

**WEEK #3 – JOY ABOUND BECAUSE OF LOVE TRIUMPHANT – Dec. 7-13, 2009**  
**December 7<sup>th</sup> – Monday**

**Centering Breath Prayer: God is...my salvation.**

*God of my salvation, teach me how to trust so that I can live without paralyzing fear. Use this time of sharing with you to strengthen me in your will and your ways. Let me rejoice in your salvation as I prepare to receive the Christ Child once more into my life. May my heart sing for the joy you have given through this tiny babe. Open my heart and fill me with the wonders of your salvation. In your Holy name, I pray. Amen.*

**Scripture: Isaiah 12:1-2**

**Key Verse: Isaiah 12:2:**

***“Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation” (NIV).***

Have you ever stopped to wonder what it is about God that caused you to believe in God as your salvation? Some of us came to our beliefs gradually from gentle, loving teachings of caring parents who wanted us to share in their belief. Some others of us came to believe because of a traumatic experience in which God became pivotal to recovery from the experience. Those of us who came gently to belief have a good understanding of the quiet strength that trust in the Lord generates. Those who came from a traumatic experience have gained first hand experiential knowledge of God's strength and ability to handle any situation. Trust and the ability to banish fear come from both experiences. Yet, with all of that experience we have with our God, most of us react with fear or anxiety when confronted with new or unexpected circumstances. Over and over again, God tells us not to be afraid. But fear is a primal emotion and we are very prone to give into it almost every time. We don't think, "I don't understand this situation so I'll just be afraid." We just react! Many times fear is a good indication that we need care in our behavior or we will be hurt, perhaps severely. Anxiety is a type of fear that can paralyze our actions because we give in to the emotion instead of seeking answers. Several years ago I was leading a workshop at a retreat on Guided Meditation and Prayer. As I was preparing for the ladies to come, technical problems arose and I tried several solutions. As the time for the workshop got closer and closer, my emotions began to run away with me. I was anxious! I was overheated, tired and didn't have the answers. I did, however, stop to pray. I didn't just panic completely. I knew that God would help solve the problem. I gave the problem to God and let God know that I trusted God to give an answer. That doesn't mean I didn't cry, I did, and it doesn't mean I just sat there expecting God to fix the problem miraculously, because I didn't, but I did trust that there would be an answer. After we moved the workshop (and we didn't have very much time in which to do it) I began to lead it and at that moment the peace came. Philippians 4:6 reminds us that with God we should not be anxious about anything because prayer and thanksgiving will replace that anxiety with peace from God. Worry and anxiety are the opposite of trust. The only way we can be "saved" from our fears and anxieties is by trusting our God. God's "strength" inspires our trust, and the more we exercise our trust in God, the more God "becomes our salvation."

A few days ago I implied that we often call for God to “save us” from trivial things. Perhaps my need for “salvation” from my technical problems was one of those times. However, it was not the technical problem from which God “saved me.” Nor was it really the technical problem from which I asked to be “saved.” It was from the anxiety, the panic that could paralyze me, that I really need “salvation.” God “*becomes our salvation*” anytime we trust God to act on our behalf. It is through trusting God in the seemingly “trivial” experiences of our lives that we build trust that will be with us when we are called to face the more difficult experiences of our lives. It is in trusting God when we don’t really understand why circumstances seem to be against us, that we grow and mature.

During the rush of Advent, we are often faced with circumstances that cause fear and anxiety. We are often faced with deadlines both at work and at home which rush at us with no regard to whether we are ready for them or not. Our days are packed with extra chores, appointments and financial commitments. Many of these are very enjoyable, but still they put a strain on our relationships. Trust in God can keep the worries, fears and anxieties at bay. The Psalmist, David called God “*my light and my salvation*” and asked “*whom then shall I fear?*” (Psalm 27:1) David had real enemies who wanted to kill him, yet he could sing and rejoice in God, his “salvation.” We, too, can sing and rejoice in our “salvation,” not just for the big things (like Eternity), but for all the little things God does for us everyday. That’s how love is triumphant on a daily basis.

#### **Additional Scriptures: Philippians 4:4-7; Psalm 27:1-6**

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

1. How do I trust in the Lord for the little things in my life?
2. When I find myself worrying or becoming anxious about things, do I pray and trust God to handle them or do I allow them to overwhelm me?
3. How can I allow God to “become my salvation” today?

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

1. If a situation comes up that causes you to feel fear or anxiety today, stop and pray about it immediately.
2. Work on something that has a deadline (even if it is not close) if only for a short time.
3. Sing or play music that brings you joy and reminds you of the trust you have in God.

*Thank you, Lord, for becoming my salvation in all the little moments of my life. Teach me the joy that only comes from trusting in you. Calm my fears with your presence and lead me into greater trust. Lead me to those who do not know of your great salvation, or who only know it as something for Eternity and not for everyday living. Be my light, my rock, my joy and my salvation today. In the name of Jesus, the baby who brings the salvation of the world, I pray. Amen.*

**December 8<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday**

**Centering Breath Prayer: What is...my fruit?**

*Creator God, teach me how to bear fruit that is worthy of repentance. As we spend time together this day, show me what my "fruit" looks like, both to you and to others. Help me know how to stay connected to the "vine" so that what I produce is only what Jesus has given me to produce. Show me how that "fruit" is also your Love Triumphant through me. In the name of the baby Jesus who is the embodiment of all God's love, I pray. Amen.*

**Scripture: Luke 3:7-14**

**Key Verse: Luke 3:8a:**

***"Bear fruits worthy of repentance"* (NRSV).**

Do I look like a fruit tree to you? Scratch that, you can't see me. Look in a mirror. Do you look like a fruit tree? Maybe you're an Apple tree or a Pear tree. No? Well, me neither. So how come the Bible is full of all these references to bearing fruit? Here we are in the middle of Advent, the season of preparation for the birth of Jesus and here's John talking about bearing fruit worthy of repentance! Thank the Lord, John doesn't stop there! Some brave soul asked him point blank *"What should we do then?"* (Luke 3:10). So, John proceeds to tell them about sharing clothes with those who have none and food with those who are hungry. Tax collectors are urged to collect only what is due and soldiers are told not to extort money, accuse people falsely and to be content with their pay. Do any of these things sound familiar? Jesus later will tell people some of the same types of things. Jesus also talks about bearing fruit. We are told that Jesus himself is the vine and we are the branches. (John 15:5) (Well, I still don't think I look like a branch, but I'm not going to argue with Jesus about it! After all, if Jesus is a vine, I guess there's nothing wrong with being a branch, as long as its one of Jesus' branches)! Jesus also tells us that we cannot bear this fruit alone, we need Jesus in order to do so (John 15:4). What is also good to know, I am not the only branch. We're all branches of the same vine. Now, when I think of a fruit vine, I think of grapes. There are other types of fruit vines, I know, but I like to think of grapes since they come in bunches of small fruits, rather than larger fruits like apples, pears, cantaloupe, or even pumpkins. If I am going to be bearing fruit, I like the idea of producing lots of small fruits (like grapes) rather than lots of large fruits. Sound silly? Maybe so, and maybe not! Jesus produced lots of rather large fruits like stilling the storm on the Sea of Galilee, healing all manner of illnesses and injuries, even raising the dead! I know I'm not ready for any of those fruits! But, sharing food and clothing, sitting with a sick person, visiting someone who's lonely, acting with kindness to those around me, these are things I can comprehend. These are the small fruits, that when added together produce larger bunches of fruit. And it is these types of things to which John refers in Luke 3:7-14.

At the beginning of this devotional message, I quoted Luke 3:8a from the NRSV of the Bible because I really wanted to play around with the concept of bearing fruit. But, I really like the NLT which reads, *"Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God."* I also like the way the NCV Bible reads, *"Do the things that show you really have changed your hearts and lives."* These translations

are bringing the triumph of love into the scriptures. Galatians 5:22-25 is the famous passage about the fruit of the Spirit. After listing the attributes of the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, we are reminded “*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit*” (Gal. 5:25 NIV). Living with these attributes as a part of our everyday lives will lead us to do many wonderful things, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Keep in mind, that Jesus does not expect us to do all these things by ourselves. In fact, Jesus told us it would be impossible to do them by ourselves. We must stay connected to Jesus and live by the guidance of the Holy Spirit within us in order to produce these “fruits.” As we continue to prepare for Jesus’ birth again, let us remember what Jesus came to teach us about his love. It requires action in order to triumph. God’s love is constantly in action in and through us. Let us be channels of that action, that Love Triumphant, as a significant part of our preparation for the Christ Child.

**Additional Scriptures: John 15:1-8; Galatians 5:22-25**

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

1. What fruits would I want to be producing?
2. What fruits do I believe that I am producing?
3. Where do I need help to produce the kind of fruits God desires?

**Suggestions for action:**

1. Make a list of things you would like to do for others during this Advent season.
2. Let your family and friends know how much you appreciate them during this Advent.
3. Choose one item on your list of things to do for others and do it today.

*Lord, I don't always understand the things that you require of me, but I do understand that you desire a response from me. Let me always respond with "yes" to do your will. Help me to produce fruit that is healthy and good. I know that I am not capable of producing this fruit without keeping connected to you. Keep me safe in your hands and producing your will for me and those around me. Do whatever you need for me to keep producing for the good of your church. In the name of Jesus, the vine, I pray. Amen.*

December 9<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday

**Centering Breath Prayer: God rejoices...over me.**

*God of infinite love, I know that you are with me, but do you really rejoice in me? During this quiet time we have together, teach me about your love and your rejoicing. Perhaps, if I understand your joy in me, as flawed as I am, I will better understand how to rejoice in all the wonders and blessings you have given me. Let us rejoice together in this day. In Christ's name, I pray. Amen.*

**Scripture: Zephaniah 3:14-17**

**Key Verse: Zephaniah 3:17:**

***“The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior; He will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love, He will sing joyfully because of you” (NAB).***

Had you ever thought about God rejoicing in us? Well, OK, maybe we thought about God rejoicing when we first accepted God as our Savior. But, we probably don't think about God rejoicing about us everyday! The NIV translation says, *“He will take great delight in you.”* That kind of implies that God enjoys my company! That doesn't sound like something which is only there at a few special times in our lives, but all the time! Now, hold on here, let's back up and look at this whole picture before we go off half cocked, as they say.

Our scripture passage for today begins with an admonition to *“rejoice greatly.”* Now that we understand! Lots of Biblical passages encourage us to sing and rejoice for many different reasons. In this passage we are enjoined to sing and rejoice and even shout because God has *“reversed his judgments against you,”* (vs. 15 The Message) or *“The Lord has taken away your punishment,”* (vs. 15 NIV). Now we, as people who have received the salvation which God brought to us through Jesus, know what it means to have our just punishment taken away. We truly ought to desire to rejoice. But God treats us like the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son treats his son, with rejoicing. In our key verse today there are five attributes of God we need to examine.

First and foremost is the fact that the Lord, our God, is with us. Now, by this time you are probably aware that I like to use different versions of the Bible and sometimes I like to compare them in the wording of key scriptures. Often we get another sense of what God is trying to tell us by this comparison. We began these devotions with the understanding that God is always with us, just as this verse begins with the same statement of fact. The wording is different in each version, but the essential fact of God's presence is in them all. In all our understanding of God's Love Triumphant, we must begin with this very important fact: God is with us now and always!

The second attribute is that of a mighty God, who is also our Savior. Advent is all about God's triumphant action as a Savior. We must understand that the reason for Christ's birth is to save us. All the teachings and examples, actions and love that Jesus brought had one ultimate purpose: to reconcile us to God by saving us from our just deserts. Until we have accepted the gift of that salvation, neither we nor God have anything to celebrate. All the versions I have consulted agree with the mighty one who

saves and two (NRSV & The Message) liken God to a warrior who saves or gives victory. God fights for us because God desires us greatly!

The third attribute is the one of a God who rejoices or takes delight in us. I really like the way The Message says that God is *“happy to have you back.”* It is this statement that allows me to understand a God who rejoices over me. If God loves me enough to fight for me, and to send his only Son to save me from my own sins, doesn't it make sense that God would rejoice when that gift has been accepted? And, the rejoicing doesn't end just because we've made that commitment, because we are now growing more and more into God's will and that makes God very joyful.

Our fourth attribute is the one we are trying to understand throughout this entire series of devotionals: love. In all the versions I have, we get several descriptions of that love, *“renews you in his love,”* (NAB & NRSV), *“quiet you with his love,”* (NIV & NKJV), *“you will rest in his love,”* (NCV), *“calm you with his love,”* (The Message) and *“with his love, he will calm all your fears,”* (NLT). Renewal, quiet, rest, and calm your fears, what an impressive list of gentle actions of love! And, O, do we need them!

And if it's not enough for God to rejoice, delight in us and gently love us in all our needy times, God even sings for us! NRSV even says, *“loud singing.”* It's not enough to sing, but God sings loudly for all to hear! I especially like the way The Message says, *“He will delight you with his songs.”* Wind rustling in the trees, birds singing to welcome in the day, crickets, and frogs and – you fill in the blank, God sings throughout all creation. God even uses us to voice God's joy through our music! God's love takes many actions on its triumphant journey. And God rejoices in us through them all.

### **Additional Scriptures: Luke 15:11-32**

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

1. What reasons can I see for God to rejoice in me?
2. How do I respond to God's delight in me?
3. What songs from God do I hear?

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

1. Be especially attentive to evidence of God rejoicing today.
2. Delight in those you love today as a response to God's rejoicing.
3. Pick out someone you don't often tell about your delight in (or love of) him or her, and let him or her know how special you think he or she is.

*Gentle, loving Lord, whose actions speak much louder than words, I am in awe of the scope of your love. That you would rejoice in me is almost more than I can comprehend! Help me to respond to your joy with joy of my own, as I go through this season of light and love that we call Advent. In the name of Jesus, the Child who became a Savior, I pray. Amen.*

December 10<sup>th</sup> – Thursday

**Centering Breath Prayer: Sing to God...He's done it all!**

*Glorious and almighty God, how excellent is your name! How I praise you for all the wondrous things you have done for me. I look forward to this wonderful time each day to learn more of you and to respond once more to your love. Fill my heart to overflowing with the praise-songs you so richly deserve, whether they are songs of music, art, poetry, dance or beauty in some other form. Let my joy pour forth so that everyone will know that you are the most glorious God that anyone could ever imagine. I praise you and glorify you with all that I am. Amen.*

**Scripture: Isaiah 12:4-6**

**Key Verse: Isaiah 12:5:**

***“Sing praise-songs to God. He’s done it all! Let the whole earth know what he’s done!” (The Message).***

Well, here it comes! You must have known that we'd get around to it sometime! Its time to sing! After all, yesterday we talked all about God's rejoicing and singing and now its time to respond! There is probably no season of the year that celebrates with music more than the four weeks leading up to Christmas, (that time we Christians call Advent). You can't go anywhere without hearing some kind of music. We've got songs about Santa and reindeer and snowmen and bells and holly and trees and drummer boys and stars and kings and home and... the list is practically endless. But, the most important songs are the ones which bring glory to God. The Message version of the Bible calls them praise-songs to God. Contemporary worship services know all about praise songs, since that is the primary type of music sung in them. In traditional style worship services we are more conditioned to hymns and choir anthems. "The Message" version includes both styles of songs, as long as their purpose is to bring glory and honor to our Lord. Christmas carols abound in these types of songs. Even non-Christians sing them during this season of the year, never even knowing that they are praising God! How much more should we, who claim the name of Christ sing often and loudly of the glory of our God! Though God has graced many of us with a talent for music and the ability to sing or play beautifully, this talent is not a prerequisite for singing to the Lord. The Bible tells us to *"make a joyful noise unto the Lord"* (Psalm 100:1 RSV). It doesn't say, "sing beautifully and artistically" or even, "theatrically," it just says *"make a joyful noise."* God enjoys beautiful music, but God also enjoys enthusiastic music that is felt from the heart much more than all the most well-trained voices of those who could care less about what they are singing!

Our singing is a response to God's love. We have recognized all the things (well, at least some of the things) that God has done for us and desire to praise God in thanksgiving through song. The Message says this perfectly when it says, *"He's done it all!"* Other versions tell of *"great things," "wonderful things," "glorious things,"* even *"excellent things,"* but this version takes in all of them. No matter how we say it, God has satisfied every need we have, whether we recognize it or not. Now, I know some of you are going to say, but I've asked God for lots of things that never happened. That

does not mean that God hasn't supplied all your needs. It just means that God knows what we need better than we do ourselves. So, as we prepare for the birth of our Lord, let's go ahead and sing our hearts out (even if it is off-key)!

Don't like to sing? Well, that's OK, too. Find some other way to praise God before others. Do you like to paint, write poetry, sculpt, make pottery, do crafts, act in a play? Or maybe, you aren't the artistic type at all. Maybe you are a good listener, a good teacher, a good server or something I haven't even thought about doing. If you do it for your Lord to bring God glory and honor, then you are "*singing praise-songs for God.*" God is singing for you as a wonderful part of God's Love Triumphant. Let's get ourselves in action, too, by "*singing praise-songs for God*" in whatever way we can!

### **Additional Scriptures: Psalm 100**

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

1. What are some of the things God has done for me?
2. How can I respond to that love?
3. What kind of "*praise-songs for God*" can I sing?

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

1. Sing or play some of your favorite Christmas songs today.
2. Make a list of other ways you can praise God without singing.
3. Be aware of the music around you today as you go about your daily life.

*God of all joyous song and everything else as well, hear my praises. You truly have done it all! I thank you for your boundless blessings. As I continue to prepare for your Son's birth, help me to respond to your majesty with song and thanksgiving in all that I do. Help me to realize that "singing" doesn't need to be music. Let me praise you in all of my actions so that your Love Triumphant is reflected in them. In the name of your precious Son, whose acts of love teach me daily, I pray. Amen.*

December 11<sup>th</sup> - Friday

**Centering Breath Prayer: Restore me...and bring me home.**

*Generous and loving God, how I long for your restoration! You have been more gracious and loving than I could ever have envisioned. No matter how I have hurt you, no matter how stubborn I have been, you have always been there for me. As we spend this time together, help me to grow into your will more fully. Prepare me for the restoration of our relationship that the birth of Jesus brings. Open my mind and my heart to your will as we go through this coming day, I pray. Amen.*

**Scripture: Zephaniah 3:18-20**

**Key Verse: Zephaniah 3:20:**

***“At that time I will bring you home, and at that time I will gather you; For I will give you renown and praise, among all the peoples of the earth, when I bring about your restoration before your very eyes, says the LORD.” (NAB).***

What does the word restoration bring to your mind? To me, it conjures up the image of an antique piece of furniture carefully stripped of its old varnish, sanded smooth, broken sections fixed or replaced and made strong again, new paint or stain applied (sometimes many coats) and a finish to make it both functional and beautiful once again. What does the one doing the restoring see in this old, broken down and often ugly piece of furniture? Perhaps, she remembers this table sitting in her grandmother's home as the center of many wonderful Thanksgiving meals. Perhaps, he remembers it as the crib his father used. Perhaps, it is a dresser that she has never seen before, but the imagination sees the beauty it might have had long ago. You have to look beyond what the eyes tell you, if you are to make the effort to restore something. We are like that old, broken down and often ugly piece of furniture. Our edges are rough, our paint or varnish is faded or chipped, our joints are falling... do I need to go on? Often, when we look at each other, or even in the mirror, we don't see much worth. How wonderful it is to have a God who sees beyond all these external flaws and sees the beautiful creation that we were meant to be!

Advent can be a great adventure of reflection, as we examine ourselves and our worth to God, who sent Jesus to be born and live among us. Usually, we don't see ourselves as very worthy of that special kind of love. The wonder of the Advent season is that God does see us that way! God created each and every one of us as a unique and special person. We were given various gifts and talents to nurture and share. We were embraced in a very special love by God, the Creator. But, sin covered us with dirt, stamped on our talents and gifts, and beat us down so that the wonder and love of God was far away from us. And, then came Jesus, born as a baby and raised in our world, with all its heartaches and disappointments. He showed us a better way to live and gave us hope for the future, even when the present seems hopeless. He came to buy us back from sin and to restore us to a perfect relationship with God. He even sent us the Holy Spirit to live within us, restoring us daily into the unique and special people we were created to be. It is no wonder that the Christmas season is so joyous for most of us.

But there are those who are so beaten down, and so covered with dirt, and so stamped on that they can't see the joy. They can't accept the gift that God sent in the baby Jesus. It is, then, our opportunity to minister to these hurting and downtrodden people. It is our joy to reach out and bring them comfort. The chorus of a familiar Christmas carol reminds us that what we carry to the world is: "O, tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy, O tidings of comfort and joy." Let's not forget the comfort part of the message. Let's not get so wrapped in the joy we have that we forget that many are in need of comfort before the joy can take place.

Restoration is not an easy process. It requires much time and patience. It hurts to be stripped of our old varnish, sanded and repaired. We require much painting and finishing. But when it is finished, we shall be gathered together at home in the presence of our God forever. And that's Love Triumphant on a very personal level.

### **Additional Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Psalm 23**

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

1. What do I need to have restored in my life today?
2. Do I feel like I am being restored? How?
3. Do I know of someone who is in need of comfort?

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

1. List some areas of your life that need to be restored. Ask God to work on one of them today.
2. Make a phone call, send a card or even visit someone who needs comfort today.
3. Share with a friend or loved one something you have noticed has been "restored" in his or her life.

*Awesome God, who restores my soul, be with me as I go through this day. Point out those who are in need of comfort and use me to meet that need. Continue the "good work" you have begun in me to restore me to the relationship with you that we both desire. As I go through this day, let me be transformed a little more into the likeness of your Son, whose birth we anticipate. Fill me to overflowing with your joy while helping me remember to comfort others as well. In the name of the Christ Child, whose birth began my restoration with you, I pray. Amen.*

December 12<sup>th</sup> – Saturday

**Centering Breath Prayer: Baptize me...with the Holy Spirit.**

*O, God, who baptizes me with water and with fire and with the Holy Spirit, come and be with me this day. Renew my soul with the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit. As we spend a few moments together, continue the “labor of love” which restores my soul. Help me to claim the joy of the Lord as we continue this journey toward the birth of your Son, in whose name I pray. Amen.*

**Scripture: Luke 3:15-18**

**Key Verse: Luke 3:16:**

***“John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (NIV).***

Advent and baptism seem to be a rather strange combination on the surface. After all, Advent is all about preparation for the birth of Christ, not about baptism! But, in many ways, baptism is about new beginnings. It is a symbol of our new life in Christ. When we were baptized, we (or our parents) made a commitment to follow Jesus as our Lord and Savior. John baptized people with water as a sign of repentance. He knew that his baptism did not reconcile the people with God, but only prepared them to receive that reconciliation from Jesus later. That was his (John’s) job, to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus. So, baptism by water is a type of preparation for Jesus. That is also the purpose of Advent, to prepare us for the coming of Jesus.

John tells the people that he is not the one who will do the reconciling. He tells of one to follow him, who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Now, John does not yet know who this person is, yet he knows that he comes soon and that the people need to prepare for his coming. We, too, need to prepare for his coming. We need to prepare our hearts to receive him. We need new beginnings. We will be coming upon a New Year soon and we always think about new beginnings at that time. But, Christmas brings the best kind of new beginnings as, once more we celebrate the birth of the one for whom John tells us to look. We need to search our hearts for those areas in which we need a new beginning in Christ. We have been doing just that in these first weeks of Advent. We’ve basked in the glory of God’s presence and God’s delight in us. We’ve received messengers and, perhaps, had opportunities to be messengers. We’ve examined ourselves and confessed to God some of the many things that plague our relationship, things which only God can forgive or forget. We’ve stood in the Living Water of God’s overflowing love as God works to perfect us in a “labor of love” only God could conceive or achieve. We’ve been given the ability to “start over” and to have our offerings be acceptable to God because of the sacrifice made by Jesus. And, we have “sung new songs” to the glory of God, allowing God to produce new fruit within us.

Truly we have done much in the way of preparation. And, what has given us the power for this preparation? Why the Holy Spirit, of course! Ah! And, who gave us this Holy Spirit? Jesus did. In Acts 1:4b-5 the Disciples, now to be known also as Apostles, were told, *“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will*

*be baptized with the Holy Spirit*" (NIV). Least some of us think this power was only for the few Apostles, in Acts 11:15, we find Peter explaining his preaching to Gentiles, with the result that, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning" (NIV). And, once more, in Acts 19:1-6, we find Paul speaking with new Christians, asking them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed and leading them into the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" as well as John's baptism with water for repentance. When we try to do all the preparing for the Christ Child ourselves, we are depriving ourselves of the power of God and the ability to succeed. So, let's begin again, by immersing ourselves in the presence of God, secure that the Holy Spirit is present in us and working God's will within us. Can there be any better new beginning than that? Truly the gift of the Holy Spirit's presence in us is Love Triumphant in the most glorious way!

**Additional Scriptures: Acts 1:1-5; Acts 11:15-18; Acts 19:1-7**

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

1. What preparation have I already made for the coming birth of the Christ Child?
2. How have I sensed God's Love Triumphant through the Holy Spirit in me this Advent season?
3. What new beginning do I want to experience today?

**Suggestions for action:**

1. Using a concordance, look up more scriptures concerning the Holy Spirit.
2. As you go through this day, try to notice the work of the Holy Spirit in your life.
3. Invite the Holy Spirit to work freely in your life today.

*Come, Holy Spirit, and work in my life today. I need your power and comfort and ability to remember what Jesus taught. But, most of all, I need to follow God's will for my life and I'm not very good at that by myself. I praise you, God, for all the many blessings and gifts you have given. I seek to be more faithful in using them for your glory. May I be closer to you today than yesterday and closer tomorrow than today. In the name of the Christ Child, whose celebrations draw ever nearer, I pray. Amen.*

## December 13<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent

### Centering Breath Prayer: No worry...brings God's peace.

*God of peace, be with me during this time of rest in your love. Teach me real trust that leads to lasting peace instead of the fleeting glimpses of it I occasionally have. I would learn to rest in your love, joy and peace instead of being immersed in my work, worry and anxieties. In the name of Jesus, bringer of your peace, I pray. Amen.*

### Scripture: Philippians 4:4-7

#### Key Verses: Philippians 4:6-7:

**(6) “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God (7) and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (NKJV).**

You're really going to do it! You're really going to tell me not to worry! Yep! I'm really going to tell you not to worry. Of course, I don't really expect it to happen, at least, not all at once. And, maybe, that's the problem. We don't ever expect God to answer our prayers all at once. Perhaps, we don't expect God to answer them at all! Do our expectations have anything to do with what God does?

I've heard it said that worry is negative prayer. I've also heard it said that the word “try” is a negative word. When I first heard that, I was shocked. I really believed that to “try” your best was a good thing to do. Now, I happen to be a fan of science fiction and fantasy. I don't go all crazy about it, but I do like to read a lot of this type of escape literature and I enjoy many of the movies. I'm especially a fan of Star Wars movies. In the movie The Empire Strikes Back, Luke Skywalker is studying with Yoda, a Jedi master, to use a power called “The Force.” Luke is trying to learn how to use this force to move things, such as rocks, etc., when his spacecraft sinks further into the swamp in which it is mired. Yoda tells him to use the force to lift it out of the water. Naturally, Luke is skeptical, and tells Yoda that it is too big. Yoda tells him, “No, there is no difference.” Luke, still not really sure tells Yoda that he will try. Yoda is very indignant and tells Luke, “There is no try, do or don't do.” Of course, Luke tries and fails. Yoda then proceeds to do the task himself. Luke cries out, “I don't believe it!” To which Yoda answers, “That is why you failed.”

When we say we will “try” to do something, we usually don't really expect to be able to do it. We lack trust in our abilities. When we worry, we don't really expect God to be able to handle the problem. Either we don't pray about it at all, or if we do, we don't really expect God to do anything. If we did, I mean if we really trusted God with the problem, we wouldn't worry about it. So, worry is simply a matter of not trusting God. Now, one of our major problems with trusting God is that when we do place a problem into God's hands, we want to control the answer. We want God to answer it, but, we want God to answer it our way. In essence, we want to tell God what to do as if we know what is best for us and the world! Trusting God, making our requests known with prayer and supplication and thanksgiving, means letting God control the answers and being sure that God's will is sufficient. When we can pray in that manner, worry will not dominate us.

The first year I wrote Advent devotionals it took about 4 months of time to write 37 devotionals. About a week before my deadline there were still 12 devotionals to be written. My mother, who is a champion worrier, did not believe that I would be able to finish them. I had determined that the devotionals should continue through Epiphany instead of finishing on Christmas Day. Since I had finished with Christmas Day I could have chosen to quit there. But, I believed that God wished me to write the other 12 devotionals. I trusted that it could be done. I prayed, "Lord, if you wish these other devotionals to be written, you will have to work a mighty miracle. I believe that you want them done and I trust you to work through me. I will make the attempt with your guidance. If it is your will that they be written, it will be done. If it is not your will then I will accept that, too." I sat down at the computer and began to write. The first day I wrote 3 devotionals. Up until that day, I had never written 2 in one day and often it took more than a day to finish 1. The next day I wrote 3 more. And, so it continued. In four days I had written 11½ devotionals! Yes, I worked hard and stayed at it. But, the key to that time was the trust and the peace that I had in my heart. Worry about finishing was not present. This was one time I felt the "*peace that passes understanding*." I now know that it is possible to trust God and not worry, and, that in the absence of worry, the peace of God is present. I am not able to sustain that belief in every aspect of my life yet, but I do know it is possible. Love Triumphant can fill us with peace when we let go of our worry and trust God. God's peace is awesome!

**Additional Scriptures: Matthew 21:18-22; John 14:23-27, 16:31-33;  
Colossians 3:12-17**

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

1. What are my expectations of God when I pray?
2. What do I believe is the relationship between worry, trust in God and peace?
3. When have I experienced the "*peace that passes all understanding*?"

**Suggestions for action:**

1. When worry begins to creep into your life today say a prayer of thanksgiving about something or someone who has blessed you and entrust that worry into God's hands.
2. Ask someone close to you to remind you when you are worrying instead of trusting God.

*God of peace and understanding, teach me how to release my worries and anxieties. Fears, both real and imagined, rob me of your peace. My life rushes by, especially in this Advent season, and your peace is often far from me. As I go through this day show me ways to trust you and rest in your peace. In the name of the Christ Child, whose coming heralds "peace, good will toward men," I pray. Amen.*