Prayer: Child of God...accept my gifts.

Holy Child of God, thank you for bringing me here to this place at this time. Like Mary, I am storing up treasures in my heart. Be with me once again and instruct me in this special time together. Fill my heart with your special love as I pray in your precious name. Amen.

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

Key Verses: Matthew 2:9-11:

“Instructed by the king, they set off. Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child. They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time! They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts; gold, frankincense, myrrh.” (The Message).

“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 “olden 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? What kind of gift would be appropriate for the Christ Child, anyway?

Mary instinctively knew something her son would teach later, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:21 NIV). Mary treasured her memories and kept them in her heart (Luke 2:19, 51). Although we are not told she treasured the memories of the visit of the Magi, it is probable that she did. Perhaps these memories, along with others she would have as Jesus grows and matures, were key to her survival during Jesus’ crucifixion. Treasures, indeed! The Magi brought gold, frankincense and myrrh, rare and costly gifts for Jesus’ future. We don’t know what happened to these gifts, but, perhaps, they sustained Mary, Joseph and Jesus in Egypt. At any rate, the question we are exploring is: What is an appropriate gift for us to give Jesus? Jesus gave everything that he was and had for us. Can we do anything less for him? 2 Corinthians 8:1-7 tells of the generosity of the Macedonian churches in truly selfless giving. *“And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will”* (2 Corinthians 8:5 NIV). This verse is the inspiration for a Christmas carol from the 1980s called “What Can I Give Him?” The answer to the title question is to “give him my heart.” I think the key to our response to an appropriate gift for the Christ Child is to give him what we have. Our acceptance of Jesus as the Christ is not complete until we give something in return. We can give the Christ Child our trust, obedience, faith, prayer and most of all our love in reflection of Love Triumphant. Even though God has given more love than we can ever repay, we can give what we have.

The Christmas season is over and we stand at the eve of Epiphany. Where do we go from here? What can we take from our Christmas celebration this year? If nothing else, I would hope we have observed God’s Love Triumphant and determined to return that love with action of our own. Christ is born! Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Additional Scriptures: Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 2:16-20, 41-52; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

Questions for reflection and/or journaling:

1. What memories do I treasure in my heart?
2. What gifts of myself do I have for Jesus?
3. How can I put my love for the Christ Child into action today?

Suggestions for action:

1. List some of your treasured memories that could sustain you in times of despair.
Keep the list where you can find it to remind you when you need it.
2. List some of the things you can give to the Lord.
3. Do something special today for someone as a gift to the Lord.

Holy Child, bringer of life, it is both a relief and a sadness that the Christmas season is over. You have given me so much in the last few weeks we have spent together. Help me to know how and where to give in return. Like the Magi, I, too, would hurry to give you praise and worship. Keep that excitement alive in me this day. In the name of Jesus, Savior of all, I pray. Amen.

January 6th – Wednesday – Epiphany

Centering Breath Prayer: God is here...God is with me.

God of love, who is always with me, I praise and revere all that you are. As we continue this Holy celebration for one more day, I take great joy in the special time we have had together. Help me to always hold on to 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 showered me with Love Triumphant, I pray. Amen.

Scripture: John 1:10-18

Key Verse: John 1:14:

“The Word became a human and lived among us. We saw his glory – the glory that belongs to the only Son of the Father – and he was full of grace and truth” (NCV).

We have come full circle. When we began this series of devotionals at the beginning of Advent, I stressed the power of the simple words “God is here, God is with me.” When Jesus, our Emmanuel, became *“human and lived among us,”* he brought us the ability to have access to God, anytime and anywhere. God is truly with us every step we take. The Advent and Christmas seasons are over and now we enter the season of Epiphany. God’s Love Triumphant has brought us back to where we began, by acknowledging God’s presence in our lives at all times. As we leave the Christmas celebrations, let’s take that knowledge and build upon it.

The word epiphany comes from the Greek word *epiphaneia* which means appearance or manifestation. The traditional celebration of Epiphany on January 6th commemorates the visit of the Magi and the manifestation of Jesus as *“the one who has been born king of the Jews”* (Matthew 2:2 NIV). As Gentiles, we celebrate the visit of the Magi as Christ’s revelation that he will also be king of the Gentiles. It has been called the Festival of Lights because the traditions ushered in this celebration with candles much as we celebrate on Christmas Eve in our time. The season of Epiphany lasts from today until Ash Wednesday when the season of Lent begins. In the church calendar it is called “ordinary time.” This is not to say that it is unimportant time for the church year, simply, that it is not one of the special celebrations such as Advent, Christmas, Lent, or Easter. During the next several weeks, between now and the beginning of Lent, we will see Jesus manifested or revealed in all his glory through his baptism, his temptation, his declaration as the one to fulfill prophecy, his rejection by his hometown, his first miracle, his power to heal and, finally, his transformation before his disciples. In them all, we will see God’s glory in different ways opening new horizons for us as his followers. How Jesus handles each of these situations reveals God’s character to us.

The Apostle John tells us that one of the reasons Jesus was born was to let us see God (John 1:18). Every time we “see” Jesus, we see the Father. Jesus said, *“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father”* (John 14:9 NIV). We may not have seen Jesus in the flesh, but we see Jesus, and therefore, the Father through the Word. The first appearance, or epiphany, of the Lord was at his birth. Shepherds and Magi,

Jews and Gentiles, were “invited” to come and see. The shepherds were invited by the angels and the Magi were invited by the star. We were invited by the Bible, which continues to reveal Jesus and the Father page by page. Through the coming weeks we will be invited to live in the light of the Epiphany, as more and more of the Lord is revealed. *Epiphaneia* is used 6 times in the New Testament (2 Thessalonians 2:8, 1 Timothy 6:14, 2 Timothy 1:10, 4:1, 8, and Titus 2:13). It is translated as “appearance,” “manifestation,” “revealed” or “glorified.” In many of these verses, the author is speaking, not of Jesus’ birth, but, the final coming of the Lord. In Jesus’ birth we “*saw his glory – the glory that belongs to the only Son of the Father*” (John 1:14 NCV). In his life, more and more of that glory is being revealed to us, through his words and his actions of Love Triumphant. During the next few weeks before Lent, let the Lord be revealed both to you and through you. Don’t let the appearance of the Lord stop with the end of the holidays. God’s Love is still Triumphant and in action and will continue to be in action until all have seen “*the glory that belongs to the only Son of the Father.*”

God is still with you and will continue to be with you each and every day. God will continue to shower you with Love Triumphant in actions which speak louder than mere words. Return that love with your love in action, secure in the presence of the Lord. God is here! God is with you!

Additional Scriptures: Matthew 2:1-12; John 14:5-14

Questions for reflection and/or journaling:

1. How has the glory of the Lord appeared to me through the Advent and Christmas seasons?
2. How has the presence of the Lord been with me during this holiday season?
3. What shall I do to continue receiving the revelations of the Lord?

Suggestions for action:

1. Continue in daily devotional time with your Lord. Many good devotional materials are available. Some contain or have accompanying journals available.
2. Join a small group study or Bible study for weekly sharing.
3. Start a prayer journal and keep track of the things you learn about your Lord as well as your prayers.

Thank you, precious Lord, Emmanuel, for being with me always. Your Love Triumphant working for me daily is unimaginable. I have grown in understanding and in my acceptance of your ways during these Advent and Christmas seasons. Fill me with longing for continued sharing with you in the days, weeks and months ahead. Fill me, also, with compassion and overflowing love for your people – all your people. As I move into my regular, ordinary life, help me to live in an extraordinary way, viewing the new horizons that are opening before me, because of your continual presence within me. In the name of Jesus, born anew in my heart and living in my life, I pray. Amen.