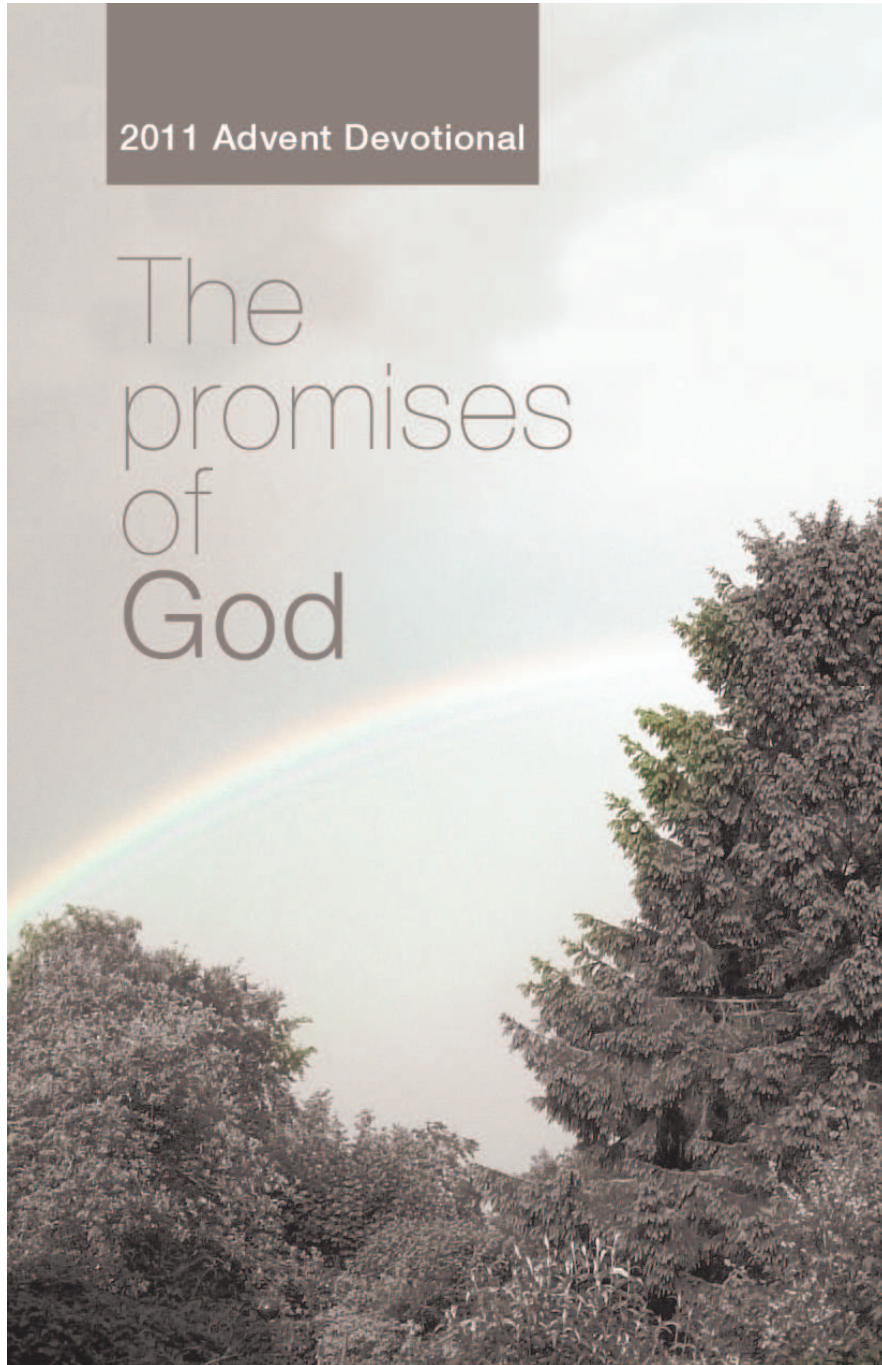


2011 Advent Devotional

The promises of God



INTRODUCTION

Christians are people of promise—that is, we live by faith in the promises God has made to us. Advent invites us to ponder promises made, promises kept and promises still to be fulfilled. We are grateful for promised blessings already received, and we anticipate even richer blessings yet to come. As Paul tells it in Romans 8, “We hope for what we do not see,” and “we wait for it with patience.”

An old proverb says that God promises a safe landing, but not a calm passage. Therefore our faith is not shaken by dilemmas and disappointments along the way. God’s promises have been compared to the stars in the heavens: the darker the night, the brighter they shine.

We know God’s promises are dependable because we know Jesus, the promised Savior. Paul marveled at how in Christ, every one of God’s promises finds its “Yes.” (2 Corinthians 1:20) Jesus fulfilled ancient promises and graciously extended many additional blessed assurances to those who believe.

Take to heart the promises that are lifted up in these pages. May your faith be strengthened and your hope renewed. God is good.

Peace and Joy!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard E. Holm". The signature is written in black ink and includes a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

Sunday, November 28, 2010

God's Promise Concerning Prayer

Among the many wonderful promises of God, answered prayer is one of the most meaningful to me. "Call on me in the day of trouble," says the LORD; "I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me" (Psalm 50:15) it says in the Book of Psalms, rightly called "the prayer book of the saints." I have seen and experienced many amazing answers to prayer. My response has been to thank and glorify God every day. I keep a journal of gratitude to help me do that faithfully.

Martin Luther was a man of prayer who has inspired and encouraged me in my prayer life and discipline. "You must base your prayer on God's Word and promise, nay, on his own command and bidding," he taught. And we must be persistent in our prayers so as to "be among those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:12).

I believe that our heavenly Father hears our prayers and answers them in his own way and in his time—not our time. And I know from both the Word of God and my own experience that God's answer to our persistent prayer changes things and circumstances. I disagree with those who claim that prayer does not change God or anything else; it just changes you, the person praying.

As a member of St. James Prayer Team I have been encouraged by my prayer partners. Along with them I lift up before the divine throne of grace and mercy the prayer concerns given to our team. One of the most amazing recent answers to our prayers appeared during the second service on Reformation Day 2010. A person who had been in the hospital for many months—often near death—fighting cancer, a person for whom we had prayed continually since last January, was at worship with us at St. James. What a wonderful answer to prayer. I almost could not believe it. Glory and thanks be to God!

Richard K. Kaeske

Monday, November 29, 2010

I could make this a list of all the ways that Christ has been taken out of Christmas. I could rant for a few sentences about the ways Santa means more to the season than Jesus for most people. There could be pages upon pages documenting all the volleys fired in the supposed "War on Christmas".

I could do that. It would feel good to know I made a stand for Christmas and for Christians too! But really? At the end of the day I am fighting wars so people recognize a holiday? So they change the words they say to me after I am done checking out at the grocery store? Instead of fighting for an idea, I want to spend this Advent pointing to a promise.

In Acts chapter 17 Paul finds himself in Athens and is disturbed to see the idols that have become ingrained in their society. He proceeds to head the center for discussing and debating ideas in the hopes that he might winsomely proclaim the good news.

"People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship-and this is what I am going to proclaim to you .From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

Paul is proclaiming a message that is counter-cultural to a society that has placed their real hope in false idols. Instead of seeking to change what was on the surface, he got to the core of what they worshiped, what was near to their heart. He even referenced their popular culture to illumi-

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

nate the reality of a God that was indeed closer than they could ever imagine and more loving than they could comprehend.

This Advent I hope to emulate the loving courage that Paul displayed here. Rather than turn to anger or frustration, instead of being transfixed by idols myself, I hope I can lovingly chart a course from a vague sentimentality to the promise of a knowable and loving Father that is not far from any one of us.

Eric Holmer

Tuesday, November 30, 2010

Human nature would wish all God's promises to be good. It is not the case. Hence the text:

Their silver and their gold cannot save them on the day of the wrath of the Lord. Ezekiel 7:19

Ezekiel is prophesying God's word of wrath from exile far away in 6th century B.C. Babylon, warning the Israelites still left at home of God's promise of doom. All the silver and gold they had so frugally socked away will do no good, for there will be no food or security available for purchase. As Warren Buffet ruefully noted twenty-six centuries later, gold "doesn't do anything but cost you charges and stares at you." Considering the excess of TV commercials promoting gold as an investment, a wrathful economic doomsday may be at hand. God does not necessarily inflict the doom. More often than not our bad choices allow doom to happen. But God does promise that willful disobedience ends badly.

Luther says Jesus Christ has redeemed us "not with silver and gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death." He is the Savior whose birth we are preparing to celebrate – in the shadows of our uncertainties and in the dark night of our souls – a good choice, a promise that shall be truly golden.

Walter Hamester

Wednesday, December 1, 2010

Personally, the most meaningful promise that God makes to us is certainly not unique to just me, but it is a staple in the beliefs of all Lutherans and Christians alike. The notion of everlasting life in Heaven is the single most comforting notion in a world that is often filled with so much distress, conflict, and suffering. However, in our daily routines of responsibilities of family, home, and work it is easy to gloss over just exactly what God's promise means. In considering the implications of this promise that God makes to us, I often consider the promise that we should make to Him in return. What promises do we make to God that allow us to be able to look at His ultimate promise with sincerity and understanding? What promises do we make to God that ensure that we will have a place with Him in Heaven?

We all know that believing in God and the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for us, treating our fellow human beings with love, respect, and dignity, and trying to live the Gospel everyday are among some of the most important promises that we can make to God in return for His promise of everlasting life. However, for me, I try and keep perspective on another important piece in my life which is my calling. Isaiah, who speaks to God's promises to us, had his calling, just as others have had their calling or purpose in life. Of course, our calling does not have to be that of a prophet or pastor, but what is our calling in the everyday world if we are an accountant, educator, business owner, doctor, lawyer, a parent, a grandparent, etc?

I look to my calling as a father, a husband, a friend, and a teacher. All too often in our society today, we take our notion of self worth, purpose, or identity from our profession and/or our material possessions or activities. Is that where we get our true sense of purpose or identity? I often need to remind myself that my calling lies elsewhere. As a father, I

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

am responsible for not only the physical needs of my three children, but I am also responsible for their emotional and spiritual well-being. I therefore have to promise to always put their needs in the forefront of my thoughts and actions. I need to provide for them and guide them to be loving, caring, responsible individuals. As a husband I am responsible for loving my wife in a way that respects her and God. Do I set a good example for my children about how to treat my spouse? Do I promise to provide her with all that she needs spiritually? Emotionally? Physically? In regard to being a friend, I see my calling as one in which I have been asked to be a good friend to those whom I have met and to those who I will meet. My promise then is to offer my friends love and support whenever it is needed. Will I treat them as I would want to be treated? As a teacher, do I guide my students to become life-long learners? Do I promise to instill in them a passion for learning or a desire to learn more about a particular topic?

I would like to say that in all of my callings above I fulfill my obligations and promise to do each task with the up-most integrity and success. Being a spouse, father, friend, and teacher are all responsibilities that I enjoy, but of course, are also difficult. This leads me to what I consider to be the biggest promise that I must make to God which is to ask for help when I need it. I am not always up to the tasks of each of my different callings in life. Therefore I need to pray for help in executing each one. I pray that not only I will be able to live up to my calling with the help of God, but that we all see how important making this promise to Him is, especially when considering what His promise means for us.

Aaron Fleming

Thursday, December 2, 2010

In times of “trial and tribulations”, as this year has been for me, it is hard to remember that God has promised to take care of us.

We are constantly reminded, throughout the Bible to trust in this promise, be not afraid and lay our worries at His feet:

“Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee.” Psalms 55:22

“I will never leave thee, not forsake thee.” Hebrews 13:5

“Arise and be not afraid”. Matthew 17:7

These are only a few of the passages that urge us to look up to God as Our Father and find peace in the knowledge that He, and He alone, is in charge.

Madeleine Jorgensen

Friday, December 3, 2010

The word promise conjures up notions including intention and commitment. It also centers on a relationship – someone makes a promise....and another person is on the receiving end. There may be waiting involved – a period between when the promise is communicated....and actualized. And whenever there is waiting, there is expectation.

Between human beings promises get made – sometimes carefully and thoughtfully, and sometimes hastily although with the best of intentions. I think back over “promises” I have made and not kept. As my son, Ben was growing up and learning to golf he would frequently ask me to go over to the course with him and play. I’d assure him that I would learn someday and would practice and play with him. Days during the summer turned to months and then to years. I

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

still don't play. My intentions were to assure him that I wanted to spend that time with him – assure him that I would someday learn the game he and his father loved. Did I *really* think that day would come: in hindsight, probably not. A simple example of the small and large ways we disappoint each other – even unintentionally – with the promises that we offer and don't keep.

As we turn our thoughts this Advent towards God – the designer, maker, and orchestrator of all things – we see clearly how a promise made by God is a promise we can count on. As I reflected on this promise theme I realized that it's impossible for me to imagine God not keeping a promise. So with God we have not only intention....but commitment....and with commitment we have reason to be confident. So we boast, not in our own doing, but in the wonderful works and amazing promises and Grace of God.

In Psalm 119, we are reminded time and time again of God's promises to us. Over and over again the psalmist describes God:according to your promise....your promise preserves my life...looking for your righteous promise...rejoice in your promise. In verses 49-50: "Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope. My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life." Two sentences that describe it all!

When we seek God and listen to his voice we are reminded daily that the greatest gifts in life, actually every good thing, comes out of God's gracious promises to us, his children. *Oh Blessed Assurance*...we wait this Advent in expectation...and the certainty that we can trust his Word.

Heavenly Father, we praise you for the bountiful goodness you bestow on us each day. We wait eagerly during this season to celebrate the birth of your Son. Through Christ we realize the fulfillment of the pledge you made to your children, offering us forgiveness, grace and a place with you in your kingdom. Amen

Shelly Holmstrom

Saturday, December 4, 2010

Now the LORD said to Abram, . . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen 12:1–3 NRSV).

Each Autumn our Junior High Sunday School takes its lessons from the Old Testament, including the one above. Every year the students learn and the teachers are reminded of the Old Testament’s cycle of promise and fulfillment, with promises pointing ever more clearly to our Savior, and fulfillment becoming ever more wonderful, as Israel enters the land God promised. But then things turn bleak in Old Testament Israel, and as the weather grows colder and we turn our clocks back, it’s Advent, and we finally hear that the earlier promises are soon to be fulfilled magnificently. The angel Gabriel visits the blessed virgin with a promise more astonishing than any we’ve heard before: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. (Lk 1:35 NRSV). Because we’ve seen every divine promise fulfilled, we know that this one will be too, and we join with Mary in her song, “My soul proclaims the greatness of Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, . . .” (from Vespers LBW).

Mike Bennett

Sunday, December 5, 2010

“Out of his full store we have all received grace upon grace.” John 1:16

I was most fortunate to grow up on a farm in northern Wisconsin; in fact, not just any farm but one that was homesteaded by our family in 1883. It was a source of great pride that each of the five generations who worked the farm brought it to a new level of thriving. It had always been a dairy farm, and it was my father who began a herd of purebred cattle. He knew the full name of every cow, its pedigree, its milk test and production. At the age of

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

86 he still drove the tractor and helped my brother, his wife, and their three sons with the milking twice a day. The farm remained a profitable “family farm” at a time when many farmers were selling out to “mega-farms”.

And so it was that in 1998 when a barn fire burned down the main barn with all the milking cows in it, the extended family and community could not imagine a worse tragedy. We could take comfort in the fact that Dad had died so he was spared the agony of seeing his life’s work obliterated. And Mom was in a nursing home with Alzheimer’s and was not aware of what had happened.

It wasn’t until several years later when they gave up the idea of rebuilding the herd that we could see that something good can come out of something so bad. Now they are not tied down to milking cows twice a day but have branched out to other types of farming—raising calves, heifers, turkeys and crops on some 1000 acres. My brother and his wife are now retired and winter in Texas, and miracle of miracles, their three sons work together in harmony on the farm. Thank you, God.

Donna Fortney

Monday, December 6, 2010

Come to me...and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

The invitation in this verse tells us precisely how to collect on a promise. God’s message is clear. He will give us all when we give Him our all.

If we believe, the Bible explains that God will give us a new life -- an everlasting life. Our faith ensures that God will honor His promise. We can choose where we will spend eternity. We just have to make the decision.

Cathy Long

Tuesday, December 7, 2010

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13

Of our countless blessings, among the greatest are the special people who enrich our lives every day. All of us know people who have a way of lifting our spirits, teaching us something, bringing out the best in us, and simply making us feel better. Because of them, we try harder, function better, and live more fully. Obviously, we appreciate them. But do we tell them?

If you were asked to make a list of the people you appreciate the most, wouldn't it be an easy task to write down their names?

And if you were asked why you appreciate them, wouldn't it be just as easy to write the reasons after each name?

Now for a more difficult question...Could you write after each name on your list the *last* time you told that person you appreciate him or her?

As we prepare to enter this Season of Promises, let each of us tell someone how much we appreciate them!!!

Debbie Daniel

Rainbow Promises

Genesis 9: 12 - 15

And God said, "This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth: And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh."

A covenant, a promise, between God and his people - a visual sign of His forgiveness and His everlasting love.

I love storms - the really noisy ones, but I also love the sun returning amongst the raindrops and the creation of a beautiful rainbow (especially ones with double arcs.) The Irish in me wishes to find that "pot o' gold" at its end. To me, the storm symbolizes the "dark clouds" that I face, but then I realize that God has given me those "rainbow moments" to face my clouds, giving me the comfort of His forgiveness and everlasting love.

From the beginning, God has given us rainbows, but more miraculously, he has also given us an innocent Child, through His Son, Jesus Christ, *the promise of life everlasting* who is as real as His *visual covenant* for "*perpetual generations.*"

Wendy Wieggers

Thursday, December 9, 2010

"The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." Acts 2:39

God's promise is that his love is equal for us all. I struggle with judgment - it comes so easily and it's a constant struggle to stay on top of it. Worst of all, it's contagious. Sometimes I hear words come out of my mouth that I'm ashamed of, only to hear a friend chime in in agreement. That's not the kind of ripple I want to start..

But the Truth lives - Christ died for me and he died for you, for our neighbor, and for the person that cut us off in traffic this morning.

He died for the people that worship him in silence, the people that worship him with traditional hymns, and the people that worship him by ripping an electric guitar solo over a loud drum beat. And he loves all of that worship equally - just like he loves us all equally.

This promise is AMAZING - so simple. God came down here as a man to show us how it's done - perfectly. But it's hard to get through a single day without taking my high horse for a ride.

"Christ in you, the hope of glory" Colossians 1:27

But the Apostle Paul sends encouragement! Christ lives in us, and his sacrifice is the promise of glory. It's not something that can be earned.

But we can be endlessly thankful and praise his name! Hallelujah!

Emi Carmichael

Promises, Promises

As we know, God has made many promises to us. For example:

Isaiah 44:11-14 God promises to crush our enemies. We cannot beat our enemies without God's help. If we believe in him, he will help us. God has power so great it is beyond our understanding. We can win our life battles with God's help.

Isaiah 54 This passage describes Old Testament Hebrew law: if a man loses his freedom, property or spouse he needs a redeemer. God tells us that he will be our redeemer, but we must put our trust in him. God will restore our losses.

John 1:32, John 3:16 As for me, God's greatest promise is the promise that he would send his Son to us. This Son would die for our sins and return to heaven. With the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of God and the power of Jesus we are given eternal life if we believe.

John 4:31-39 God kept his promise! About 2000 years ago God sent his only Son, the baby Jesus. He was born to the Virgin Mary and Joseph. Jesus' birth is well documented. What a miracle!

Luke 1:26-38 Now according to our church calendar, we begin the Advent season, the four Sundays before Christmas. Advent means the coming. This is a time to remember the first coming of Jesus. We remember the humble birth of Christ, the shepherds in their field, the angels singing and the visit of the wise men.

I love this season because it represents the joy, the hope and the peace of the whole world. I look forward to eternal life because I trust God. I don't know what to expect in the next years of my life, but I know God will keep his promises.

Merry Christmas, everyone.

Mary Gram

Saturday, December 11, 2010

He Will Come Again

"...Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time..." Hebrews 9:28

The church confesses that her Lord and Head, Jesus Christ, "shall come to judge the quick and the dead." We believe that he is coming again. *When* he will come, we concede, is a mystery.

The question, *When* will he come again? is not nearly so important as the *why* of his coming. Our response to that question will pretty much determine what we will be doing while we wait for his return.

The day of our Lord's return is known also as Judgment Day. That is enough to terrify those who have rejected Christ and have no defense on the inevitable day of reckoning. We Christians need not fear, because the matter of our destiny is already settled. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1) We are free.

The anticipation of the Savior's return is both a comfort and an incentive. When he comes, he will bestow on those waiting for him the fullness of their inheritance of joy and life everlasting. While waiting for him, we serve him in the newness of life. We share in the task of gathering those not yet under his rule, that they too may be glorified with us.

Come, Lord Jesus, to take us home with you. Amen.

Norbert Meyer

Sunday, December 12, 2010

A Child Has Been Born

A child has been born for us. We have been given a son who will be our ruler. His names will be Wonderful Advisor and Mighty God, Eternal Father and Prince of Peace. His power will never end; peace will last forever. He will rule David's kingdom and make it grow strong. He will always rule with honesty and justice. The Lord All-Powerful will make certain that all of this is done. Isaiah 9:6-7

Someone is shouting: "Clear a path in the desert! Make a straight road for the Lord our God. Fill in the valleys; flatten every hill and mountain. Level the rough and rugged ground. Then the glory of the Lord will appear for all to see. The Lord has promised this!" Isaiah 40:3-5

Years later, John the Baptist started preaching in the desert of Judea. He said, "Turn back to God! The kingdom of heaven will soon be here." John was the one the prophet Isaiah was talking about, when he said, "In the desert someone is shouting, 'Get the road ready for the Lord! Make a straight path for him.'" Matthew 3:1-3

Jesus left Galilee and went to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. But John kept objecting and said, "I ought to be baptized by you. Why have you come to me?" Jesus answered, "For now this is how it should be, because we must do all that God wants us to do." Then John agreed. So Jesus was baptized. And as soon as he came out of the water, the sky opened, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down on him like a dove. Then a voice from heaven said, "This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him." Matthew 3:13-17

Prophecy is not simply prediction of the future, it is God's revelation of himself, his requirements, and his plan" (The Essential Bible Companion, p.50, from our Bible in 90 Days program).

Isaiah prophesied during the years 740-700BC - many hundreds of years prior to the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. What I hear in Isaiah 9:6-7 is God promising a child will be

(Continued on page 18)

(Continued from page 17)

born for us and he will be our ruler. When we move onto Isaiah 40:3-5, I hear God promising there will be someone in the desert announcing to all the people they need to turn back to God and be baptized. That someone, we find out centuries later, turns out to be John the Baptist. Not only did John the Baptist baptize many people, but as incredulous as it was to him, he was the one who would baptize Jesus. And as we read in Matthew 3:17, upon completion of Jesus' baptism God announces, "This is my own dear Son..."

We started out with a promise from God sometime in the 700BC range stating what would eventually take place and realize God fulfilled His promise of giving us a son, His son, who would be our ruler forever. The birth of Jesus Christ is when the promise of all promises begins.

Barb Basgall

Monday, December 13, 2010

It seems to me that the season of Advent can be a time of peaceful waiting and thoughtful watching, knowing that we are to receive a gift through no effort of our own. This gift, of course, is the Christ child, who is the promise of our salvation. So, knowing that we receive this in such an effortless way, we can feel a sense of calm anticipation. We don't have to work or worry to receive the gift.

Anticipation is defined as "expectant waiting". This is especially meaningful this year for our family, as our oldest son and his wife are expecting twins in the spring. So we have much to anticipate, to be grateful for, and a great deal of excitement; the very feelings that define this time of year. As the young Mary says in Luke 1:46,47 "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my Spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

We can be delighted and excited, but calm at the same time, rejoicing in God's blessings and the promise of his salvation and peace. Thanks be to God!!

Craig Linn

We can all look back at milestone phone calls in our lives:

- The first date
- Getting picked for a play or team
- Getting accepted into school or a club
- Landing a job
- Getting an offer accepted to buy the first house
- A new birth in your family
- An accident or passing of a loved one

Sometimes we wait endlessly by the phone for the call. Other times, the call catches up completely off guard.

One morning in January I had two calls I will never forget. I was working out at the health club before the annual meeting at our church. After presenting at the meeting as our church treasurer, I planned to go down and spend the day with my wife Susan in intensive care (ICU) at Northwest Community Hospital. She had been diagnosed with a very aggressive form of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. They first performed surgery, and then began chemo several days ago. They kept her in ICU to keep a close watch on how she would react to the chemo. Meanwhile she was living by a number of machines that kept her breathing, fed her, monitored her heart rate, took over for her kidneys and watched other vital signs.

As I started my workout, the cell phone rang. It was the surgeon. Susan's white blood cell count was way down after the chemo. She was vulnerable and the doctor said infection had set in. We had a choice. Do nothing and Susan dies in a day. Decide to operate and she could die on the table. He said many other doctors would say it was too late, but he thought we should take a chance.

I agreed and told him to get the operation set. I immediately got on the way as fast as I could. I contacted many family members and friends even though I was barely able to speak. I also reached our pastor Richard and had him mention it to the congregation and have everyone pray before the meeting.

(Continued on page 20)

(Continued from page 19)

We had several cousins and a sister-in-law and her husband, plus one son already at the hospital. We gathered around. While not normal, they let us into the operating prep area and say one last goodbye before they wheeled her off. We knew it might be the last time we see her alive.

Then we went to the surgery waiting area on the second floor, which we had to ourselves on a Sunday morning. There was a phone on the reception desk. Monday through Saturday, a receptionist would answer it, but today, we were on our own. We stared at the phone, waiting for the call from the surgeon. Meanwhile we prayed. Our congregation prayed. Other friends and family prayed.

Finally the call came. The surgery was a success. Prayers were received and answered. Susan would live another day.

Two calls in one morning. An incredible day I will never forget.

In the Old Testament, when Samuel was young he had a night he would never forget either. He got three calls but thought they came from Eli. After the first two, Eli said he did not call and told Samuel to go back to bed. The third time Eli realized it was the Lord calling for Samuel. This time he told Samuel to lie down, but be ready to answer the Lord. Soon enough, the fourth call came:

"The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel, Samuel". Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." 1 Samuel 3:10

The surgeon called, I answered, and with his guidance we made a lifesaving decision. Samuel answered and with the Lord's guidance, he became a prophet. When the Lord calls, will we be ready? Will we answer? He wants to guide us too.

Jon Paul

Wednesday, December 15, 2010

Our dog, Gracie, was rescued literally from the middle lane of the highway. She was picked up by my mother and sisters, put in the car and taken for emergency care. They promised, “We will make sure you are healed and find a good home.” That promise was fulfilled and Gracie came to live with us during her recuperation from hip surgery, heartworm infection and malnutrition. While we tried to find her a home, she was making herself at home, cuddling up to our old dog Frankie and worming her way into Mike’s heart. The deal was sealed the day that Gracie hopped up into the bedroom easy chair, and Mike turned around and went elsewhere to sit and read. So Mike and I promised, “We will care for you and give you a loving home.” A firm commitment.

It is easy to keep our promise on a beautiful fall day, walking the prairie path above the brilliant blue waters of Lake Michigan, under a clear blue sky. It is easy to keep our promise when dog food is on sale or when Gracie is the model of gentleness with a small child.

The promise is a little harder when we go to the vet and pay for a year’s worth of vaccinations and parasite medicines. It is a little harder when there are extra visits for infected eyes, bills at the boarding kennel when we travel, during daily obedience sessions when things don’t go the way the trainer said they would. It is just plain no fun at all when the weather is blustery and outside is where we walk.

Whether we fulfill our promise willingly or grudgingly, Gracie is there, with earnest eyes that make us ashamed of any temptation to shortcut our duties. If we do miss a deadline or forget about taking a walk, she is there to nudge us into action.

God’s promise to take care of us comes without conditions, and remains whether we appreciate it or not. In a way, we are all like Gracie—in need of God’s forever promise. She is a daily reminder that I, too, have been promised a forever home.

Carol Bennett

Thursday, December 16, 2010

When I walk into the sanctuary, my eyes first gravitate towards the reddish-hued triangular stain glass window located behind the altar. When I leave the sanctuary, my eyes gravitate towards the bluish-hued triangular glass window located behind the pews. During the hour in between glances, my spirit mirrors the symbolic color differences as well. For me, the red equals noise, noise that distracts me from making my relationship with God a priority. Worshipping in the sanctuary quiets the noise, and allows me to consciously invite God into my heart. For me, the blue represents tranquility, a tranquility that only God can provide. During this time of the year, Lord, the noise and distractions only seem to exponentially increase. Through the silence that can be obtained through worship, please let us remember the promise that Jesus made: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18).

Suzanne Gerber

Friday, December 17, 2010

...and Peace on Earth!

During a recent visit to the Art Institute in Chicago, I saw the exhibit *Public Notice 3* by Jitish Kallat. In the center staircase, in the colors of the US Department of Homeland Security Alert System, the exhibit displays the speech of Swanic Vivekananda delivered on September 11, 1893 to 7,000 attendees of the First World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago as part of the Columbia Exposition⁽¹⁾. The speech's key message focused on religious tolerance and the universal acceptance of all religions as true. "Sectarianism, bigotry and fanaticism

(Continued on page 23)

(Continued from page 22)

have long possessed this beautiful world. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair," he said.

Millions of people are praying for peace daily and especially during this Advent season like in so many years before. Look at the cards and letters you will receive in the next few weeks...**peace on earth!**

The opposite of peace is war and conflict fueled frequently by government officials influenced and driven by pure political and egotistical thinking, personal aspirations, outright ignorance or arrogance. Prayers alone don't solve the issues, we tried that many times, and as the past millenniums show, wars erupted all too often in the name of religion. We need actions!

There is something you and I can do? Yes, we can!

We believe in only one God, who tolerates people of many religions and sects: Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Catholics, Jehovah Witnesses, Hindus, Muslims, Jews and so many more.

As a Lutheran, I respect people who have other believes. I tell them what I believe and why, and feel they respect what I tell them as I respect what they believe in. There is no reason for war or violence.

Let's listen to and respect each other!

We need peace on earth... ***Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina!***⁽²⁾ as Padre Martini encouraged the choir to sing on Reformation Day, and I add:

PAX VOBISCUM⁽³⁾

"Praise God in heaven!

Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God."

Luke 2:14

1) Go to : <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/resource/1082>, for the full text. Exhibit until May 1, 2011

2) *God, make haste to help me! (Psalm 70:1)*

3) "Peace be with you" - Roman greeting, used 2000+ years ago

Detlef Koska

Saturday, December 18, 2010

"Love is patient." 1 Corinthians 13:1

As the holidays approach, a feeling of anxiousness often consumes me. Thinking about all the busyness of activities, events and gatherings (and all the preparation for them to go as smoothly as possible) can often be overwhelming. Finding a quiet place in my heart to ground my thoughts is challenging to say the least during the last couple months of the year. I get caught up in the hype of the secular holiday, and often only as our family arrives at church for the Christmas Eve service do I feel myself decompress enough to truly enjoy and receive the good news with an open and calm heart.

This anxiousness is similar to what I felt before I met my husband, Joe. Being a planner at heart, I would ask God (and it was often) who He had chosen for me to share my life with. Needless to say, I was not very patient and often grew frustrated that nothing was happening. One morning as I prayed in earnest to God asking Him yet again what His plan was for me, I felt Him reach out to me with three simple words – "Love is patient". Humbled (and a little frightened that He had actually responded to my prayer), I asked Him to forgive me for my impatience and to please help me to have greater trust in His plan. Later that year I met my husband, and I understood that God had made a promise to me – have patience, trust in His plan and He will provide.

I often wonder if those living in the time before Jesus' birth too felt this same anxiousness knowing that a promised Savior was coming – but never knowing exactly when that day would be. I can imagine there must have been doubts that the promised day would ever even come. What a surprise that when the day did finally come, God's promised Son arrived in such a wonderfully simple and humble place; a stable - really?!? Who could ever have imagined such a place for an expected King's arrival! Just another re-

(Continued on page 25)

(Continued from page 24)

minder that God's plan is not always as we imagine – or plan – for it to be.

But blessed are those who trusted in Him and His plan finally knowing that His promise was indeed fulfilled, even in a simple manger in Bethlehem. So during this busy time of year, may God grant us all a quiet and trusting calm in our hearts knowing, as we patiently wait, that His promise of love through Jesus' birth will truly be fulfilled.

Melinda Voelcker

Sunday, December 19, 2010

It is six and time for dinner, but I have to stop by the store and oh I forgot to mail that letter. God is with us. The news about my sister's illness isn't good. God is with us. Where are my keys? God is with us. The sun is shining off the lake and the color of the sky is a brilliant blue. God is with us. Why did I say that? God is with us. The family is gathered around the table and the meal is ample. God is with us. Where are my keys? God is with us. The news isn't good and the tears flow freely. God is with us. How will I find time to shop and mail and wrap and clean and write those cards? God is with us. Peace that passes all understanding is present. God is surely with us.

The little and the big. The happy and the sad. God's promises are true. For me, for you.

*Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever.
Psalm 136:3*

Susan Holmer

Monday, December 20, 2010

"...I will never leave you or forsake you." So I can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid..." Hebrews 13:5-6

I have held this promise of God close to my heart for many years.

Becky was a dear friend to me. She invited me to her church when I was a freshman in high school. They were starting a singing youth group and wanted to find interested singers to join. Music? I was in!

Once there I listened as Reverend Rudy Kempainen opened the words of scripture to us. He explained that God held us precious and he would never leave us or forsake us. This was a time in my life when I was searching for a path that would bring meaning to my life. It just clicked. And Becky was there every step of the way to encourage me in my faith and to be an example of what that faith looks like.

Fast forward ten years...Mike and I are married and have our two children. Becky is married and has four boys. On a cool September morning a call comes from a friend. Becky was in an accident and she didn't make it. Sweet, kind-hearted Becky swerved so she wouldn't hit a deer in the road and lost control of her van.

The grief was crushing. There was a gaping hole somewhere in the center of me; the space that she had filled. When I needed to feel the presence of God so much, I felt only empty and alone. But Hebrew 13:5-6 kept popping into my head. It just kept coming back. "I will never leave you or forsake you." God kept pressing on my heart that he is God and I am not. He sees the whole picture. I'm much too close to the picture to see anything but a blur. Yet every step of the way he is with me. He will not leave me. He will not forsake me. He is my helper. I will not be afraid.

Oh, sweet promise! Oh, great comforter! Christ cele-

(Continued on page 27)

(Continued from page 26)

Oh, sweet promise! Oh, great comforter! Christ celebrates each mountaintop victory with me. He walks through each dark valley with me. Emmanuel: God with us!

Dear heavenly Father,

Thank you for walking every path with us. You've promised to do so and you are faithful to keep your promises. We praise and thank you for being there every step of the way, through every breath we take. In Christ's name Amen.

Donna Jarvi

Tuesday, December 21 2010

“I believe this makes four days in a row,” I said to my wife one December evening as we perused the aisles of Target looking for another Christmas gift. We knew the store's layout by heart—even where the push-button display of Christmas CD's would be happy to belt out another tune from high-pitched chipmunks. We had gotten into a routine: depart from home at 4:30, drive to store, purchase a gift and mull around a bit, head to closest restaurant because it was too late to cook dinner at home. Our priorities had shifted. To regain our balance, we decided to implement a new plan the following year: All Christmas shopping would be done on the first Saturday of December. We traveled to Valparaiso so that the grandparents could watch the kids, grabbed the Christmas list, and shopped. By compressing myriad nights and weekends into one day, we no longer followed the lights of consumerism, but we focused on the one light that truly matters. Jesus promises, “I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Doug Gerber

Wednesday, December 22, 2010

Luke 2: 19

"But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart."

It is at this wonderful season of Advent that I become preoccupied. I try ever-so-hard to be preoccupied with the moment...with the coming of the Messiah...with the amazing and glorious birth. But the truth is that I get off-message by becoming way too caught up in food preparation, decorating, card writing, presents, entertaining, silver cleaning...oh, the list goes on. And with all this fussing comes the guilt that I should be calm and quiet and more open to feeling the presence of the Christ child in my life.

But I have come to a new understanding. I look at Mary and I see a young woman who was also preoccupied and stressed. I can't even begin to imagine being ready to deliver a baby, riding on a donkey for miles to one's hometown to be counted in a census. She must've been half-crazed with worry, wondering how she would manage so far from home with mobs of people all around her, yet no family or friends to help in the delivery of her firstborn. I will bet the trip wasn't as calm and serene as we see painted on the face of Christmas cards. And yet when the moment came for her baby to be born, she was ready. She was calm in the face of what seems like chaos. For her, it became pure joy.

And that's what gives me a sense of relief now...that during the busyness of Advent, I am in good company when I think of being a bit frazzled. It's okay. Because when I hold a flickering candle in church on Christmas Eve and sing "Silent Night," I, like Mary, am finally calm. I, too, ponder all these things in my heart. I, too, am overwhelmed with the night. I, too, am ready to be changed forever by the Child.

Susan Olsen

“The Promises of God”

There are really only three of God’s promises that have been a focal point of my faith and life. The first one being God’s promise to love us, his earthly children, always and unconditionally. The second is the promise that through our acceptance of Jesus Christ as our savior, all our sins will be forgiven. The third one being, that through our belief in God and Jesus, God promises to give us eternal life in Heaven.

The first promise I mention, God’s undying love, is shown to me in various ways. I see this in the many beauties of the earth he has created, as well as the many blessings of rich bounty and loving family he has bestowed upon me. For that each day I am grateful.

As a sinful being, God’s promise to forgive all my sins allows me the opportunity to reflect on those sins, strive to do better, and be reborn each day to try to lead a life that would make Him pleased. Without this promise it would be easy to be discouraged and lose hope, as we are all sinners.

Finally, God’s promise of eternal life puts everything in perspective for me. God has given me one opportunity to live a mortal life here on earth. Through the Bible and prophets, He has taught me what is important in this life and how He wants us to live it while we are here.

While always a strong believer in Christ, it was not until I started to open up my heart to form a personal relationship with God, that I truly understood God’s word and what was important in life. It is a relationship I look to strengthen each day. I still struggle with living the way God wants us to live, but it is a jubilant feeling in my heart knowing that I am getting closer each day.

Chris EngeLhardt

Friday, December 24, 2010

"...Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins". Matthew 2:21-22

What an amazing promise the angel of the Lord made to Joseph. For any parent, there are few moments in life as joyous and memorable as finding out that you will soon be having a child. As soon-to-be grandparents we will be discovering all over again that excitement that the promise of a grandchild brings. Rarely does any other news in life hold such promise for the future.

It is no wonder that God's greatest promise was fulfilled in the form of a child, the baby Jesus. No mighty warrior, hero of the nations, no king of splendor coming down from heaven, but instead a little baby boy wrapped in makeshift diapers in a cattle stall. Only Joseph and Mary had been told what promise that baby boy held for their future, and the future of all of us.

We look to our children, and our grandchildren, for joy and fulfillment in our own lives, and as a promise to the future in the form of their lives. During Advent, we all look to the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus for the greatest joy and for the fulfillment of the best promise of all, the promise of eternal life.

Father, You have always kept your promises to us, but none greater than your promise of eternal life in the birth of the baby Jesus. Help us to keep our promises to you, our families, and to all of your children. Amen

Tom and Chris Meyer

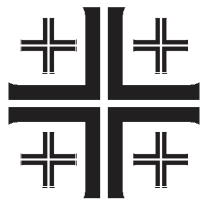


Worship Schedule December 2010

Dec. 1 (Wed.)..... Vespers 7:30 pm
Dec. 5 (Sun.)..... Holy Communion 8:30 & 10:45 am
Dec. 8 (Wed.)..... Taizé Service 7:30 pm
Dec. 12 (Sun.)..... Holy Communion 8:30 & 10:45 am
 Sunday School Christmas Program..... 9:40 am

December 15 (Wed.) Vespers 7:30 pm
December 19 (Sun.) Lessons & Carols 10:45 am ONLY
December 24..... Candlelight Service..... 4:30 pm
 Candlelight Service w/Holy Communion ... 10:00 pm

December 25..... Holy Communion 10:30 am
December 26 (Sun.)..... Holy Communion 10:45 am ONLY



St. James Lutheran Church

1380 N Waukegan Rd

Lake Forest, IL 60045

(847) 234-4859

www.stjameslutheran.org