

Lessons & Carols devotions

written by Jamie Witt

Monday, Dec. 31, 2018 Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’” (Luke 2:13-14).

When I was in high school I went to a Christmas choir concert at the college I would one day attend, Carroll College. I had never heard that many people singing together in praise all the familiar Christmas carols. The sound was amazing! I imagine that to be what hearing a multitude of angels singing must be like—it’s so beautiful and inspiring that it gives you the chills, just like that Christmas concert long ago did for me. Let that feeling of awe and praise go with you into the new year ahead. May it be a year of blessings and love! Remember that God walks into the new year with you too, which is blessing enough for us to sing along with the angels, “Glory to God in the highest heaven!” Prayer: “Lord God, walk with us into this New Year, be with us through all the highs and lows of the year. Bless our year with Your Spirit, and guide us as we go forward. Amen.”

Tuesday, Jan. 1, 2019 Joy to the World

“When they [wise men] had heard the king, they set out; and there ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy” (Matthew 2:9-10).

I sang “Joy to the World” for an audition in high school for a vocal group I really wanted to sing with. I did not get picked for the group, and that experience left the stain of disappointment on this song for me. That stain hung out there on this song until I met a very dear friend. She loves “Joy to the World”, in fact it is one of her favorite songs. When I started singing it again, with her there, the song took on new meaning. The stain was wiped completely away by her joy, and her bright smile that shines with the love of God. When I think of “Joy to the World” now I think of my sweet friend, and my loving Savior. God can take us, with our disappointments and sadness, into new situations that change our perspective. Where there was disappointment there is now found happiness. God brings people into our lives to change our perspectives—to make Godself known more fully through them. As the New Year begins be open to changing some feelings from the past, as God ushers in new days of joy to the world. Prayer: “Lord, let us not be tied to the disappointments of the past, but be awake and alert to Your work in the world changing our sadness to joy. Amen.”

Epiphany of Our Lord devotions

written by Robbie Schwartz

January 2, 2019

While almost every day I have enjoyed a sunrise or sunset through the windshield of my car, it naturally pales in comparison to seeing a sunrise at the beach or a sunset over the Rocky Mountains. Since they both are awe-inspiring, they often lead me to give thanks to the Lord for another day’s arrival or departure. In Isaiah 60: 1-6, we are reminded that despite the Earth and all its people living in sin – or darkness – God and His glory brought light where it was needed with the birth of Jesus Christ. In doing so, we looked and we were radiant through His love, our hearts throbbing and swelling with joy. When we are unable to mend our ways, when we lead lives full of sin, despite it all God will provide us with light to find His path. In the midst of darkness, we can still find life and salvation through God’s light.

January 3, 2019

Be it three wise men or three kings who came bearing gifts following the birth of Christ, their journey is at the center of Epiphany. The season is about the revelation of Jesus Christ to the world. Isaiah 60: 1-6 tells us what it meant to the world at that time, one where many people were lost in lives rife with sin. The time for redemption has arrived and with it the departure of a time when many doubted the grace of God. But were it not for God, there would be no light on the Earth. And were it not for our faith in God, and the knowledge of God in our lives, our light would never come as we sing His praise. The people and church of this time period are told to arise and shine, to wake up and both receive and bring light to those living in darkness. Just as the wise men followed the light of a star to a small manger, it is up to us to see the light God provides us each day as guidance for His will in our daily lives.

January 4, 2019

The text of Psalm 72: 1-7, 10-14 is one I have heard cited before during some of the National Day of Prayer events I have attended. It is a prayer for guidance from God for the king, although it is often adapted to our time by citing its importance for our elected leaders at the local, state and national level. While espousing the importance of the king, it is also a call to action. It proclaims the importance of helping those in need, almost a measuring stick of how just a ruler is by the degree to which those with the least are treated. Just like those National Day of Prayer events, this text should serve as a call for those across a political spectrum to not pray for the demise of a leader but for God to intervene and show the correct path. Is it not more productive of us to, as a divided nation, stop whining about what is wrong and join in prayer to ask for God’s guidance for our leaders?

January 5, 2019

Ephesians 3: 1-12 talks about what in early Christianity was a great mystery – but today we know it as God’s grace found through Christ. But it is unlike any mystery that we might see on TV or read about in a book. No, it is a mystery where the end has been revealed but the story has not yet finished. Instead it is the beginning of a new story, the mystery is a gift that upon its revelation has left us as stewards of a new treasure. The treasure of Christ leaves us charged with leading our lives proclaiming God’s grace through our words and actions. Both us as Christians and as a church, we are left with the task of proclaiming the wonders of what was once a mystery but we now know to be the grace of God: that His Son came with glory to wash away the sins of the world and that He will return to judge both the living and the dead.

January 6, 2019

I take great interest in how Ephesians 3: 1-12 ends – “In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.” We often think of freedom and confidence as man-made constructs or ideals. I know many atheists or agnostics who say that it is organized religion that prevents most people from being free – and I am sure they would argue the same about confidence as well. They question how can one live a life of freedom if they are bound by the commandments? And how can one live a life with confidence if they are to be subservient to the word of God and prophets written / interpreted so long ago? But it is just as easy to argue that faith is freedom and confidence realized in today’s world through God and His grace. It is being confidence in faith that we are able to live our lives free from sin, knowing that our shortcomings can be overcome through His grace.