—DAILY READINGS TO PREPARE FOR CHRISTMAS—

the weary world Rejoices

Introduction

The Weary World Rejoices

Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Do you feel weary in these days? Christmas is a time with many things to do; family members to visit, a myriad of shopping trips, parties to go to, cookie baking and the list goes on. It can be exhausting just to look at the list.

Perhaps you feel weary down in the pit of your being. Maybe you are just plain tired and worn out. You may be struggling with illness or loss or grief that makes every task feel that much heavier. You may be hanging on to a thread just to keep your sanity. Perhaps you are lonelier than you ever thought possible or hoping against hope that things will get better.

The baby Jesus came that first Christmas to heal our broken relationship with God and heal the brokenness in our world. He entered our world as a baby so he feels our pain. He was tempted in the same ways that we are and felt the same things we feel. The Bible says that in His agony He even sweat drops of blood. He knows and He understands. And He wants to give us rest!

In these writings that we, attendees of the Dillsburg Brethren in Christ church, have put together, we pray you will meet hope, peace, joy, and love that come only from Jesus, the One whose birth we celebrate at Christmas. As you prepare for Christmas, may the words of our pain and challenge meet you in yours and draw you close to Him who gives you rest.

May you have a blessed Christmas

December 1

Hope for Christmas

by Grace Holland

We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Romans 5:2

It was shaped kind of like a loaf of bread but it was soft in its red tissue paper and had things inside that rattled. My brother kept saying that he was sure we would like it. It was for my sister and me together, as our gifts often were, and both of us checked out the package with awe.

Maybe it was a doll suitcase with some clothes inside. Or maybe it was a comb and brush set for our long hair. Maybe it was a bag of candy—but why would it be in a case? Could it be a new doll with her own carry cot? If that was it, she was pretty small. It must be something wonderful to be that mysterious. Our imaginations soared as we dreamed of all sorts of wonderful things that could be in that package.

When it was time to open our present, we found inside a doctor's kit. There were little bandages, a play stethoscope, a thermometer, some candy pills and many other things to stir our imagination as we played. A doctor's kit was not something we had even thought of or hoped for. We loved it!

Any hopes that I had for my life could not have contained all that has taken place. It started with telling God that I couldn't sort it out and I needed him to take over. There have been struggles and victories. There have been opportunities to help and to heal. There have been times to teach and to see hope born in others.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for opportunity beyond our hopes and life beyond our limitations. Amen.

December 2

Hope in God's Love

by Dulci Brubaker

"And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." 1 John 4:16

In April 2017, my baby died halfway through my pregnancy. I was heartbroken. I didn't know this person whose heart started and stopped beating inside of me, but I loved him with every fiber of my being. Now I had to come to terms with the reality that I would never watch him smile or take his first steps, let alone become an adult.

When I unexpectedly got pregnant again in 2018, many people assumed the attitude that God "owed" me a healthy baby, or at least that statistically it was unlikely that my next baby would be stillborn as well. But though their encouragement sounded good, it didn't help.

After experiencing loss and hearing so many other tragic stories, I couldn't cling to the hope of a healthy baby. It wasn't something I could count on. Instead, what I *could* trust, grasp, hold onto, was God. Even on the darkest day of my grief, I knew that God was good, that He loved me, that He loved my son, and that He grieved with me. Faced with pregnancy after loss, my trust had to be rooted in God. I had to accept that in this situation, in my life, and throughout the world, *anything* could happen—but no matter what, God, the Creator of the Universe, loves and wants to be *with me. With you.* That's what He was saying to all of humanity when He sent his son Jesus to be born as a baby so long ago. And like his mother Mary, whose circumstances (unmarried, a virgin, mysteriously pregnant) appeared dire, we can put our hope in God, not knowing *what* He's going to do, but trusting that He loves us.

God, help me to trust not in the circumstances of my life, but in You and in Your love for me. When I am uncertain about what the future holds, help me to say to you in faith, as Mary said to the angel, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."

December 3

Thrill of Hope - Anticipation and Fulfillment

by Julie Cook

"I see him [Jesus], but not now;
I behold him, but not near.
A star will come out of Jacob;
a scepter will rise out of Israel."
Numbers 24:17a (NIV)

Have you ever been *thrilled* about something— I mean, *totally overjoyed*? Maybe part of the thrill was accented by anticipation.

The best news I received the year I was ten was this: I was going to be a big sister again! I was ***thrilled*** and couldn't wait to meet this itty bitty baby who would become an integral part of our family.

Meeting my tiny sister was the highlight of the year I was eleven. As I waited the final hours until I met her for the first time, I was giddy with anticipation. In no way was I disappointed when I finally held her! All I wanted to do was get to know this unique, miniature individual who would grow to be a lifelong friend.

There was a lot of anticipation surrounding Jesus' birth. Not only were his parents filled with expectation but so was the whole world! Jesus' birth was the culminating moment of generations of hope. He was and is the fulfillment of countless longings. Can you imagine some shepherds receiving a special visit from an angel who told them of Jesus' birth, first announcing, *"I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10)*?! What a moment! The time of fulfillment had finally come.

You and I are part of *all the people*. Today, even so many years later, we can join in anticipation *and* experience the thrill of fulfilled hope through Jesus' birth.

Jesus, thank you for coming as a fulfillment of longings past and present. Thank you for glimpses you give us of hope and anticipation in everyday life. Help me to hope in you and experience the thrill of your forgiveness and eternal care.

December 4

Fear and Hope

by Kimberly Tucker

"In the countryside close by there were shepherds who lived in the fields and took turns to watch their flocks during the night. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified, but the angel said, "Do not be afraid. Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." *Luke 2: 8-12*

One of my favorite posters hangs framed in our kitchen. It's a photograph of a small boat filled with refugees of all ages standing shoulder to shoulder—packed in like sardines. Some are even sitting on the edge of the boat. The poster says:

The only thing stronger than fear is hope.

Our hope is in Jesus—that baby who was born in a stable. As the angel said who spoke to the shepherds, *"…a savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."*

Thank you, Jesus, that I can put my hope in you. I have nothing to fear with you at my side. Amen

December 5

Holding on to a Glimmer of Hope

by Rachel Pease

Have you ever made a terrible mistake? The kind you don't think you'll ever recover from or be able to forgive yourself for? The kind where you feel like you've ruined your life?

Two years ago, I found myself in circumstances like this after I took an exciting new job which involved moving our family to another state. Within months, I knew the job was not right for me and I frantically tried to find a way out. Within six months, we ditched the new opportunity and returned to PA. It was hard to see how any good could come from a situation that hurt my pride, derailed my career, cost our family $40,000 in financial losses, and resulted in our pre-teen daughters having to change schools twice in one year, while losing friends in the process. However, I believe that the Bible is true and that God keeps His promises. So when I read Romans 8:28, which says that *God works all things together for good for those who love Him*, I tried to hold onto a glimmer of hope.

There were some really hard days, and it took time. Now I can look back and see how God has worked in my life. We're still paying off some debt, but God has provided jobs for both me and my husband, and we are making progress. Although my new job is different than what I imagined, it's a position that fills my days with purpose and meaning. Our daughters learned some important lessons and developed resilience. And I see that God really has worked everything together for our ultimate good, despite the pain of making a huge mistake. In some ways, we are better off now than before.

This Christmas, if you find yourself in the midst of a hard situation, whether it is of your own making or not, please hold on to a glimmer of hope. No matter what, God really will be able to work even this out for your ultimate good, just like He did for me.

December 6

Help is on its Way

by Rob Douglass

This is my first Christmas since my younger sister died of cancer. Maybe you are like me and have experienced loss this year, or maybe you are in a place where your loss is just around the corner.

We have those moments in life where something has happened, and nothing will ever be the same again. If we lose hope, the pain of past losses or the fear of future losses can imprison us.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer knew a few things about prison and loss, and yet he didn't lose hope. He was a German pastor who stood valiantly against Hitler and Nazi regime in Germany. He was eventually arrested, imprisoned, and executed.

In December 1933, Bonhoeffer preached a sermon where he compared the human condition to a mining disaster where miners were trapped.

For Bonhoeffer, humans are buried alive. There is nothing that we are able to do to save ourselves from our predicament. We have a sense that someone is "up there" trying to help, but there is no real expectation of it making a difference. He writes that all that remains is "an agonizing period of waiting and dying."

Then suddenly a noise can be heard that sounds like tapping and rock breaking. Before long a voice calls out, "Hold on, help is on the way!" With this, the disheartened miner picks himself up and his heart leaps.

At Christmas, the one who was "up there" came down here so that we could be rescued.

To paraphrase Scripture, *Luke 21:28 says, "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, hold on, don't give up hope because your help is on its way."* Our rescuer has come and he won't leave us until we are with him.

December 7

Waiting

by Jaylene Shannon

My husband and I took my mother-in-law to visit my father-in-law in the rehab center. Though she had promised to have lunch before we arrived, she had forgotten. So we waited for her to fix her lunch, toddling with her walker around the kitchen. She then took about 30 minutes to eat her half sandwich, hand full of chips and bowl of applesauce. I sat with her and tried desperately not to rush her.

Inside we were both feeling hurried. We had been traveling for 4 days and driven 4 hours that morning. We stopped in for a quick visit and then we would be on our way.

When she was finished, we cleared things away and waited while she used the restroom, gathered her purse, turned out the light and a few other things she needed to do before we left, all the while using her walker to get around ever so slowly.

I wanted to be so frustrated but inside I felt God's still soft voice reminding me to be still and quiet. I felt like He was reminding me that He often waits for me. I am not moving slowly; instead, I am scurrying about doing my thing while He waits for me to stop and take notice of Him.

*Psalm 46:10 says, "**Be still, and know that I am God**; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." (NLT)*

So this Christmas when we are tempted to be in a rush to get all our to do lists checked off, let's take time to remember that the One who came as a tiny baby that first Christmas wants to spend time with us. He wants us to know that He loves us and left heaven to enter into a relationship with us.

Lord, help me slow down so I can hear your voice and experience you in others. Amen.

December 8

His Parting Gift

by Esther Spurrier

"I'm leaving you well and whole. That's my parting gift to you. Peace. I don't leave you the way you're used to being left—feeling abandoned, bereft. So don't be upset. Don't be distraught." John 14:27

These were some of Jesus' parting words to his followers before he left his human/divine life on this earth to return to God the Father. He was leaving these friends, but he was leaving his peace with them. Can we really experience the peace of Christ on a daily basis?

Some years ago we got a call telling us that our 17-year-old son had just been in a serious auto accident. He was being flown to the hospital. We were at the airport, taking our daughter to return to college after Christmas holidays. So we rushed to the hospital to find out more information and to be with him.

We found our son unresponsive in ICU. We learned that he had suffered a serious head injury, and doctors could not be sure how much the brain had been harmed—and what the rest of our lives might look like. I felt like I was in shock—numb and unresponsive. I couldn't even pray. Almost immediately our friends started gathering in a lounge at the hospital to pray with and for us.

The road to recovery was long and slow with many turns and setbacks. Somewhere along the way, the numbness molted into peace. I knew that whatever the outcome, God was with us and would give us the help we needed. And God's people helped us experience the presence of Christ.

Jesus, thank you for leaving your peace for us to realize even when you were no longer physically present here on earth. Help us lean hard on you in our times of trouble. Amen

December 9

Finding Inner Peace

by Laura Esch

I'm currently reading the book *Anxious for Nothing* by Max Lucado. If you haven't read it, I recommend it. He reminds us that we can give our worries to God in prayer, and let Him handle it. Easier said than done, right? I have an anxious heart, and I waste time worrying about the future. My life would be much easier if I always remembered to give my worries to God in prayer instead of letting anxious thoughts take over.

The holidays can be a stressful time for many Americans for a myriad of reasons. The New York Times refers to this as "festive stress." It's ironic, really. During the season we are supposed to remember Christ coming to bring peace to the world we become more stressed than ever. Instead of worrying this season away, let's give our worries to God in prayer. During this Christmas season, may you experience the peace that only God can provide.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."
Philippians 4:6-7 NIV

December 10

Peace on Earth

by Grace Holland

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests. Luke 2:14

Years ago we were at a mission outpost in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) when the Congo got its independence, society disintegrated, and people fled the chaos. Moving through Zambia they slipped through the southern border and we were in the path of some of those fighting their way to freedom.

We were also on the edge of the game park, and animals of every description could sometimes be seen in the woods around us. My husband had a gun for hunting. It would not do for a missionary to shoot any person, though—no matter who or what his purpose. The gun would also mean disaster in the hands of an intruder. So my husband got rid of his gun.

We continued peacefully with the work of starting schools and planting churches in this new area for the church. The danger passed. Zimbabwe eventually got its independence too. The problem was that the president, once on the side of the people, ruined the country's economy as he confiscated properties and fought illegally to stay in power beyond his years of sanity.

Today the country of Zimbabwe struggles, unable to grow enough food for its own people, but the church has grown by leaps and bounds. In the midst of uncertainty, there is peace. In the midst of unemployment there is fellowship and mutual help. In the midst of strife there is cooperation. God's favor is resting on those who trust him.

Thank you, God, that there is peace in the hearts of people everywhere who receive you into their hearts and live to please you.

December 11

The ABCs of Peace

by Mel Brough

PEACE WITH GOD:

Always available
Brings hope
Contentment in the midst of trying times
Delights the discouraged
Everlasting
Faith's enduring promise
Grace without measure
Hope for the hopeless
Incomprehensible at times
Jesus in our lives
King of Glory reigns
Light in the darkness
Mercy in the midst of trials
Not available through the things of this world
Overcoming life's storms
Perfect
Quieting the thoughts
Restoring the weary
Song in my heart
Testifies to God's goodness
Unifies Christ followers
Victorious living
Wonderful
eXceeds human reasoning
Yearning for this precious gift to us
Zillion times better than anything the world has to offer

May blessings of peace flood your whole being this Christmas season as we once again wait with joyful anticipation to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

December 12

Path of Peace

by Naomi Smith

The rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.
Luke 1:78-79

After I turn out the lights and retreat to my bedroom at night, I often realize that I forgot something out in the kitchen. And because I hesitate to shine light into the rooms where our children are sleeping, I usually tiptoe through the darkness until I am close enough to the kitchen to turn on a light again.

The trouble with walking in darkness is that I cannot see what lies beneath my feet. We try to clean up the floor at the end of the day, but we are not always successful, and then I end up tripping over a pile of stuffed animals or books.

When I say that I long for peace, I wonder if I am longing for a floor cleared of all debris. I want room to walk without tripping over the evil in my own heart. I want conflicts to be settled peaceably—no more war, injustice, or petty arguments. I want to live in a world of people who think first of other people.

We live in a world strewn with hate, greed, and violence. It is treacherous to tread here, but we are not alone. Jesus is the “rising sun” of these verses from Luke. He comes to dwell with us in the middle of our mess, and he can guide our feet into paths of peace. By his light we can see to walk, and by his light we can begin the cleanup.

December 13

Really Know Peace

by Esther Spurrier

"Glory to God in the heavenly heights! Peace to all men and women who please God." Luke 2:14

These are the words the angels sang to the shepherds on the hills surrounding Bethlehem when they announced that Jesus had been born in a stable close by. These are words we like to sing during the Advent and Christmas seasons.

But I have struggled with anxiety all of my life. Why is that? Am I not a person who is pleasing to God?

I had done it again. I had committed myself to do too many things in the coming week. And now I was having trouble sleeping. When I would waken at night, I would immediately start thinking (worrying?) about how I was going to get everything done. I would make mental plans of what I would do today and tomorrow and the next day in order to fulfill my commitments.

I wonder if I am concentrating more on pleasing people, on being seen as a productive person in our society that so values productivity, rather than concentrating on pleasing God. God is much easier to please than people. Rather than withholding approval, God likes to say, "Well done!" to us.

God, help me to listen to your words rather than worrying about the words and thoughts of the people I so often try to please. Help me to really know the peace you want me to have. Amen

December 14

Let it Begin with Me

by Rachel Miller

"For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people, when through his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us." Ephesians 2:14

World Peace: an ideal state of nonviolence and happiness that would exist across all peoples on Earth. That's what I want for Christmas this year - no more wars, shootings, abductions, racism, or bullying. But seeing as how I don't have the powers of world domination, I don't think I'll be getting my wish this year. Even if I did have world domination powers, unfortunately, world peace cannot be forced on anyone else as coercion is in direct opposition to peace.

Fortunately, we as individuals can do a lot to live at peace in our own lives. This reminds me of the song, "Let there be peace on Earth" which was originally written to be sung by the International Children's Choir in 1955. I always appreciate that "Let there be peace on Earth" is immediately followed by, "and let it begin with me." It reminds me that I have a part to play and leaves me feeling less hopeless about the current state of things. One of the songwriters, Jackson-Miller, later explained that she wrote the song after discovering what she called the "life-saving joy of God's peace and unconditional love."

Jesus, we thank you for the work you did here on Earth and your example of peace to us. May we understand your way of peace and work to spread it far and wide--in our lives and our spheres of influence and beyond.

December 15

Mary Did You Know

by Joe Bennett

Proverbs 3:5 ESV Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

When I hear the song “Mary, did you know?” by Mark Lowry, I think of my experience as a parent. As a father, I have hopes, dreams, and fears for my children. Tears well up in my eyes as I think about the feelings that Mary must have had.

Imagine a visit from an angel, not just a dream, but a real conversation. Imagine becoming a mother by the power of the Holy Spirit. Your child will be the savior of the world, the Christ. Now imagine trying to explain this pregnancy to your parents and your husband-to-be. By the grace of God, an angel also visits him so he decides not to divorce you quietly.

You deliver a baby boy and you name Him Jesus, just as the angel said. This baby in your hands, the Son of God, will save the world. Did Mary really understand what would happen?

“Mary did you know that your baby boy, would one day walk on water?
Mary did you know that your baby would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy, has walked where angels trod?
When you kiss your little baby, you've kissed the face of God.
Did you know that your baby boy was heaven’s perfect Lamb?
This sleeping child you're holding, is the great--, I--- AM”

Just as there was probably a lot Mary didn’t know, we also don’t know what lies ahead. May we keep our trust in the One who knows and loves us through it all.

December 16

Joy in Trusting God

by Jaylene Shannon

I was late with getting my Christmas shopping done. I was speeding down the highway and suddenly I heard a siren. Oh no, it was a policeman!! And he was after me!! I had been in such a rush! As I sat there in shock, I seemed to hear God gently say to me, "Child, you don't trust me." Surprisingly it wasn't a condemning voice but very firm yet loving. I had to agree that I didn't trust Him with my day, though I had prayed to Him that morning that I wanted to do things His way. As I heard his voice, I began to relax and took the ticket for $94.00. I knew I deserved it and I knew that once again I needed to learn to trust Him. "Lord, I'm sorry for taking things into my own hands again and driving too fast. I could have hurt someone."

I felt such shame. When I got home I went to the mail box with "my tail tucked between my legs" so to speak. I didn't want to tell anyone what I had done. I opened my mailbox. What was this? There was an unexpected check in the mail for $147.00. Wow! What joy!

"God you are too amazing!! I can't understand your love and mercy. You required a penalty for my wrong doing but supplied the payment for the fine and gave me some left over!! What a great lesson for life. Praise your wonderful name. I stand in awe of you!"

So as you face the pressures of Christmas this year, may you experience the joy of knowing what it is to trust Jesus. May you feel the Joy of Him giving you more love and peace than you ever deserve.

Romans 15:13 (NLT) I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him.

December 17

Finding Joy in Unexpected Places

by Rachel Pease

Nursing homes aren't usually thought of as joyful places. And yet, having worked at Messiah Lifeways at Messiah Village for the last 19 months, I have seen first-hand that joy is not dependent on circumstances. Some of the people with the most joy are facing the darkest moments in their lives.

One man visits his wife daily. He lives in an apartment by himself while she is cared for in a nursing neighborhood because of her Alzheimer's diagnosis. And yet, every time he sees me, he remarks on how blessed and grateful he is. Joy radiates from his face.

Another woman lost her husband nearly two years ago. She grieves his loss every day. And yet she used her resources to create an amazing music therapy program to bring the joy of music to hundreds of residents throughout Messiah Village. The joy she receives from having given this gift is remarkable.

Yet another example is found in a couple who have faced tremendous losses – the kind that could shatter a person's heart and leave them questioning where God is. But they regularly bring their therapy dogs in to spread cheer to nursing residents, which brings joy to them in turn.

What I've observed in each of these instances is that joy is present when the person has a spirit of gratitude and generosity. When they are grateful for even the smallest blessings of daily life and when they look for ways to pour out blessings on others, joy follows. These examples and so many others inspire me to live a life of joy as well. If people facing their darkest days can find joy and share it with others, so can I.

Long after the Christmas lights fade and the holiday music subsides, we can still find and spread joy each and every day, even in unexpected places and even in the hardest of circumstances. May we give thanks, live generously, and spread the joy of Christ this season and throughout the New Year.

December 18

Joy to the World

by Grace Holland

Look! I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. *Luke 2:10*

It was Christmas in Africa and we were having a tough time getting used to the heat. We had arrived in April and with the seasons reversed in the southern hemisphere, the mild winter seemed like summer, and then summer went on endlessly.

October was sometimes called “suicide month” because of the extreme heat. Then the rains came and cooled things off a little, but how would we ever manage to embrace the heat for Christmas?

On the day before Christmas it rained and in the evening there was a fine mist still blowing. It felt a tiny bit like snow. As we entered the church for the Christmas Eve service there was a glow from the pressure lamps, and the faces of the carolers shone with joy as they came in carrying candles.

Reversed seasons were something we hadn’t thought much about as we applied to serve in Southern Africa. We hadn’t known what to expect, either, when it came to meeting folks delivered by faith in Jesus from the slavish fear of evil spirits. Now we knew something of both, and as we celebrated Christmas together that evening we were glad that we had come.

Lord Jesus, thank you for people around the world who have found salvation in you. Amen

December 19

Joy ...In His Presence

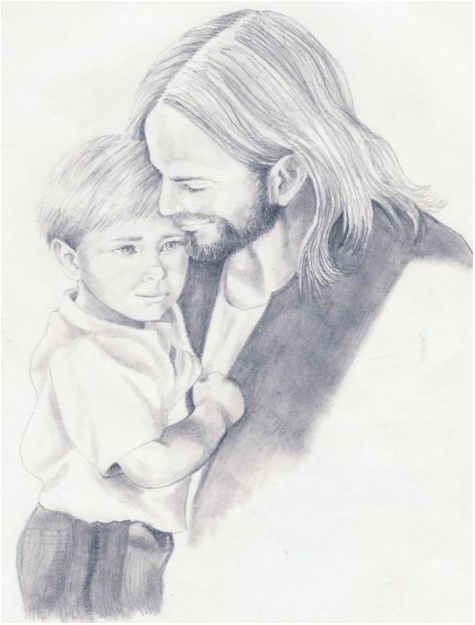
by Faithe Spurrier

Listening to our grandchildren laugh is one of my favorite moments in life. The sound is infectious, contagious and wonderful! It brings me great joy just to be in the same room.

The Psalmist David, in 16:11 says, "You (LORD) make known to me the path of life; You fill me with Joy in Your Presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

When our Good Father realized He could not be close to His children, He took drastic measures. He sent His Son to be "one of us"; to be right with us, and to fill us with great joy.

So if we listen very carefully; amid the angels singing, the shepherds hurrying, and the wise men adoring, we may hear the sound of a baby laughing... the sound of God coming close.



Joy ... in His Presence.

Thank you, Jesus!

December 20

Glorious Inexpressible Joy

by Rachel Miller

1 Peter 1:8
You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. (NLT)

Have you felt inexpressible and glorious joy? The kind of joy that doesn't fade away a few hours after you collect The Prize or a few weeks after a Big Win? A joy that can't be stolen by bad news or a sour spouse? I had a few months of that kind of joy. It was a joy that was often accompanied by happiness, but also remained during sadness and stress. This joy came about because I was walking in deep trust that God already knows the future and has my best interest in mind. It didn't matter what happened - and there were some disappointing happenings! - I was at peace and felt great joy which didn't make much logical sense outside of faith in God.

When we love Him, we obey Him. When we obey Him, we trust Him. When we trust Him, we are filled with glorious, inexpressible joy.

Prayer: *Thank you, Father, for your gift of Joy. Thank you for revealing yourself through Jesus so that we can love and obey you. Show us the parts of our lives where we need to trust and obey you more fully.*

December 21

Rejoice Over You with Singing

by Naomi Smith

The LORD your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing.
Zephaniah 3:17

During my sophomore year of college, I was a resident assistant in my dormitory. I was in charge of a long hallway of student rooms, and there I organized activities, listened to complaints, and tried to keep the peace.

One of my clearest memories from that year happened on a cold December day. I was in my room with the door open, and I heard music coming from down the hallway. I decided to investigate. It was finals week, and all of us were studying for tests or working on projects. I intended to ask those students to kindly turn down their music, but I never did.

For as I peeked inside the offending room, I saw two young women lying on the floor. Their eyes were closed, and they appeared to be sleeping. But over and around them, and spilling out into the hallway, came the majestic sounds of the “Hallelujah Chorus.”

Every time I read this verse from Zephaniah, I remember those sleeping students and the beautiful music surrounding them. I am convinced that God sings his songs of love over us all the time, day and night, even when we are too overwhelmed or exhausted to hear them. He is rejoicing over you right now! Just listen.

December 22

The Word

by Jared Whitesel

*So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. John 1:*14 (New Living Translation)

The Word
Creator, Light, Lord, and yet
Baby, child, human.

It does not make sense;
To see the One who
Was at the beginning and
Was the beginning
Made flesh and living among us.

The Word lived as human
But was blameless, pure, and sacrificed,
For us, for our sins: that same Word
That Created All

How? Why?
Would the God of All die
For me?
Only Love

Jesus, thank you that you loved us that much!

December 23

Love and Sacrifice

by Jaylene Shannon

John 3:16 (New Living Translation)
16 "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

A few years ago my daughter told me that she was thinking about moving to a country in Asia (where there is terrorism) so others could learn to know the love of Jesus. It was a dark time in my life. I cried many tears. How could this be? I asked God over and over, would you really ask her move to a country where she might die for her faith? For a year I went to tears often. I felt sorry for myself most of the time and thought that no one would understand. Three times I heard God's voice whisper to me, "I gave up my Son for you." He understood!! I was not alone!! He did that for me!

The Love that God has for us required great sacrifice. On that first Christmas morning, when He sent His Son as a small baby into this world, He sacrificed so much for us. He knew that Jesus would become a man who would one day die for the sins of the world. He sent Him for that purpose.

This Christmas as we think about Jesus' birth and the sacrifice that God made for us, let us also be willing to sacrifice for Him. His love for us draws us so strongly that our sacrifice for Him is small in comparison.

December 24

What Love is This

by Jared Whitesel

What love is this?
That spoke and created life.
That made galaxies for His Glory.
That formed us out of dust, and said
It is good.
What love is this?

What love is this?
That humbled himself and
Became flesh.
That lived as one of us.
That broke down barriers among people.
What love is this?

What love is this?
That sweated blood for us
That carried our punishment.
That died for us
On the cross.
What Love is this?

What love is this?
That tore down the curtain
Separating us from God.
That destroyed the grave.
That lives among us.
What love is this?

What love is this?
That frees the prisoners.
That heals the broken
That walks among us even today.
That loves us more than we can comprehend.
What love is this? Jesus

December 25

Bethlehem Bedlam

by Rob Douglass

Peace on earth was what the angels proclaimed to the shepherds so many years ago. But sometimes what we experience at the holidays is anything but peace.

The word, bedlam, means a state of uproar and confusion. It was originally a word to refer to the chaos of a mental hospital.

In 1247 London, a hospital opened that was connected with the monastery called St. Mary of Bethlehem. Within 200 years it had become a mental hospital. Some records indicate that it had even become a tourist attraction where people would go to heckle inmates.

During this same time, the name Bethlehem underwent a corruption, and it came to be pronounced "bedlam." So, the chaos at the mental hospital at St. Mary of Bethlehem gave rise to our use of the word, bedlam.

I hope your celebration of Christmas can't be described as bedlam, but even if it is, you can know peace. You see, it was into the chaos of our mess that Jesus came. He still comes into the bedlam of our lives. The angels announced it, Jesus brought it, and I pray that you may know his peace this season even if you are the midst of craziness.

Pray: Jesus, you are said to be the Prince of Peace. There are a lot of areas in my life that are full of bedlam. Would you please come into my chaos and bring me your peace. Amen.

Dillsburg BIC Church

Growing Deep, Reaching Far

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