



2013 First Presbyterian Church

Advent Book

Theme: "Here Comes The Son"

Welcome to the 2013 Advent Book!! Over the past several years we have seen many changes take place within our church. One thing that we are happy to say has stayed the same is the commitment on the part of the session and the congregation to continue with the great tradition of the Advent Book. Advent and Christmas are the best time of the year for many of us. So this book has a special meaning and a special place in our hearts. The articles are just as varied as their authors, which makes the book so special. Thank you to each of you that played a part in making this book a success. Thank you to the authors, those that processed the book for mailing, and to Jenny Verwers for all her hard work with graphics and printing. This is truly a team effort. May God bless each of you with a blessed Christmas season. We hope the devotions and articles here will focus your thoughts on Here Comes the "Son". Now please, enjoy this Advent book.

Co-Editors Marilyn Mc Callister and Jane Repp

December 1, 2013

Those of us of a certain age can remember the 1969 song by George Harrison, "Here Comes the Sun." Part of the lyrics feature these words

"Here comes the sun ...

It's been a long cold lonely winter.

It feels like years since it's been here.

Here comes the sun.

The smiles returning to the faces...

I feel that ice is slowly melting.

It seems like years since it's been clear .

Here comes the sun."



I imagine that those awaiting the arrival of the Messiah over 2,000 years ago felt the bitterness of cold in their hearts. They looked for that strangling grip on their souls to melt with the arrival of a new King – The SON- who would make everything intelligible to them and free them from oppression. How shocked most of them would be to find, not a royal prince in glorious garb birthed in a palace, but a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and born in a stable. God's Son would not gallop on a gallant steed and rid them of their foes, but would ride a donkey and tell them to love their neighbors and enemies and to turn the other cheek. He would be crucified on a cross like a criminal. Many of the Jews must have felt abandoned in a winter of despair. Yet for others, the true believers, the ice melted, and smiles returned to their faces. Things did become clear in God's time.

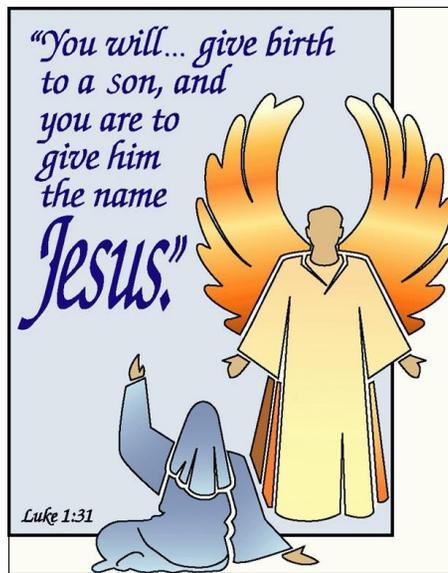
To us on earth, the sun is the provider of sustainability and light. In most religions, light has a major symbolic meaning. For Christians, God's Son-Jesus - becomes our sun, our provider of light and our sustainer. He said, "I am the light of the world. "As we prepare our hearts this Advent season and light the candles each Sunday, may we await the coming of the Son with hope and faith. May we look to the future with smiles on our faces and feel the ice of bigotry, war, and want melt in our world. Let there be peace on earth.

"Here comes the SON Here comes the SON,"

... and we with God's help say "It's all right. It's all right."

Linda Kirchhoff





Well, soon Mary went to visit her relative, Elizabeth and sure enough Elizabeth was pregnant...and Mary stayed until the baby was born...and it was a son!! And on the eighth day when they named him, everyone was very surprised that they named him John and not after his father; and as soon as the baby was named, Zacharias could speak again.

But as luck would have it, about the time that Mary's child was due a decree was sent out from Caesar that everyone had to travel to where they were born for a census, no getting around it. So Joseph helped poor pregnant Mary up on a donkey and they trudged their way to Bethlehem. It soon became apparent that this baby wasn't going to wait and would be born in Bethlehem, that night! But try as they might they found no one who had room for them at an inn, but not a moment too soon, they found a clean barn with a hay filled manger for the cattle. And Mary's baby was born and it was a son!! And she laid him in that hay filled manger and just as the angel had promised, people came from far and wide to worship and adore her son, and he was called Councilor, Mighty King, Lord of All.

Yes, "here comes the Son..."

*It's Christmas, let's all remember once again
the coming of the Son and all it means to us.*

Linda Campbell

December 2, 2013

When I was a child, we always had a German advent calendar in our home during the month before Christmas, complete with a pretty scene (often a glittering snow-covered church) on the cover. My next older sister and I took turns opening the little door for each day, revealing the 'surprise' picture behind. Of course, we knew that the 'surprise' that would appear on Christmas morning would be the baby Jesus himself, and it was with great anticipation that we looked forward to that magical day.

I love using an advent calendar to focus my thoughts on the REAL meaning of Christmas -- the coming of the Son. It's so very easy to lose sight of the most tender and cherished gift of all. When going through a box of family mementos recently, I found a brand-new (at least twenty-year -old) advent calendar. I'm looking forward to using that calendar as the centerpiece for my own preparation for Christmas this year, to ready myself for the coming of the Son!

Lord, help us to quiet our hearts and to focus in the days ahead on the true and pure love with which you blessed us on that first Christmas day, and to share our joy in this world-changing event with everyone in our lives -- not only at Christmastime, but in each day of the year.

Val McKee



December 3, 2013

When considering the theme of this year's Advent booklet, I eventually thought, for some reason, of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15). I imagined the father, seeing his son, whom he thought lost to him, coming back home. Then I asked myself: what does this have to do with Advent?

I considered it some more. Then I thought I saw some connections. The strongest, it seems to me, is that all of us are the prodigal son. We need what the prodigal needed: forgiveness and redemption. We've squandered, to a greater or lesser degree, our birthright, gifts that have been given to us. Gifts from God that we don't take advantage of. There's the peace of mind that the knowledge of God's forgiveness should give us and that faith should reinforce. There's the luxury of bathing in God's unconditional love.

We've frittered them away. But just as the father in the parable didn't give up on his son, God doesn't give up on us. Just as the Biblical father embraced his son – he who was lost - our Heavenly Father has embraced (and continues to embrace) each of us. He sent his Son into the world to give us the greatest birthright possible: the promise of everlasting life through the redeeming death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Like the prodigal, we are given another chance. We are the son – saved by THE SON. And here he comes again!

Dave Stolper



December 25, 2013

Gather round and I'll tell you the old story once again.

Long long ago, way back in the olden times, there was a nice man and his sweet wife Elizabeth. The man's name was Zacharias and he was the priest at the temple. He was a godly man as well as being kind, but, alas, Zacharias and Elizabeth had no children and that made them sad, but they had become resigned to the fact that there would be no children of their own to care for them in their old age.

But one day as he was preparing the incense in the temple, an angel appeared, right there by the altar! Now Zacharias was absolutely stunned! The angel told him he had heard his and his wife's prayers for a child and their wish would be granted. And that Elizabeth would bear a son and they should name him John. Well, old Zach thought that was a bunch of baloney...and told that angel so! Really he said, how could that be, my wife is too old and besides how would you know something like that?? Well that angel told him what for...said he was Gabriel and that he knows God personally...and just for being such a skeptic, he wouldn't be able to speak until the child was born! And when Zacharias came out of the temple to face the people gathered to worship, and all he could do was wave his hands and make gestures, they knew he had had a vision. And sure enough, it wasn't very long and Elizabeth knew she would soon have a baby.

Then a few months later that very busy angel, Gabriel had another announcement to make. His friend, God had located a young woman named Mary and she was planning to marry a young carpenter called Joseph. Well, Gabe popped in to visit Mary and told her that his good buddy, God found that she was suitable for a very special task. The angel told Mary that her great aunt, Elizabeth was pregnant and would soon bear a son and that God wanted her, Mary to bear his own son! Mary protested that that could not be because she was not married, but Gabriel told her that this would be a very special baby, the son of God, you should name him Jesus and he would be known far and wide and be called King of all. Mary said..”like, whatever...” *(continued)*

December 24, 2013

The Son in Coming...The Son is Coming....

The Son is Coming.....

The Son is HERE!

Be in Waterloo at 11:00 AM

tomorrow to pick him up!!



For those of you who do not know my family well, you need to understand that is exactly how news of my son, Craig, arrived!!! Sharon and I could not have children of our own, so we adopted two wonderful infants that have since grown into two wonderful adults. Sharon and I often joked that we had an eight year pregnancy and a 1 minute delivery for both of our children. We had applied with two agencies about a month apart, and waited five years for Dianna and another two-and-a-half years for Craig.

I remember well, September 4, 1979. I was teaching at the High School in the mornings and at Central Jr. Hi in the afternoons. Sharon called the school about 1:00 PM to tell me she had gotten the call from the adoption agency and we were expected to be in Waterloo before noon the following day. Until that call, we had no idea if we would have another girl or a boy. We had nothing for a boy purchased and we had such little time to prepare that we chose his name on the way to Waterloo and Craig came home in PINK! He eventually did survive that humiliation, though.

Can you imagine the news Mary, mother of Jesus, received from the angel: that she was pregnant and would give birth to the Savior of the World? I am sure that was much more shocking news to her than the news was to Sharon and I that we were going to bring home a four-day old baby boy from Waterloo, IA? Mary was a young, un-married woman, Sharon and I have been married ten years and already had a two year old running around the house. Yet, Mary was calm and sang her Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55).

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for children in our lives, whether of our own biological processes, or those of someone else. They are a blessing from you. We especially thank you for the birth of Your Son and Your Saving Grace to us. Amen

George Wilkening

December 4, 2014

Here comes the Son.

But . . . The Son is already here. He is God the Father, the Son. He is omnipresent - with us always - loving, supporting, guiding in the (sun) light of his love. Emanuel.

In the darkest hour, The Son is here giving us strength, bringing the sun when all is dark. "If I say darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day for darkness is as light to you. (Psalm 139)

When life seems too much, the darkness all-encompassing, it is the light of the Son that brings us strength and calm. As we anticipate the celebration of the coming of the Son we hold so dear – we treasure the light and bask in the warmth of love that will bring us through those times.

Yes! Celebrate the coming of the Son into our lives, and let the celebration be one of light, joy, gladness & calm that the Son will always be here with us.

Let the celebration begin –
Let the Son Shine In!

Dave Boyd



December 5, 2013

When Kay and I were trying to decide what to do for the Advent booklet we were looking through some old church material we had saved. We found the church bulletin from December 18, 1982 which was the date of the children's Christmas program that year. On the back was printed the following hymn which was sung during the program and was written by the Jr. Sr. High Sunday school class that year. We had forgotten about it but it was very special and a lot of memories came back in a rush because our oldest son was in Junior High at that time.

God's Only Son

Shepherd quake, angels sing,

Glory to the Holy King.

The world rejoices at the sight

of the babe born on this night.

Peace on earth, Love to all,

Jesus came to one and all.

Bringing joy to everyone—

God's only Son.

Bearing gifts came three wisemen

to the city of Bethlehem.

A shining star led the way

to the babe sleeping on the hay.

“Precious gifts we will bring

for this child the newborn king.

The world was filled with awe –

ALLELUIA!

And so I stressed about having mouth-watering hoers d'oevres,

And playing the right Christmas carols in the background,

And adorning the house with beautiful holiday decorations,

But **I** never really took the time to relax and enjoy the party.

I once saw a screaming child in a toy store, pouting for yet another play-thing,

And I swore I'd never cater to my children like that,

And I'd teach them the REAL meaning of Christmas,

And I'd make sure that they knew more about giving than receiving,

But now I realize I was so busy being “Santa,” that I downplayed the true gift we all can receive.

I can't change what I did in the past,

Or walk suddenly away from the hubbub of the big bad world,

Or become a saint and donate all my money to the poor,

Or totally get rid of my need to be “perfect,”

But I can learn to slow down, look around me, and embrace the true gift of the season.

This year I won't run from store to store, redeeming this coupon or that coupon,

Or stress about how to afford everything,

Or focus on finding that exact right Christmas card,

But I will consider saying thank you to everyone who helped me and my family over the last several months.

I used to think that Christmas was just a season,

But now I know that the spirit of Christmas, the giving and receiving is a life-long season, not just the time between November and December.

Thank you to all in this blessed holiday time. The gift of God's son and the gift of love from others is what I will treasure this 2013 season.

Kathy Ventling

Hang on, help is on its way
He'll be there as fast as He can
"Hang on", a tiny voice did say
From somewhere deep inside the inner man

Don't you forget who'll take care of you
It don't matter what you do
Form a duet, let Him sing melody
You'll provide the harmony

Hang on, help is on its way
He'll be there as fast as He can
"Hang on", a tiny voice did say
From somewhere deep inside the inner man

Help is on its way
Help is on its way

Yes, the Son is coming! Salvation is on the way. Take a deep breath and embrace this season of new hope. Amen.

Terry Rickers



December 23, 2013

The True Gift

I used to think that if I found the right gift
And wrapped it up in thick creamy paper,
And tied it with a festive bow,
And made the person smile that I'd made everything perfect,
But now I know that I was just playing into the hands of the commercialized world.

I always felt that hosting the picture-perfect party was connected to a flawless holiday,

Chorus—

Time has come for the earth
to celebrate a Baby's birth.

A child who's special in every way
shall be born upon this day.

Allelu, Allelu, Allelu, Alleluia, Allelu!

The world was filled with awe

Alleluia!

WRITTEN BY THE JR. SR. HIGH SUNDAY SCHOOL
CLASSES CHRISTMAS 1983

Gary and Kay Parsons



December 6, 2013

*Luke 2:11...."For onto you is born this day
in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."*

As I thought about the Advent theme this year, I was struck at how amazing it is that God sent a child as the new Savior. When you compare that to the many empires and rulers that have walked the face of the earth over the past centuries - each having major impacts during their time - none has lasted as long as the impact of a little bitty baby born in a small town in Israel called Bethlehem. What a dichotomy! Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, the many pharaohs of Egypt.....the list goes on and on.....all left their mark.....all important rulers of their time.... all led powerful dynasty's and cultures,but none have had the impact that a little tiny baby, born into poverty, did. Jesus's approach was so different than any of these famous leaders....God sent his son to live life among us on Earth, not to rule over us, but to live as one of us, to experience the trials, tribulations, and joys we experience on Earth....and to help us know and understand the love of God and how we are to be part of his kingdom. Jesus, being born part human, could relate his teachings to us and make them real to the people of his day. And his parables and stories are still as relevant today....some 2000 years after his birth...as they were when he spoke them. No other leader in history has had the impact that Jesus has. And it all started in the simple birth, in a simple stable, on a cold night, some 2000 years ago. From his humble beginnings Jesus became one of the most powerful and long lasting figures in history.

And it all started with a baby.....

Here Comes the Son.....

Kim Miller



December 22, 2013

With an Advent theme of "Here Comes the Son", the obvious musical inspiration would be The Beatles song "Here Comes the Sun". After a little thought, another song popped into my head that does a better job of expressing the anticipation and the occasional anxiety that accompanies the Advent season.

In 1977, the Little River Band released the song "Help Is On Its Way". When you take a close look at the lyrics, they convey a message that seems apt for Advent. We get too caught up in the rush and the commotion of the impending holiday. Instead of happily looking forward to the arrival of the Son of God, we get bogged down in our worldly problems and worries.

Here, with a couple of slight edits that enhance the connection to Advent, are the lyrics:

Why are you in such a hurry?
Is it really worth the worry?
Look around, then slow down

What's it like inside the bubble?
Does your head ever give you trouble?
It's no sin, trade it in

Hang on, help is on its way
He'll be there as fast as He can
"Hang on", a tiny voice did say
From somewhere deep inside the inner man

Are you always in confusion?
Surrounded by illusion?
Sort it out, you'll make out

Seem to make a good beginning
Someone else ends up winning
Don't seem fair, don't you care?



(continued on the next page)

December 21, 2013 (continued)

When I first heard the theme for this year's Advent Booklet, my aging hippie mind went immediately to the Beatles' song, and I've been doot 'n' doo doo - ing ever since. I love that song with its peppy melody, upbeat lyrics, and nonsense chorus syllables. I also love the message: "Here comes the sun and I say, 'It's alright.'" The first line, "Little darlin', it's been a long, cold, lonely winter" perfectly reflects my attitude toward the season's frigid temperature, endless slush and ice, and especially its gray, sunless skies. I am by nature a summer person; I love light and especially warmth. Ninety five or even one hundred degree days don't faze me, and I consider air conditioning a nuisance. So, creeping through fall toward the winter months feels to me a little like walking to my doom. I watch the sun move farther and farther south, the days get shorter and shorter, and I get a little desperate, like our ancient ancestors who feared the sun might never return. Of course, I know the sun will return, and I remind myself that God has made the universe wonderfully and perfectly, that winter is a part of his plan. As the Psalmist says, "He made the moon to mark the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down." † Even if I would prefer to not have winter, I trust in God's perfect plan and his love for mankind. As proof of God's unfailing and unfathomable love for us, we celebrate the advent of his most remarkable gift: coming to live with us in human form, teaching us how we should live, and dying so that when we fail, we are not lost. Thus, in the depths of winter when darkness fills our lives and we try to remember what it is like to have warm hands and feet, we should rejoice! Here comes the Son! And I say, "It's alright."

Dear God:

Help me remember that when I walk in your ways, with your Son as my guide, I need fear no darkness.

Amen.

Helyn Wohlwend



December 7, 2013

Here comes the Son! I get it – we're talking about Jesus, but is He the Son of Man or the Son of God? Is it possible to be both at the same time? I'm confused!

The phrase "son of man" first appears as a reference to the Messiah in one of the visions described in Daniel. Dan. 7:13-14: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

When Jesus described himself as being the Son of Man (his favorite self-description), He was giving a physically accurate description. Jesus was a living, breathing human being, physically born by his human mother, Mary, and raised with the help of his human stepfather, Joseph.

As Jesus began his work of healing and teaching, He used parables and indirect comments to deliver his lessons to "those with ears to hear." He wanted people to think deeply in order to find and understand the hidden meanings in his messages. Those who were familiar with the writings of the prophets could make the connection between Jesus calling himself the Son of Man and the Daniel reference, finding support for their hope that this was the Messiah.

At the same time, however, Jesus was also the divine Son of God, the Father, the Ancient of Days. Jesus claimed to have power and authority given to him by God his Father, allowing him to do things that only God can do. Jesus explained in John 5:25-27: "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man." The Old Testament writings all taught that only God could grant life or judge those who were living. Jesus also had those God-given, God-like abilities.

So yes – it is possible to be both at the same time! Not only is it possible, but it happened! We believe! "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man...For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:13,16) Thanks be to God, the Father and to Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man!

Christmas blessings to all.

Linda Curtis-Stolper



December 8, 2013

When I heard the theme for this year's Advent booklet would be "Here Comes the Son" my first thought was that of the familiar Beatles tune. I quickly pushed that aside thinking that a popular song from the '60's doesn't have anything to do with Advent.....or does it? The lyrics are quite simple, talking about a long cold winter, melting the ice away and putting smiles on people's faces. I don't think it's too much of a stretch to relate these ideas to Advent. After all, December is usually a very chilly time of year and many people are already tired of winter by then. Yet the anticipation and celebration of the birth of Jesus can warm our heart and put a smile on our face. Perhaps another way to look at this would be to compare the cold of the Advent season to the darkness of our lives. This is not to say that we are continuously sad or depressed, but rather caught up in day to day things. We can be more concerned about our personal problems and forget about living up to our full Christian potential. We need to step back for a moment and remember that God sent His son to be the light in our lives. What a great thing to celebrate! Whether one is referring to the temperature outside or the feelings inside our heart there is nothing better than the warmth of the Son.

Ann Cutts



December 21, 2013

Here comes the Son

Here comes the Son
Ever and ever
Rock of salvation
Exalted one

Cleanses our sins
Omnipotent
Most high
Enlightened
Savior

The bread of life
Holy Spirit
Eternal life

Saved you and me
One and only
Now and forever

Sam Cutts



December 20, 2013



Words of Beauty; Words of Hope; Words of Light:
Words to be written on our hearts and cherished forever
Comfort ye my people, saith your God; speak ye comfortably
to Jerusalem; and cry unto her
that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.
The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight
in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low;
the crooked straight and the rough places plain.
And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.
But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when He appeareth?
For He is like a refiner's fire.
Behold! A virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel:
God with us.
O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain!
O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength!
Lift it up, be not afraid!
Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!
Arise, shine for thy light is come,
And the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.
The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. and
They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.
For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given
And the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His Name shall be called
Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.
*Selected words from the Holy Bible set to music by G. F. Handel
in his most famous work, *Messiah*, composed in 1741

Virginia Bennett

December 9, 2013

“In the past God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son.”

This is how the letter to the Hebrews opens. The writer goes on to describe who this Son really is, and to distinguish this Son as being higher even than the angels. The language is all about the power and majesty of this Son of God.

Why is the image of “son” so powerful and evocative? I think about the fact that I am a son also. Not only that – I’m a first-born son. Through most of human history that fact would have made me a relatively privileged person, depending on who my father was. (I’m also the first grandchild on my mother’s side, which I will attest can still be a privileged position when you’re young and Christmas rolls around!)

The great irony of the Christmas story is that all this language of power and glory is used in reference to a baby born in circumstances utterly devoid of privilege. In fact, when we strip away the veneer we have applied to this story over the centuries, there is a rawness in what happened that will make us quite uncomfortable. It reflects all the vulnerability of life in that time and place.

“Here comes the Son!” How does he come? Not at all like the son of an all-powerful God would be expected to come. He is weak, dependent, and vulnerable. And having come in this way, how does he live? He chooses weakness and vulnerability all the way to the end, because they were the very best way to demonstrate the power and love of God.

Advent is traditionally not just a time to prepare for celebrating Christmas, but primarily a time to prepare for the second coming of Christ at the end of time. However one interprets that, we certainly need some preparation, because we are called to be the very Body of Christ. That is, to embrace the weak and vulnerable, and the weakness and vulnerability in ourselves. This does not come naturally to us. So let us pray the words in “O Little Town of Bethlehem” –

*O Holy Child of Bethlehem,
descend to us we pray,
cast out our sin and
enter in, be born in us today.
Amen*

Larry Anderson



December 10, 2013

Savior, Prince of Peace and Son of God are just a few of the names of Jesus. At Christmas time we often remember the birth of Jesus. This article is going to list ten Bible Verses about the birth of Jesus which include Scriptures from the Old and New Testament.

10 Awesome Bible Verses About the Birth of Jesus

Isaiah 7:14- #1 Awesome Bible Verse about the Birth of Jesus- Prophecy

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

Isaiah 9:6 #2 Awesome Bible Verses About the Birth of Jesus- Prince of Peace

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

John 1:14 #3 Awesome Christmas Scripture- The Word became flesh

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Matthew 1:16 - #4 Awesome Bible Verse About the Birth of Jesus- Joseph and Mary

and to Jacob was born Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

Matthew 1:21 - #5 Awesome Christmas Bible Verse About Jesus' Birth- Jesus is Savior

"And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins."



Third, we don't deserve this gift. At Christmas, we give gifts to those whom we care about, who have been kind to us over the past year, or who have given us a gift first. We don't give gifts to the person who has been mean to us, talking bad about us, or to the angry neighbor who never has anything nice to say.

Yet God demonstrated His love toward us and gave His gift to us when we were still sinners, and to everyone alike...enemy and friend.

Fourth, the gift tells us something about the giver. When you want to give someone a gift, you start thinking about it ahead of time. Hopefully, you try to find what that person wants or needs.

When God decided to give us the gift of eternal life, it wasn't something that He just thought of by chance and in a fleeting moment. No, long before there was a town called Bethlehem, a garden called Eden, and a planet called Earth, a decision was made in eternity that God would send forth His Son, Jesus, who would eventually die on the cross for all of mankind....the ultimate sacrifice, so our sins could be forgiven, without eternal penalty, and we could have life everlasting.

So Christmas isn't really about those gifts that you may have under your tree right now. All of those things will be gone one day. All that will be left after this life is the human soul, and that will live on forever. Life is about knowing the God who made you and who gave you the greatest gift you will ever receive...His Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Think back to so many many years ago, when some had the realization of who Jesus was, and thought "Here Comes The Son!"

What a glorious feeling that must have been :-) And now, today, we are still feeling the wonders of His Love!

Kim De Graff



December 19, 2013

I read that someone actually tried to calculate how much it would cost currently to give the gifts named in the classic Christmas song, "The Twelve Days of Christmas." The grand total came to about \$100,000. Some items were affordable, like a partridge in a pear tree for \$184.99. Two turtledoves around \$150. Six Geese a laying \$162. But the price takes off when you add 11 pipers piping. That is at least \$2,400 right there. Then there are the 12 drummers drumming. With current union scale for musicians, they will run you another \$2,600 plus. The price really soars when you get 12 lords-a-leaping. I don't know where you would find them, but they would be very expensive.

Still, the real message of Christmas is not the gifts that we give to each other, but rather, it is a reminder of the gift that God has given to each of us. It is the only gift that truly keeps on giving, so I want to point out four things about it.

First, it is surprising. When Christmas rolls around, you often try to figure out if certain people have bought that gift you really wanted. Maybe you already know what they bought, because they didn't hide it very well. Or maybe you uncovered it by accident-or maybe not.

But when the day comes and you open the present, you have to pretend you're surprised. Yet all along, you knew what it was.

God's gift to us, however, was a complete surprise. It was not expected, and as you examine it more carefully, you realize how great a gift it actually was.

Second, God's gift came to us in the humblest of wrappings. What would you think if you saw a gift under your Christmas tree that was wrapped in newspaper and tied up with string? At first, you would maybe assume that a guy wrapped it (sorry guys).

But think about God's gift to us. Jesus was not born in a palace of gold; He was born in a stable. He was clothed with rags. He was laid in a feeding trough. God's gift to humanity, the ultimate gift of eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ, came in the simplest and humblest of wrappings.

Matthew 2:1 - #6 Awesome Bible Verses about the Birth of Jesus Christ- Born in Bethlehem

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,

Luke 1:14 - #7 Awesome Christmas Bible Verse About the Birth of Jesus- Joy and Gladness

"And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

Luke 1:35 - #8 Awesome Bible Verses About the Birth of Jesus- The Son of God

And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.

Luke 2:9-12 - #9 Awesome Christmas Scripture- Good News and Great Joy

And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. "And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger."

Luke 2:21 - #10 Awesome Bible Verse About the Birth of Jesus- And they Named Him Jesus

And when eight days were completed before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb

I pray these awesome Bible Verses about the birth of Jesus were uplifting to you today. If you have not yet made Jesus the savior of your life, I encourage you to seek Him out today!

Carol Camp



December 11, 2013

Here comes the Son and immediately the song by almost the same title is running through my mind, as I'm sure it does for many of you. When it is a cloudy or gloomy day and the sun comes out, the same song comes to mind again.

At this time of year, the phrase is equally true for me. The song goes on to talk about seeming like years since it's been here, and smiles on faces. To a child, it seems like a long time since Christmas was here and their smiles light up the room when the day finally arrives.

This all reminds me of when Cathy & Patrick were small. The church we attended had a huge Nativity scene. The figures were about two feet high. The manger, with Mary and Joseph, was on the left side of the altar. Through the door on the opposite side were camels. Each Sunday those camels were closer to the manger side of the altar, and we discussed their progress. "Look, the camels have moved." "Why have the camels moved?" There was nothing in the manger. "Where is Baby Jesus?" Finally, the camels, and the wise men traveling with them, arrived on the other side and, lo and behold, there was the Baby Jesus. The Son had arrived.

As we prepare for the coming of the Son. We need to remember the awe and wonder we had as children, watching and waiting. Here comes the SON! Hallelujah!

But you, Bethlehem Ephratha, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord. And he will be their peace." Micah 5:2, 4, 5

Jeannette Shannon



December 18, 2013

Full Nest

Sara and I became empty-nesters this fall when our younger son Peder went off to college. For the first time in over twenty years, when our older son Anders was born, there was not a son in the house. After putting so much of our time, energy, and love into raising our two sons while they were under our roof for all of those years, all of a sudden they weren't under our roof anymore. At first, this realization made our house seem very quiet, lonely, and sad.

We soon realized though that, although it at first seemed sad, their absence from home can actually add to our joy when they do return home. We appreciate our time together more. We no longer take for granted the precious time we do have together. We try to make the most of each moment together. When they're on their way home, we joyously call out "Here come the sons!" (And sometime we preface that by saying, "Ready or not!"). And, when it's time to say goodbye again, we know a part of them is always with us, regardless of where they or we are.

Likewise, during Advent, we anxiously await the birth of Christ and the joyous return of the Christmas season. The joy of the season replaces the sadness we feel at other times, like when it's too quiet and lonely in the house. We want to joyously call out "Here comes the son!"--just like when we call out "Here come the sons!"--and we should. However, we should also remember that the son is always with us, regardless of where we are, and let that remembrance fill our hearts with joy. And when our hearts are full of joy, so is our nest.

*A woman in childbirth suffers because her time has come;
But when she has given birth to the child she forgets the suffering
in her joy that (a child) has been born into the world.*

So it is with you: you are sad now.

But I shall see you again. And your hearts will be full of joy.

And that joy no one shall take from you.

John 16:21-22

Steve Hopkins



December 17, 2013

Here comes the Son...capital S...the one who loves us and whom we love. Not only does the Son come to us this holiday season but our children, parents, grandparents and grandchildren, strangers and friends, rich and poor, young and old all come to us. They come to us at parties, at church, over coffee, at work, on the street corner, in the grocery store, through the mail. So...how do we greet those who come to us? When the Son came he was greeted humbly by shepherds, adoringly by angels, grandly by wise men, and with love by Mary and Joseph. Very few brought gifts but all brought their presence. True presence can be difficult to achieve during this busy time of celebration. Sometimes it seems too difficult to greet with joy and be truly present with those who come to us this season...time is short; our thoughts are elsewhere, past hurts still sting us. May we find the time to sit in the stable with the Son...or the neighbor, or friend, or stranger...who comes to us this season and listen together to the singing of the angels...or the sadness or the fear or the excitement...to be present in this moment with all those who come to us.

Prayer: Come to us, Lord Jesus. Come to us in worship and music, through family and friends, in what we think and what we do. Be present with us and help us to be present with others in your name. Amen.

Linda Erickson



December 12, 2013

Looking For Christmas



W P H B S E V P H U P N K Y A Q J S Y M
F H Y J F R V H T X O G Q A K E T F O W
K G P N Q O K W S S E U B C G D I N F A
X O B H U D S Q H P Y I I F D R N W U Y
C J Y A D A V H D V R H R A J H V E H N
Q M L L F E G Y H T K I U V C T E C I I
B P X L T T C B H M Y M G E K V V C H D
R V F E Y O H M F W I C P F O C K H Z L
O T B L Y W R F J J B H O L V Z B R V N
J P K U H A G A A B J B D N U N T I B I
R J E J K R W I F O N U X L J K G S F S
E A Z A I T I L E O U J Q E A M N T T Z
T M O H S D R E H P E H S U H T T M Z H
F E Y L O H V H R G P T H N I H T A Z M
C H T F O W N Q K E F P C A Q S E S A S
W E P N G O T Y P S E F H M S D U R A T
I L G V E G T T F S K S W M Z P Y N U A
R H V G X V U K O V Z I Z E S P C R T R
I T Q F W E D J X H S L E T V T O N X L
U E G S L X W A D E N E W Q H X J J O C
D B B J S G E S M O L G N K T L Z P P V
L U N M E W E E G L H N L E S T N X Y X
Q R J A P S N I H N F A I B H I G T A W
H R K N K A U W Y N O U X Y W I A O I E
Y V Q G E N M S S G Q H E J Z J X T L J

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|--------------|-----------|
| ADORE | JESUS |
| ADVENT | JOSEPH |
| ANGEL | LOVE |
| ANTICIPATION | MANGER |
| BETHLEHEM | MARY |
| BIRTH | NOEL |
| CHRISTMAS | SHEPHERDS |
| EMMANUEL | SON |
| HALLELUJAH | STAR |
| HOLY | WISEMEN |

The Ritter Family

December 13, 2013

Have you seen Jesus?

Did you see him yesterday?

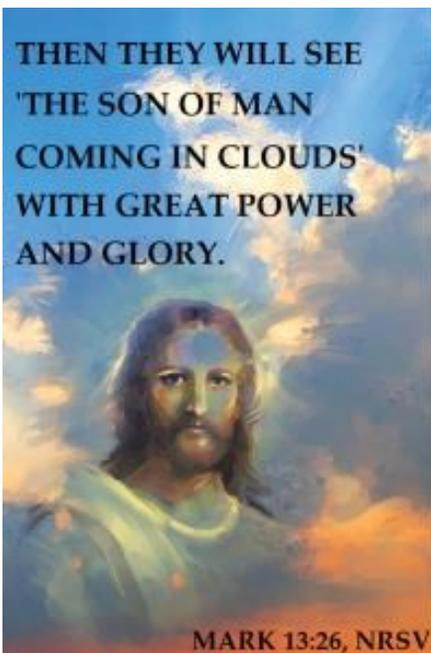
How about today?

Do you think you will see him tomorrow?

Every day brings us one day closer to the second coming of Christ. Each hour brings us closer to meeting the Son face to face. Isn't that a glorious thought? And yet, every day, if we look hard enough, if we open ourselves to feel more, if we allow ourselves to listen more deeply, we can see Jesus right here on earth.

While on our Work Week trip to Benton Harbor, Michigan, we were challenged to look for Jesus in everything we did, everything we saw, everything we heard. To see Jesus at least once a day was our goal. Have you tried doing this? He's there, you know.

Mickey Van Baale



He was right, of course. The museum owners had been unwilling or unable to find a faux polar bear to advertise the real, albeit stuffed, bear inside, and so had come up with what they thought was the next best thing – a recycled grizzly. But no amount of white paint could turn the grizzly bear into his polar cousin. Although the outside was now flawlessly white, the shape, the head, and the stance were all wrong, and the discerning eye was not fooled.

Here Comes the Son. Even though we are in the season of celebrating the coming of the Christ Child, I can't help but look beyond the Babe in the manger to see other images of Jesus – the poised boy teaching his elders; the righteously angry One, cleansing the temple; the humble Servant washing the feet of His disciples; the compassionate Healer and the righteous Accuser of the Pharisees. When the Son entered the picture, situations changed. *People* changed. With His perfect discernment, He was never blind to the false piety of the elite or the resigned desperation of the poor, but in every situation, every encounter, He broke away all that was false and cut straight to the heart – crumbling every façade, chastening, encouraging and liberating. At some time in our lives, we have all been guilty of 'painting the polar bear'. As we welcome the Son this advent season, let us invite Him to transform our hearts, lives, church, community and world. This we know - when the Son enters, whether with a blinding burst of light or a gentle, compelling glow, His perfect light illuminates every crevice of our being.

Rejoice, Christians!

Here Comes the Son!

Norm Grimm



December 16, 2013

Polar Bear Painting

Growing up in Iowa, I did many of the jobs common to a country boy—baling hay, walking beans, and mowing lawns. Later, while in college, I cooked in a restaurant, did some accompanying, and worked on a production line at Amana refrigeration during the summers. With my first teaching position came a new slate of summer jobs including seed corn supervision, painting, wall-papering, and camp director. Then in the summer of 1983, while working for the maintenance department of a museum and motel complex, a unique challenge came my way. I was asked to paint the polar bear.

He was standing on his back legs, poised to attack, a vision of terror captured in fiberglass, affixed to a platform on the peak of the roof, threatening an unseen enemy - and badly in need of a coat of paint. Just yards away, the roar of traffic on Interstate 80. So one summer day, armed with a brush, bucket of white paint, and a rope to tie myself to the bear, I climbed up on the roof.

From the ground perspective, it had looked like a quick, easy job. But arriving at the peak, I discovered that my adversary was at least nine feet tall and there was no way I could reach the top of that massive head. So my own little version of Cirque du Soleil ensued. There was I, rope through the bucket handle, around the bear and through my belt; paintbrush in teeth and shinnying up the bear like an over-sized light pole, trying to ignore the honking of passing motorists.

At the end of the day, the bear was glistening white, and I was safely on the ground, with a fair amount of paint on me as well. As I stood looking proudly at my handiwork, gleaming in the afternoon light, a vacationing family stopped to admire the bear. A boy of ten or so looked critically at the roof and announced, "Look, Mom! It's a white grizzly bear!"

December 13, 2013 *(continued)*

Do you perhaps wonder what Mary and Joseph were thinking before Jesus' birth? Were they wondering what was "down the road" for this child? They knew the unusual circumstances in which they were a part. After all, the Christ child was of humble parentage. His mother was described simply as a virgin. The man she was engaged to marry was not flush with money, but poor. The accommodations for the mother and father and child yet to be born were but a stable. But yet, they waited with excited expectation as do parents today. Are we and they so different?

"Christ who is our life" (Colossians 3:4)

"It is by His life that we live." This from Morning and Evening by Charles H. Spurgeon

To Mary and Joseph, I believe, they thought their son, Jesus Christ, was just as precious as we think our children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, or any other child we deem close to us. "He is precious." (1 Peter 2:7)

Peter tells us that Jesus is precious but he did not and could not describe how precious. No one can compute the value of "God's indescribable gift." (2 Corinthians 9:15)

When you think what life would be like without Him, it magnifies His preciousness. (From Morning and Evening)

Prayer: Thank you Lord Jesus for giving us our life, for being here for us and asking only that we trust in you. Amen

Nancy Mott



December 14, 2013

The “Son” began when God’s Angel came to Mary and told her she would bear his only begotten Son.

The scripture says: “The Angel said to her, be not afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. And now you will bear a Son and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and be called the Son of God most high, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor, David”

-Luke 1-30.

Mary Mary

A Christmas Carol by Avery and Marsh

Mary, Mary, what you gonna name that Baby?

What you gonna call that Holy Baby?

Why don’t you call him Shepherd?

Sh... why don’t we all call him Shepherd?

Why don’t you call him Lord?

Sh... let’s all call Him Lord!



So in this excerpt, we remembered that Jesus, the Son of God, is our shepherd and our Lord.

As prophesized, Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, the son of God, our Shepherd and our Lord, He was born in a manger...was a carpenter, a traveling minister and prophet until he was crucified by the Romans because he was predicting a way of life and obedience to God altogether different from the Jewish faith.

He was to be our forgiver of sins and lead us
into Heaven...our Shepherd.

Let’s remember why we believe in the Lord and Shepherd Jesus Christ during this Advent season celebrating his birth.

Barb and John Taylor

December 15, 2013

Unto Us A Child Is Born

I remember the day my son, Skye, was born as if it were yesterday. Jay and I spent that day in continuous smiles and overflowing joy with our new child. He was healthy and happy and we knew in that moment that God had greatly blessed us. We had lots of friends and family stop by to see our new born son. They brought gifts of soft blankets, clothes, and toys. What a great day for us!

I wonder if this is the same kind of joy that Mary felt on the day Jesus was born. She gave birth to a healthy and happy son just like we did. Many people came to visit and brought gifts of frankincense, mirth, and gold. What a great day for the whole world!

This is something we all have in common. We were all born into this world with God’s blessing and He has given us gifts that we can choose to use to make this world a better place.

Each of us has been given the chance to be a blessing to this world, just like Jesus has been for us. We might not make the blind see, but we can be the light in someone’s life. We might not walk on water, but we could help the elderly walk across the street. We might not feed thousands with fish and bread, but we can help serve in a soup kitchen.

Every day we can make the choice to be helpful by praying for someone, giving of our time and talents, or sharing a smile with a stranger.

Let today be the start for us to use our gifts from God to be a blessing to others.

Kelly Koenen

