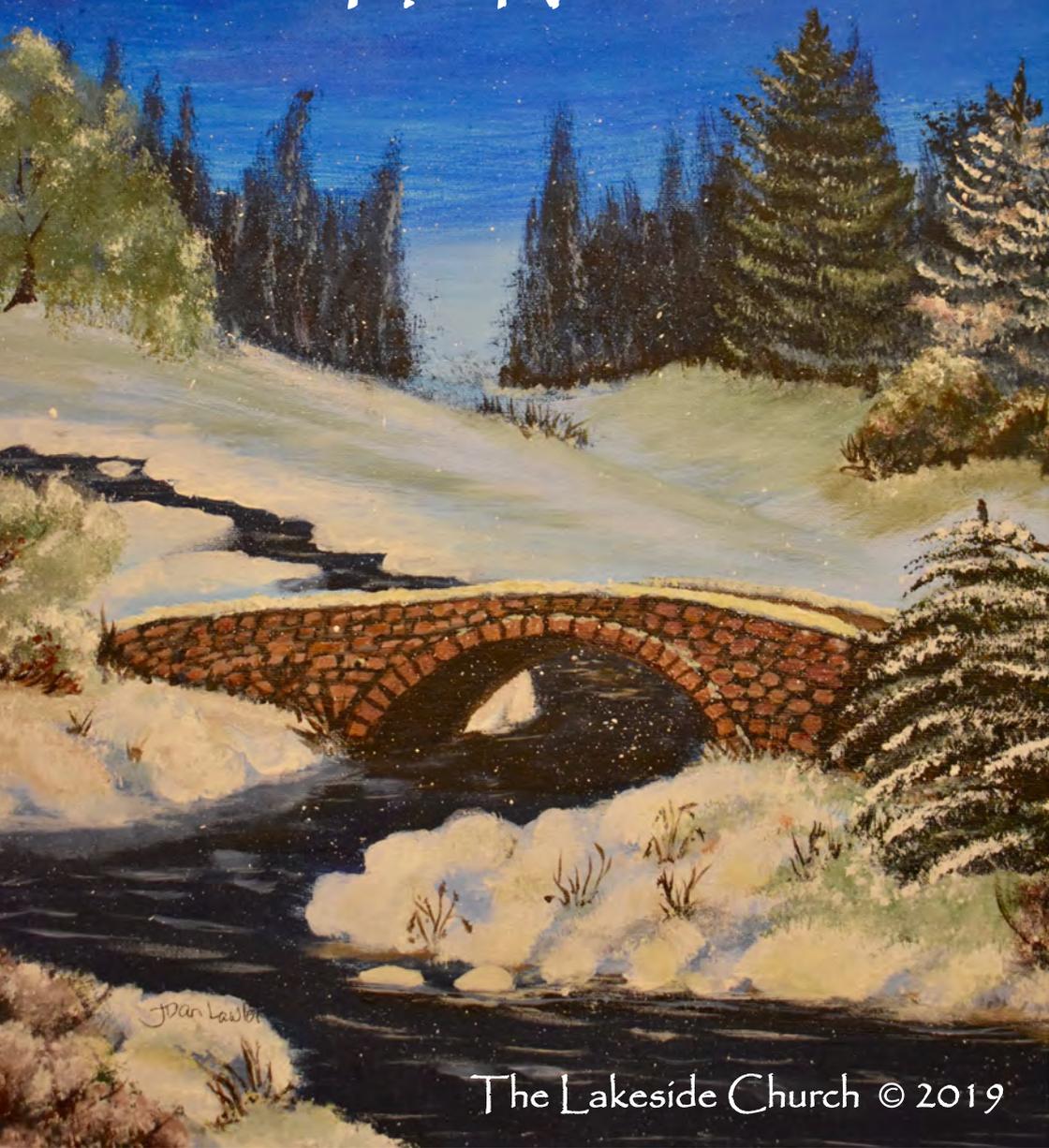


Jesus, The Wonder Of His Name



Joan Lawler

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FOREWORD

With the holidays arriving soon, December is the time of year many of us start thinking about home, family and most importantly, God's greatest gift to us - our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The title of this devotional is 'Jesus, The Wonder Of His Name', and each day in December we will be introduced to various names and descriptors of our Lord Jesus, written by different people from The Lakeside Church - Toronto. As you read each day, our prayer is that you will be led to worship the Lord our God with increasing wonder, gratitude and thanksgiving. Reflect on that Name and journal in the space provided how the Lord Jesus reveals God, His person, His character, His attributes and how He has met your need or desire through that specific Name.

The Name of Jesus carries life, truth, power and salvation. In His Name there is forgiveness of sins and newness of life. In His Name there is healing and restoration. In His Name there is love, joy, peace, comfort and hope. In fact, whatever you need finds its fulfilment in Jesus.

Let this devotional help you focus on the unshakeable, unchangeable, matchless truths found in The Name of Jesus. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, sent in His Name, you will be "more than a conqueror through Him who loved us" and worship Him who alone is worthy of all praise.

Love and blessings,
Pastors Brian and Sabrina

Acknowledgements

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Jesus

“She will give birth to a son and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sin.”

~ Matthew 1:21

In my role as an English teacher, I have helped many new immigrants to Canada learn English. In this one particular class, a vast majority of those who attended did not belong to the Christian faith. One day, a student asked a question, and in my response to her, I mentioned the word “God” a few times. To my dismay, my entire class of non-believers nodded their heads in assent. Two of them responded “our god also said...” So, to which god was I referring?

Since then I have always preferred to use the name ‘Jesus’ when talking especially to those who have yet to come to faith in Him. But that’s not the only reason why. The name Jesus is life and breath and hope to me. After all, wasn’t this name decided on by the heavenly council of the Trinity - and sent to all mankind trapped in the curse of eternal death and separation from God because of sin?

An angel was sent from heaven to both Joseph and Mary just to make sure they got the name of the Son of God right. Jesus means ‘Jehovah is salvation’, and that is exactly what He came to do – “save His people from their sins.” Peter boldly declared in Acts 4:12 “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” There is only one way to God and that is through Jesus Christ.

Jesus – only two syllables, five letters, and pronounced the same in almost any language in the world.

- Jesus – the name that reflects the love of God for His people.
- Jesus – the name that rolls off easily from the tongue of a little child.
- Jesus – a name that is savoured and breathed out by those who are nearing the end of life’s journey.

- Jesus – a simple name, a common name, the sweetest, greatest most powerful and glorious name.

No wonder Apostle Paul in awesome wonder exclaims in Philippians 2:9-11, “Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

When Pontius Pilate addressed the Jews, he uttered one of the most crucial questions in the Bible: “What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” Matthew 27:22. All people must answer this question, and the way they do will determine their eternal destiny. This Christmas season, will you use every opportunity to point people to Jesus, the Saviour of the world, the Lord of hope, and the Giver of eternal life?

~ *L. Arnold*

Reflection

Jesus Is Logos - The Word

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

~ John 1:1-4

As a teen, I remember great excitement in our little city one year because a ship had berthed at our only major port. Unlike other vessels that came to our island, this ship did not bring tourists in search of sun-kissed beaches. This ship had brought books; hundreds of Christian books for readers of every age. I recall the awe I felt as my family and I went aboard and perused the stacks of books, all the while feeling the strange sensation of the motion of waves far beneath our feet. The ship had an unusual but very appropriate name, "Logos Hope".

Logos means the Word of God and is Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus, the Word, is eternal and is God. Jesus or Logos, put on human flesh and lived among us: "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" John 1:14.

John uses the concept of Logos to explain some of the many characteristics of Jesus:

- Jesus is Eternal: "In the beginning was the Word."
- Jesus was with God before coming to earth: "The Word was with God."
- Jesus is God: "The Word was God."
- Jesus is Creator: "All things were made through Him."
- Jesus is the Giver of Life: "In Him was life."

For centuries, people ignored the message of love and redemption of God spoken through the prophets. It was easy to disregard an unseen

Jesus Is My Strength

*The Lord is my strength and my defense; He has become my salvation.
He is my God, and I will praise Him, my father's God, and I will exalt Him.
~ Exodus 15:2*

What do you first think of when you hear the word strength? Physical power such as a weight lifter being able to lift amazing gravity defying amounts of iron? A tow truck that has just hauled a car from a deep ditch back on to a flat surface? When I think of strength I'm reminded of the Lord and His supernatural strength, and how He has picked me up from perilous ditches every time I veered off the straight and narrow road.

Have you had days where nothing seemed reasonable and life just kept beating you up? Seasons, where things didn't go the way you wanted, where situations seemed so hopeless, your strength diminished and your dreams became hard to envision? You felt like life's tracking device had simply lost its signal.

When times become desperate, there is Someone you can turn to and His name is Jesus. When you are weak, and the little faith you have has escaped through the cracks where hope once existed, there is Someone whose strength will lovingly pull you back to Him. Jesus is your Strength. He just doesn't give you strength. He *is* your Strength. The promise the Lord gives in Isaiah 41:10 is: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." When you turn back to God for strength, all your weakness, fear, and hopelessness will be defeated through the presence of the Holy Spirit reviving and renewing you from within.

So as Autumn's last leaves fall to the ground and we are reminded that Christmas is just around the corner, don't give up, don't abandon hope. Let the reality of Christ living in you as your Strength give you boldness and courage, not only to overcome personal battles but

Jesus Is My Mediator

*For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all people.
~ 1 Timothy 2:5-6a*

I was once invited to spend Christmas day with a friend and her family. What should have been a happy occasion turned out to be very uncomfortable for everyone involved. There was strife in the family. Five of the seven family members had strained relationships with each other; so strained in fact, that they would not even say hello to one other. It was a painfully awkward evening to say the least – and I for one could not wait to leave. I called my mom soon after and she told me that I should try to be the peacemaker and bring everyone together. I thanked her for the suggestion but I knew that I was not up to the task, nor was I willing to try. I felt like it was not my place to intervene in that situation.

If you have strained relationships with family members, I imagine that Christmas time is especially challenging because there is the not-so-subtle societal pressure to get together with loved ones during this season. I am sure you can agree that being in a room with people you don't get along with is very uncomfortable and distressing.

Such was our lot as mankind. Because of Adam and Eve's disobedience, sin entered our world and separated us from a close relationship with God. Sin made us enemies with God. Like Isaiah 59:2 says, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear." In days of old, priests offered animal sacrifices to atone for sin and reconcile man to God – albeit temporarily, because man would sin again soon after and the divide would be recreated. There was therefore a need for a better and permanent solution. Enter Jesus.

Jesus is the willing and capable Mediator between God and man. He came to permanently and wholly reconcile us back to God. "Christ is

the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant.” Hebrews 9:15.

We no longer have to live in enmity with God. We no longer have to hide from Him in guilt and shame, or have an awkward and uncomfortable relationship with Him. Jesus, our Mediator, has already paid the price and has permanently repaired our relationship with our Heavenly Father. Our role is to believe in Him and to surrender our lives to Him. Are you reconciled to God today? If not, do not let another day go by without surrendering your life to Jesus, your Mediator and Reconciler.

~ Liz Thuo

Reflection

Jesus Is The Prince of Peace

For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.

~ Ephesians 2:14

Ever since becoming a Christian in high school, Prince of Peace was always a name of Jesus that I felt drawn to. I think it's safe to say that we all crave peace. Whether that means a release from the daily stresses of life, a long night's rest, a vacation, or even a few moments of silence to ourselves. Close your eyes for a few moments after reading this. What appears in your mind's eye when you think of peace? Is it a place? A feeling? A certain warm memory from your past? Or perhaps it's the familiar comfort of a good friend or family member.

For me personally, one of my favourite moments of peace was an experience I had on a trip to New Zealand. I had hiked a gruelling six hours over boulders and steep inclines until I reached the summit of Mount Cook. My legs were aching, my knees shook with every step, and my chest and back heaved under the weight of my 15-pound hiking bag. I was sore and miserable, sweaty and slightly dehydrated. I lazily shook off my bags and made my way to a series of benches outside of our lodging area. I will never forget the first glimpse I had of the breathtaking view. The peak of Mount Cook sat in front of me, the cloud line lingering below us and the sky washed in the most brilliant reds, purples and oranges. I sat completely stunned, as my tensed muscles unknotted themselves as I took in the scene before me.

I have come to understand that experiencing Jesus as the Prince of Peace is a lot like my time atop Mount Cook. We come to Jesus with our baggage. We come with our pasts, our failures and shortcomings. We come with the aches and pains of life. We come spiritually "dehydrated" and in need of relief. When we sit at the feet of Jesus and take in the view of His splendour and beauty, we begin to experience the peace that is spoken of so often in the Bible.

Jesus Is The Bread Of Life

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty."

~ John 6:35

When I think of bread, I am reminded of Christmas time as a little girl. My siblings and I were raised by grandparents who owned an outdoor bakery. Christmas time was always the busiest season at the bakery. One of the most popular items at the bakery was duck bread, which, as the name suggests, was bread shaped in the form of a duck. It was a hot seller and people would place their orders months in advance, and would line up for two weeks just to pick up their orders in time for Christmas dinner. The people loved feasting on duck bread, and my grandparents would do whatever they could to make sure everyone got some for their Christmas dinners. Sometimes though, they would run out of ingredients, and my grandma would say "I wish I could multiply the bread the way the Lord Jesus did when He fed the 5,000!"

The crowds following Jesus loved feasting on bread too. Jesus had just provided a meal for them by supernaturally multiplying five loaves and two fish, and the people followed after Him hoping for more bread. They were still hungry. When Jesus fed the 5,000 with the five loaves, He taught us a wonderful spiritual truth: He is the Bread of Life and those who come to Him will never hunger again.

I believe no matter how good religious exercises are, they cannot feed us, they cannot fulfill us and they cannot replace the Lord Jesus. He is real and available to us all the times. He is our Bread of Life. He will never run out and never get stale.

While duck bread is wonderful, and may have lasted us a month, it did eventually run out. Only those who feast spiritually on what Jesus offers will be never go hungry. On what are you feasting today?

~ D. Allison

Saturday, December 7

Jesus Is The Lamb of God

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

~ John 1:29

Growing up, in our neighbourhood, residents were treated to a nightly "orchestra" of barking dogs and growls from feuding stray cats. But starting from the month of October, an unlikely sound was added to the musical score – the bleating of sheep. As you walked around the neighbourhood, you would see a number of sheep and goats grazing, tied to posts outside people's homes. Not surprisingly, December 26th brought a new dawn. The bleating stopped and the goats disappeared. Yes, you guessed it! These unfortunate, fattened creatures had met their inevitable end atop Christmas dinner plates. Sad, but delicious.

In our world today, lambs serve as food for most and pets for some. But in the old testament, lambs played a pivotal role. They were offered in sacrifice to provide a temporary covering of sins. From the time of Adam and Eve, sin separated us from our Lord. God commanded the nation of Israel to perform numerous sacrifices according to certain specific procedures. First, the animal had to be spotless. Second, the person offering the sacrifice had to identify with the animal. Third, the person offering the animal as a sacrifice had to inflict death upon it. When done in faith, this sacrifice provided a temporary covering of sins. You may be asking yourself, why animals? Hebrews 9:22 tells us that "... the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." Since the animals did no wrong, they died in the place of the people who had done wrong, and the lambs' blood covered their sin.

In Genesis 22:8, Abraham prophetically told Isaac "The Lord will provide Himself a lamb". This prophecy is fulfilled in the New Testament. Jesus is introduced as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" John 1:29. Fittingly, and not by coincidence,

Jesus was born amongst the animals in a manger in Bethlehem. He led a sinless life, and was the perfect spotless Lamb. God gave his Son Jesus to die for our sins as the ultimate and final sacrifice to take away our sins, eliminating the need for animal sacrifices. His blood permanently washed away our sins unlike that of the animals which only covered up the sins of the people, temporarily.

So this Christmas season, we can celebrate the fact that Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, willingly laid down His life for our redemption. He died in our place so we don't have to. Through faith in what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross and through His resurrection, we can receive forgiveness for our sins and an eternal inheritance as children of the Most High God.

If you haven't yet done so, will you accept His gift of salvation today?

~ ***M. M.***

Reflection

Jesus Is The One Who Sets You Free

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

~ John 8:36

I was working the evening shift when a customer (let's call him John), came into the store to return an ink cartridge. I knew this was not going to be an easy transaction based on his demeanor. I greeted him politely, and he immediately started to shout, telling me that we had sent him the wrong product. I politely told him I would take it back, but would have to charge him the full price for the other product which was not the same as the one he was returning. This set him off like a 'volcano', and impulsively, I reacted more 'secularly' than Christian-like. My inside voice crept out and I said something that was not so nice. He heard me, yes he did, and told me off in no uncertain terms! That night when I got home and reflected on my day, I felt awful and was convicted about the way I had behaved. I knew I could have handled the situation differently. I prayed about the way I reacted and asked God to forgive me. However, I still could not forgive myself. I woke up still thinking about it and knew I needed to be set free from the guilt I was carrying.

I attended church the following day, and wouldn't you believe it! John came in and sat right in front of me. I reached over, tapped him on his shoulder, and asked him if he remembered me. I think my exact words were "Were you at the store last night? We had an altercation". He turned around and without speaking, hugged me, gave me the biggest smile and said, "We have both been forgiven and set free". I felt the burden instantly lift from my shoulders. I was immediately reminded that even if I had not seen John, I had confessed my sin to Jesus and had been forgiven by Him.

It was a reminder for me to reflect on the truth of God's Word as found in John 8:36 - He whom the Son sets free is free indeed. How incredible to know that we don't have to carry the burden of sin with us! We are our worst critics and at times we are so hard on ourselves.

However, as stated in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Great is His faithfulness! We receive new mercies every morning, they are renewed daily. This is the amazing love our Lord has for us. Have you confessed your sins and repented? You can rest assured "there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus" Romans 8:1. You don't have to carry the burdens of yesterday into tomorrow. If you have not yet received Christ as your personal Saviour, would you, this day, accept His gift of salvation that will set you free from guilt and shame?

~ A. Wilkinson

Reflection

Jesus Is Jehovah Jireh, My Provider

*Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."
~ Genesis 22:13-14*

The name of God - *Jehovah Jireh* which means God is my provider, was given to God by Abraham on Mount Moriah where God provided a ram for him to sacrifice in place of his son Isaac.

This is one of the most powerful names used to describe God. As our Heavenly Father, God always provides for us. He knows what we need long before we do. I found it really interesting that Moriah means 'seen by God'. And so we can be comforted knowing that our needs are seen by God; and as *Jehovah Jireh*, He will meet those needs. I have an earthly father who continues to do everything he can to provide for me. However, there are some who have never had that relationship with their earthly dads, so seeing God as a Father who provides for us may be a difficult concept for them to comprehend. Although there are many reasons an earthly father may fail as a provider, God our Father never fails us. He never has, and He never will. He always provides for His children, and He always makes a way for us, even when there seems to be no way.

Two thousand years ago, the Lord Jesus was born in a manger to die for our sins. The ram caught in the thicket, providing a way of escape for Isaac, was a symbol of the Saviour who would die on the cross and provide a way of escape for us – a way of salvation, forgiveness of sins, new hope and abundant life here on earth, and most importantly an eternity in heaven.

This Christmas season, my hope is that you learn not to worry about material things that will fade, tear or rust. But instead, trust in the

Jesus Is The True Light

*The True Light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.
~ John 1:9*

Many years ago, we experienced a major power outage in our city and almost everything around us was in complete darkness. I remember it being so dark, you couldn't even see your own hand in front of you. It was the first time we had witnessed something like this in Canada, but fortunately we were prepared. We had put up a lantern in front of our home and we noticed that something quite interesting took place; people took notice of this light and they began to draw near to it. The light from the lantern was almost like a lighthouse, lighting the darkness around us and drawing people from the dark to a place of light.

At that moment, I was reminded of how Jesus had also called me from total darkness and into His wonderful light. Just like that lantern from our home had drawn others, Jesus is the True Light who draws us out of our lives of darkness and into a restored relationship with Him. His Word promises us of this truth: "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.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem on that Christmas night, many were drawn to the Light that God promised all people thousands of years ago. They came to see who God had sent, and to see in Him the hope that was sent for them and for the many generations to come.

This Christmas, let us be reminded of the Light that only Jesus can offer. God also calls us to share this light with others who are in darkness, just as we once were, "... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" Matthew 5:16.

Jesus Is My Hope

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
~ Romans 15:13

Hope is a fragile concept in our own strength. It is a terrible thing to lose hope, or to give up hope. In the year 2000, I contracted chicken pox at the end of my first trimester of pregnancy. Since I could not be vaccinated at that point, my doctor suggested that I could either terminate the pregnancy, or hope and see. At first I spent hours researching, getting second and third opinions, and searching for hope from the internet. The effects the chicken pox could have on my baby's health and development was daunting. My fiercely faithful mother prayed and declared all would be well. I had six long months ahead, and I filled them with prayer, Bible reading and hope.

Hope for a Christian isn't an escape or wishful thinking according to C.S Lewis, but something a Christian is meant to do. Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. When we have faith in Christ, we have hope for an eternal future. In Psalm 42:5, David encourages his downcast soul to have hope in God: "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Saviour and my God." David argues with himself because hope does not come naturally to us. Our default response in the face of difficulty is fear and despair. So we have to cultivate hope in God, as David did. We must talk adamantly to our souls. Hope in God!

Hope, when used in a secular sense tends to express uncertainty: "I hope it won't rain" only means that one has a desire about the weather, not surety. But biblical hope is a confident expectation and desire for something good to happen in the future; we have a certainty that the good we expect and desire will be done according to God's will. As sinners, we acknowledge that Jesus is our only hope of salvation.

Jesus Is The Door

"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."

~ John 10: 9

As a child, I recall watching an American game show called "Let's Make a Deal". The premise of the show is that members from the audience (known as "traders") are selected by the host and given a 'tempting' prize with the option to keep it or barter it for a different item. The one caveat is, the other item is hidden behind a door until the trader makes the choice to turn in the prize he/she already has for something else that could be of greater or meaningless value. Oftentimes, the trader would trade the "known" for the unknown.

Isn't that reminiscent of many of us who have accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour? When we first received this priceless Gift, we were exuberant and spiritually satisfied, knowing that all our needs and wants were fulfilled through His great love for us. "But God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" Philippians 4:19.

But as we venture through life, the tempter speaks to our base desires and presents us with alluring 'prizes' that are packaged in a way that seems to be of greater value than the original gift.

I am reminded of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God gifted them with everything they would ever need, but the serpent in his guile, manipulated Eve to think that if she chose what was behind his door; "... your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" Genesis 3:5. We all know the consequence of that interaction and decision.

As we approach each day, and especially the Christmas holidays, we will be presented with many appealing doors that will seemingly offer the gift of prosperity, riches and fulfillment, but in the end, those

Jesus Is The Truth

The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth...For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

~ John 1: 14 & 17

What is truth? Ask anyone today that question and you're sure to start an interesting conversation. Interestingly, it is the same question Pilate asked Jesus several hours before His death.

In John 18, we find Jesus standing in Pilate's courtroom, where Pilate is trying to trip Jesus up and catch Him saying something that would prove He was deserving of crucifixion. Pilate asks "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus answered Pilate's question and makes a profound statement about His birth. "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now My kingdom is from another place." "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a King. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me."

This is a wonderful Christmas text, even though it comes at the end of Jesus' life on earth and not the beginning. In this conversation with Pilate, Jesus states the purpose of His birth – He was born to testify to the truth, and everyone who is on the side of truth listens to Him. So, in defining truth, it is first helpful to note what truth is not. Truth is not subjective, nor is it collective. Truth is not based on how we feel or what the popular worldview is. Colossians 2:8 warns us that without truth we will fall for human tradition and principles of this world. Without truth, we will embrace the spirit of compromise and tolerance that is prevalent in the post-Christian culture we live in.

Scripture teaches that the truth is far more than a moral guide. Jesus declared, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the

Father but by Me” John 14: 6. He didn’t say He would show the truth or teach the truth or model the truth. Jesus is the truth. He is the source of all truth and the perfect expression of God. He is the absolute embodiment of all that is true which means that truth cannot be adequately explained, recognized, understood or defined apart from the Lord Jesus, making Him the author, determiner, arbiter, ultimate standard and final judge of all truth.

Who or what has the final say when it comes to the truth in your life? Is it your feelings? Is it advice found in a book? Is it your friends or spouse? Is it your upbringing and culture? Is it whatever makes you comfortable? Or do you allow the Lord Jesus and His Word to have the final say in your life? As followers of Christ, we are to walk in the truth. We are to love the truth, and believe the truth. We are to speak the truth in love.

The truth found in Jesus will always set you free. This Christmas, worship the God who is truth and walk in the truth.

~ S. Foerster

Reflection

Jesus Is El Shaddai, Lord God Almighty

*Whoever dwells in the shadow of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
~ Psalm 91:1*

The name *El Shaddai* has long been one of my favourite names of God, for it is this name and the stories associated with it, that continues to give me strength and hope of seeing the miraculous workings of God over the impossible situations of my life.

The Hebrew name *El Shaddai* is rich in meaning and commonly translated 'God Almighty'. The word *Shad* means 'breast' and it is the basis of its other rich names – Nourisher, Satisfier, Strength Giver, the all Sufficient One, the One with whom nothing is impossible.

Experiencing God's sufficiency comes especially to those facing impossible situations. At the age of 75, Abraham received God's promise of a son who would bring forth a nation. However, at the age of 99, Abraham was still childless. In the midst of struggling in his faith, God revealed Himself to Abraham as *El Shaddai*, God Almighty, with whom nothing is impossible. In Genesis 17:1-2, we read "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty [*El Shaddai*]; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." Abraham's new-found faith eventually gave him Isaac, the promised son and heir.

The greatest example of the sufficiency of *El Shaddai* was when He did what was humanly impossible at Christmas. This He did through the birth, life, death and resurrection of His Son who saved you and me from sin, hell and death, forgave us our sins and gave us eternal life with God.

Friends, what impossible situations are you facing now? Trust *El Shaddai*. He not only has power over every condition of your life, but also

also always keeps His promises. He is not bound by the laws of nature or fettered by any man. *El Shaddai* is the all powerful, all sufficient keeper of His promises. Let me share just one testimony of how Jesus is my *El Shaddai*. My husband went through major heart surgery. Unexpected challenges arose and we were informed that nothing more could be done medically, but the medical team would do their best to keep him comfortable. But God - our *El Shaddai* with whom nothing is impossible - extended my husband's life by 18 fruitful, active years, worshipping and serving his Master.

This Christmas season as you worship the Lord Jesus born in a manger, be bold in sharing your testimonies of how *El Shaddai* has proven again and again in your life, that nothing is impossible for Him.

~ L. Arnold

Reflection

Jesus Is My Advocate

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father -

Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

~ 1 John 2:1

If I were to ask you if you are an advocate, you would probably respond by saying 'no'. The dictionary defines an advocate as someone who represents another person's interests, like a lawyer does. In fact, the word comes from the Latin word *advocare* meaning to add a voice. To advocate is to add a voice of support to a cause or a person. The Greek word for advocate is *parakleton*, which means, helper, advisor, or counsellor. So with those definitions in mind, perhaps you realize that you are advocating every day, when you are a voice for someone, or while you help, advise, and give godly counsel.

Sometimes advocating for others can have a negative impact on you, but that doesn't mean you stop being an advocate. I can recall a time in my life where one of my friends was getting married and she had a mutual friend of ours do the wedding planning. The bride felt she was being over-charged, but was afraid to speak up, so of course, I decided to speak on her behalf. Unfortunately, my speaking out for the bride caused a rift in my friendship with the wedding planner. But praise the Lord that in time, that relationship was restored.

At some point in our lives, we will either be an advocate or need someone to advocate for us. We have to go through the process of making appointments or have to wait on the convenience of the individual. The wonderful news is, we have an Advocate, Jesus Christ, who is there for us always. We don't have to make appointments or wait until it is convenient for Him! He is always 'on call' for us; we don't need to pay, access by secret code, or go through someone else - we have a DIRECT line to Him! He will stand up for you, and speak out on your behalf. When you accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, He becomes your perfect Advocate. He has experienced everything you

will ever go through. He was tempted, rejected, betrayed, hurt and abused, but yet was without sin. Unlike a human advocate who can only defend us based on external information, Jesus, our Advocate can see what's going on internally. Nothing is hidden from Him, and He doesn't take a break from defending us. Through His death, resurrection and ascension, the Lord Jesus has credited us with the verdict of "not guilty" making us right before God.

No matter what the enemy says about you, or anyone else for that matter, Jesus will fight for you, defend you and ultimately WIN your case! Isn't it reassuring to know that we have the most powerful Advocate on our side? He specializes in representing sinners like us in the highest of all places, the presence of God, and He's never lost a case. If God is for us, who can be against us? What an awesome God! What an amazing gift!

~ *A. Wilkinson*

Reflection

Jesus Is Love

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.

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.

~ John 3: 16-17

Today marks the start of the last week of school before the long-awaited Christmas holidays. The kids are getting ready to enjoy their last few days which consist of very little school work and lots of parties. The shopping malls are crowded with people crossing off all the last-minute things they need to do before the big day. Every year, I also get caught up in the hustle and bustle of the season, and to make sure my focus isn't lost and my priorities misaligned, I always pause and remind myself of what the real meaning of Christmas is.

So what is the real meaning of Christmas? Is it the gifts we have bought and hidden away? Is it the dinners we have scheduled with family and friends? Is it time off work to spend with loved ones? The Bible is very clear that the real meaning of Christmas is God putting on human flesh and coming in the Person of Jesus Christ. Why? Because He loves us! We were lost in our sin and needed a Saviour! Jesus was born to die for our sins. He paid the price for our sins by dying on the cross. Without the birth of Jesus Christ, there would be no hope for humanity. We would have no hope of having our sins forgiven, of being reconciled with God and with one another, of living a life of joy, peace and blessings, and no hope of spending eternity with God in heaven.

The true meaning of Christmas is the celebration of this incredible act of love that is unconditional and not based on feelings or emotions. Jesus doesn't love us because we are lovable or because we earn it or deserve it, but simply because He is love. He is the very definition of love itself, and there is no such thing as loving God and loving others without Jesus.

Jesus Is The Rock

...the Lord God is an everlasting Rock...
~ Isaiah 26:4

*So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation;
the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic."
~ Isaiah 28:16*

As an architect, I know how crucial a strong foundation is to any building project. In the mid-1990s, my fellow classmates and I in Architectural Studies followed the news story of a building in Mississauga whose front façade cracked and sheared some feet into the ground. Turns out that someone in the process of scouting out the land for the building had faked the soil sample reports. The soil was not of a composition that could support the immense weight of the building; it did not have a firm foundation.

There have been times in my life where I have been grateful to have Jesus as my foundation, as my "Rock". Jesus talks about the wise man who built his house upon the rock, so that when storm winds and rains blew, his house stood firm. Like the foolish man, people who do not have Christ as their foundation, build their lives on sand; the things of this world. When the storms of life come, they turn to these things to cope. Eventually their façade crumbles and they are left searching for hope and direction.

Jesus is also described as an everlasting "Rock of Ages" Isaiah 26:4. The cornerstone was usually the largest, the most solid and principle stone in the foundation of a building. Jesus describes Himself as the Cornerstone that His church would be built upon. He serves as the foundation of the Church as well as the foundation for each individual Christian's life.

Is Jesus your rock? He is the only firm foundation for our lives if we

Jesus Is The Faithful God

*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.
~ Hebrews 10:23*

Have you ever felt as though you were in a situation with seemingly no way out? Perhaps you hit rock bottom and didn't know which way to turn? Maybe due to shame and stigma you didn't even tell your family and friends you needed help, and you decided to walk through the season alone. At some point or another, if we're really honest with ourselves, we have all experienced a time in life where we felt like this.

The good news though is that even in your darkest moments, God never left. We are humans, which unfortunately means that no matter how hard we try, we will inevitably make mistakes. God on the other hand, is perfect and always keeps His promises. In Hebrews 10:23 we are reminded that because of His faithfulness, we can be confident in our own faith. Now this may sound redundant or circular but stick with me here. See, because of God's unwavering steadfast presence in our lives, faith is not blind. Faith is rooted in the fact that our God is constant when everything around us is shifting and changing.

I make it a point every day in my quiet moments to reflect on God's faithfulness, because in a way it places me in a position of thankfulness. It is impossible to think of His faithfulness, without by extension, being in complete awe and wonder of the goodness of God. I think we can all agree that He has seen us through some difficult times. Though this time of year can be especially busy and our moments of quiet become few and far between, it is important to make time every day to pause amidst the twinkling lights, presents, food and crowds to remember that God is faithful, even when we are not. Considering all that Christ has done for us, we should be filled with hearts of gratitude at Christmas time. Don't let the world distract you from the greatest reason you have for the hope you profess. His faithfulness is firm, His promises are true and His love will never

Jesus Is The Holy Servant

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable Your servants to speak Your word with great boldness. Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.

~ Acts 4:29-30

When this chapter begins, Peter and John have been called before the Council of elders and rulers and teachers of the religious law. The two men had been preaching the name of Jesus in Jerusalem and had just healed a man who had been lame for over 40 years. In doing so, they lead over 5,000 men to turn their lives to Christ. The Apostles are threatened and told not to preach the name of Jesus anymore, but they boldly refuse. As Peter and John return to where the other believers are gathered, they begin to pray. The believers pray that they would receive boldness to continue to spread the Gospel, and that signs and wonders would accompany them as they did so, rightfully attributing these signs and wonders to the power of Jesus, who they refer to as God's "Holy Servant".

But what is it that makes Jesus God's Holy Servant?

In Acts 4:30, the phrase "Holy Servant" is from the Greek words *Hagiou* and *Paidos*. *Hagiou* literally translates to "separated from sin and therefore consecrated for God". *Paidos* literally translates to "ideal servant of Jehovah". Jesus didn't just resist sin. Jesus was the only Person to ever walk the earth and live a faultless and blameless life, free from sin - truly making Him someone who was set apart for God - stumbling in no area of His life. He set the standard for the life of anyone who walks upright with God.

He is the *Paidos* because His actions are a direct representation of the Father's heart. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" John 14:9. Jesus began the work of bringing God the Father's kingdom to earth by establishing the upside-down Kingdom. Jesus loved those

who society had deemed unloveable and uplifted those who were cast down and out by society. Jesus loved the way the Father loved His people.

If we were to read verse 30 with those two phrases explained, it would sound like this: “Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of [your ideal servant of Jehovah who is separated from sin and therefore consecrated for God.]”

So what does that mean for us?

My prayer for each and every single member of God’s family, is that this Christmas marks the beginning of a new season. That we would model ourselves after Jesus. That we would strive to be ideal servants of Jehovah, separated from sin and therefore consecrated for God. That we lose sight of the fanfare and chaos of everything that we have to do to make our festivities fun and instead, be servants in His upside-down kingdom. That we recognize the abundance God has given us; that we would take time to seek out and care for those who are overlooked and forgotten - in your community, in your school, at your work, or even a stranger! Jesus came to save the weak and shame those who think they are strong; there is no room in the kingdom of God for the pride or arrogance of thinking that we are too busy to love. So let us challenge ourselves and ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes and heart to see those who are neglected and in need. And when we do, may we be ready to emulate the Father’s love and be imitators of his Holy Servant.

~ A. Agrippa

Reflection

Jesus Is The Alpha And Omega

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

~ Revelation 1:8

Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last - like the letters "A" and "Z" in the English alphabet. It also refers to the beginning and the end of something. In Revelation 1:8, Jesus says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." Jesus is the beginning and the end. He was born in a manger in Bethlehem and died on a cross at the age of 33. But the length of His life on earth was not the extent of Him. By calling Himself the Alpha and the Omega, Jesus was declaring His divinity, being one with God the Father. He existed with God in the beginning and will reign with Him forever. Everything begins with God and will somehow end with Him.

Jesus has no first and no beginning. He was, and is and is to come. We, on the other hand all have a first and a beginning. We all start somewhere. Human life begins at conception. As time passes, a little baby achieves important milestones, a toddler learns to walk, a child learns to read, and a teenager transforms into an educated and responsible adult.

My spiritual "first" happened when God intersected my life over 30 years ago. It was then that I was born again. As the Lord Jesus told Nicodemus, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" John 3:3. This timeless and limitless God, who came in the flesh and lived on earth some 2,000 years ago, became the "Alpha" in my life and will be with me at the "Omega" of my life.

Jesus has promised to be with me and has provided all the support I need to walk in abundant life. Through all the ups and downs, through all the joy and pain I have faced, He has been there and continues to be there for me. He does the same for you. He fills in all the blanks

Jesus Is The Chief Cornerstone

The Stone the builders rejected has become the Chief Cornerstone.
~ Psalm 118:22

As a Christian, have you ever been or felt ostracized and rejected because of your faith? Rest assured, there is comfort to be found in this. In His Sermon on the Mount teachings, Jesus reminded us that “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matthew 5:11-12

This persecution and rejection that Jesus spoke about, though present throughout the history of the church, couldn't be any more axiomatic than what we are experiencing today. Christian churches are daily being persecuted on a global scale. Locally, there is and has been concerted effort by government to enact legislation to diminish Christ or obliterate Christ from Christmas.

This prevailing sentiment towards Christ and Christmas is so contrary to the childhood that I experienced. The Christmas that I so nostalgically remember, was one devoid of any political correctness. One where people had no reservations about wishing each other a “Merry Christmas” and the words ‘Happy Holidays’ were commonly used in reference to non-religious observances.

This Christmas, may I challenge and encourage you not to bow down to consensus and to stand firm in your conviction; even if it means rejection. Jesus came unto His own, and they rejected Him. Though He was rejected by mankind, God elevated Him to be seated at His right hand. “The Stone the builders rejected has become the Chief Cornerstone”.

In layman's terminology, “the cornerstone (or foundation stone or setting stone) is the first stone set in the construction of a masonry

Jesus Is The Great I Am

*Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."
~ John 8:58*

Do you remember all the gifts you received for Christmas from the time you were little up until now? Chances are you don't remember everything, but there are a few that stand out in your mind because they meant the most to you. For me it was a pair of red socks that Santa left under the tree for me when I was 3 years old. I don't know why the memory of receiving that cheap pair of red socks is etched in my memory – given that it wasn't anything spectacular. Maybe it's because that was the first time I exercised my faith and I saw results. I had faith that if we went to bed early, like momma said, Santa would come while we slept and leave us gifts. And when we woke up, that youthful faith was rewarded! I ran around excited, filling our house with jubilant shouts: "He came! Just like momma said he would!"

As you've grown older, you have noticed that your Christmas gift wish list has become more sophisticated – and with a price tag to match no less. What if every year from the age of three into adulthood the only gift I received every Christmas was a pair of red socks? That would not go over very well! I would likely feel undervalued and like my loved ones do not know me nor understand me – because that gift that gave me joy decades ago no longer would do so at the stage of life I am in.

In Exodus Chapter 3, we read the story of Moses and the burning bush. God had heard the Israelites' cry for deliverance and was sending Moses to go to Egypt to lead His people out of slavery. A very nervous Moses asked God, "who shall I say sent me?" To which God responded "I AM WHO I AM". When I first read this verse, I was confused. God's explanation seemed incomplete. "I Am?" What was He exactly?

God is EVERYTHING. The Alpha and the Omega. He is the beginning, the end and everything in between. Everything exists because of Him. Without Him nothing exists. Were we to list all His qualities, it would

be like the hymn writer of 'The Love of God' said: Could we with ink the oceans fill, and were the skies of parchment made; were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade; to write the love [and attributes] of God above, would drain the oceans dry; nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.

Is it any wonder then that God simply referred to Himself as "I Am?" Whether we are successful or struggling, He Is. Whether we are joyful or sad, He Is. Whether we are young or old, He Is. Whether we are sick or in good health, He Is. So unlike my red socks, Jesus is the Gift that will never get old. Before Abraham was, Jesus was. He is the Gift for all the seasons of our lives. He is the Gift who is relevant throughout the endless ages. In Him we live and move and have our being.

Unlike our false "faith" in Santa, the faith we have in Jesus and in His second coming is real. The early Christians shouted in jubilation: "He is risen, just like He said He would!" The end-time Christians will shout in jubilation: "He returned for His Bride, just like He said He would!" Jesus is coming back soon. Will you be ready to go with Him? This Christmas, if you do not know Jesus, why don't you invite the I Am to come into your heart? It is one decision you will never regret!

~ *Liz Thuo*

Reflection

Jesus Is Immanuel, God With Us

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel" which means "God with us".
~ Matthew 1:23

Christmas comes with lots of high expectations - happy families enjoying delicious meals together, beautifully decorated homes and wrapped gifts under stunning Christmas trees - but not everyone is able to live up to these ideals. Yes, for many people Christmas is a happy time, but for others it can be one of the most difficult times of the year. For those who have recently lost a loved one, Christmas can intensify feelings of grief and sadness. Many others experience feelings of loneliness, financial pressures, or increased family conflicts that make the season a very stressful time of year.

But what is the message of Christmas? It is that God is with us. Jesus was given the name "Immanuel" meaning God with us, and it is one of the most beautiful names given to Him. No matter what we have or don't have, no matter how we feel, or what we face, He is with us; we are never alone.

Jesus could have been born in glamorous surroundings, in the lap of luxury, but He chose to be born in a stable among smelly barn animals, to show us that He was more concerned about connecting with us in our pain, loss and suffering, than He was about His own comfort.

God is with us. Immanuel is here. He is not unapproachable, inaccessible or some far-off God. He is right here with us. The true meaning of Christmas is clear: God became flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ. He IS Christmas!

So while we may enjoy family time, beautifully decorated homes, and seeing our children and grandchildren's anticipation of opening gifts, we know that is not what Christmas is truly about. For those who are lonely, grieving, suffering from sickness, loss and lack, take it to the

Jesus Is The Indescribable Gift

Thanks be to God for His Indescribable Gift!
~ 2 Corinthians 9:15

Do you remember what gifts you received for Christmas last year? An article in Business Insider on December 12, 2018 stated that according to a Groupon survey, people forget the majority of gifts they receive by this time next year. So if you don't remember what you got last year, you're in good company!

When it comes to gift-giving, we only have to look at Scriptures to learn that it was God who originated this Christmas tradition when He gave His Son as a gift to the world as a baby in a manger. In 2 Corinthians 9:15, Apostle Paul calls this Gift "indescribable".

Interestingly, when Paul writes that Jesus is God's Indescribable Gift, he uses a Greek word for indescribable – *anekdiegetos* that is not found in any other writing. Paul made up this word to describe the Indescribable Gift because words are completely inadequate to describe the gift of God's Son. What words could you use to describe the King of kings born as the poorest of the poor? How do you describe God in flesh, walking on the very earth He spoke into being? How do you describe Jesus taking our sins upon Himself and suffering on the cross? How do you describe the indescribable? Well, you can't, and that is why Jesus is the Indescribable Gift. He simply cannot be boxed up. He is above all things and is in absolute control of all things. Humanly speaking, it is impossible, but with God, everything is possible.

God has given us the gift of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Gift that keeps on giving; the Gift that will never get old, go out of style, break, rust or wear away. Jesus Christ is the perfect Gift for everyone – "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 3:16. As you look for the perfect gifts to give your loved ones

Jesus Is Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince Of Peace

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, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

~ Isaiah 9:6

One of my favourite pieces of music to play at Christmas is George Frederic Handel's Messiah. As a child, it filled our West Indian home with the gorgeous sounds of a European cathedral, rich and soul stirring. One of the movements of that oratorio "For Unto Us A Child Is Born", is based on Isaiah 9:6 which is a prophecy of the coming Messiah. The prophet used descriptive words to shape our understanding of Who our Saviour is.

Wonderful: The word 'wonderful' means "something so magnificent it causes wonder and amazement." Jesus was wonderful in His birth. To redeem sinful mankind, God sent His Son born as a baby in a manger. Jesus was wonderful in His life. He was sinless and His life, miracles and teachings testified to His divine authority. Jesus was also wonderful in His death. He died to make our salvation possible, and His resurrection opened the door to heaven and eternal life for us.

Counsellor: In his prophecy, Isaiah describes Jesus as, "wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom." Jesus is the source of all wisdom, and has an intimate understanding of human nature because He took on human form. No one is better qualified to counsel, teach and advise. In Christ is "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" Colossians 2:3. Our Lord Jesus knows how we feel, what we think, and He always knows what we should do in every circumstance.

The Mighty God: Isaiah reminds us that the baby in the manger is our true hero. The name Mighty God in Hebrew is *El Gibbor*. *El* refers to the one true God, while *Gibbor* means "strength, power, hero." In a

society where heroes are characterized by talent, intelligence or wealth, the only one truly worthy to be called “hero” is the One whose might is unprecedented. The Messiah would not only have the power of God, He would be the God of power!

The Everlasting Father: The Lord Jesus holds all things together, and everything in heaven and earth were created by Him. There is no one greater than Him. He has no equal, no rival. He is eternal, He is everlasting. He is Father, Protector and Provider to His children through His life, death and resurrection, for all time.

Prince of Peace: In a world marked by conflict and hopelessness, Isaiah presents the Messiah as the One who would bring peace. This peace is not like anything the world can offer, but one that stands the test of time and circumstance. This peace surpasses all human understanding because it comes right from God. It guards our hearts and fills us with hope.

Today is Christmas Day. Let us allow the magnitude of who Jesus is fill us with awe until we can do nothing but marvel at the amazing gift He has given us of Himself.

~ N. Georges-Bennett

— M E R R Y —
Christmas

Jesus Is The Light Of The World

"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

One thing I love about Christmas is the decorations – more so all the pretty lights that people string on their Christmas trees and on the outside of their houses. In those bitterly cold and dreary wintry nights, nothing peeps up my mood faster than gazing upon the twinkling lights. I find it particularly interesting that some individuals and businesses put their lights up as early as October! They instill a sense of urgency in us by sending us a loud and clear message: "Ready or not, here comes Christmas! If you haven't started planning for it, you better get to it soon!"

If you have ever experienced a power outage at night, you realize at that moment just how much you rely on light to get things done. Without light, we stumble about in the dark, unsure of which way we should go. Such was life before Christ. The world was broken. Mankind was living in darkness and in sin; struggling, unsuccessfully, to obey all the Laws of Moses. People were confused, harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. But then God sent his Son, Jesus. And like the song writer said, "He came to love, heal and forgive. He lived and died to buy my pardon. An empty grave is there to prove my Saviour lives!"

Because of the birth and sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, Light entered our world. And when He rose from the dead, the Light of the World forever conquered darkness; never to be extinguished. And just like the Christmas lights brighten up the darkest of nights, Jesus promises that if we follow Him, we will never stumble about in darkness. He is our Good Shepherd. He leads and lights the way for us. So while we may not understand why we must suffer, or why we must walk certain difficult paths, we can rest assured that with Christ dwelling in our hearts, we are overcomers and have a living hope for this life and

for the life to come. We can face uncertain days without fear because we know the One who holds our future. “Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart because I [Jesus] have overcome the world” John 16:33.

So this Christmas season, I encourage you to “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight” Proverbs 3:5-6.

And finally, like those keen early decorators who warn us that Christmas is just around the corner, I too would like to sound an alarm. If you do not know Jesus as your personal Saviour, God is calling you out of darkness into His marvelous light. I would beseech you to surrender your heart to Him. “Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near” Isaiah 55:6.

~ *Liz Thuo*

Reflection

Jesus Is The True Vine

*"I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Gardener."
~ John 15:1*

Every time I read this passage, I am reminded of all the people who get all amped up for the event of Christmas. Those who get dressed up *real nice* and do their hair ever so fancily so that they can go to Christmas eve/Christmas day service. But once Christmas is over, with the exception of the occasional wedding or funeral, those same people are unlikely to set foot in church until Easter! I am sure we all have a few friends or extended family that come to mind at this point. Those who go through the motions of these sacred dates miss what this passage is pointing out. That there is an importance, no, an urgency in remaining in Jesus constantly.

See when the words "True Vine" are spoken, Jesus is using two Greek words: *alethinos ampelos*. *Alethinos* means the "true" in the sense of being real, ideal, genuine. It is used to declare a state of authenticity. John 7:8 and 1 Thessalonians 1:9 use this word to say that Jesus is the only REAL God as opposed to all the false gods that are worshipped. *Ampelos* literally translates to "vine". In this instance it is an illustration of Jesus - the source of life. In a simple five-word statement, Jesus teaches that He is the real, authentic, source of life. He goes on to say in John 15:2, that God the Father is the Gardener and cuts off every branch that does not bear fruit. Those who do not belong to Jesus cannot bear fruit, for He is the source of life. And those who do not bear fruit do not remain in the kingdom of God the Father.

While this passage of scripture is a warning, and all those who read and hear it should take heed, it is also an example of the Father's great love. See nothing Jesus says is an accident or a coincidence. He is the Living Word after all. In verse 2, when Jesus uses the words "cuts off", it comes from the greek *aīro* which while it does mean "cuts off", it also means "raises up". Ancient vineyards ran along the ground, and the vines needed to be "raised up" to encourage fruit growth. This is

mirrored by James, brother of Jesus, in James 1:21 when he writes “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.” See the act of engrafting was used to save a damaged, dying or fruitless branch. The farmer would cut off (*airo*) the branch in question and reattach it to the healthy vine (the engrafted word), raising it up (*airo*) surrounded by healthy branches so that it may grow (become a fruitful believer).

I know many of us pray for our loved ones who do not follow Jesus, and Christmas is a reminder to many of us about where they may stand. But I want to encourage you, to work and pray with the same urgency that this warning is given, making the most of this Christmas to share the gospel, the reason for this season at every turn. Simultaneously, holding on to the hope and expectation that Jesus is doing what He does best and that God the Father is perfecting His garden.

~ A. Agrippa

Reflection

Jesus Is My Redeemer

"And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth."

~ Job 19:25

If you've grown up in church like I have, you're probably quite familiar with the term "redeemer." We can hear it in popular songs like Nicole Mullin's "My Redeemer Lives," or even the old classic "O Divine Redeemer." This term is applied to Christ in most contexts, but have you ever wondered what exactly it entails? What does it mean to be redeemed? Why does it matter that Jesus is our Redeemer?

Our passage today comes from Job which was written in Hebrew. The word for "redeemer" in the original language is *Go'el* which holds a beautiful meaning when paralleled to the salvation work of Jesus. The Hebrew word for redeemer translates into "kinsman." A kinsman's job during that time in history was to save and settle family property, as well as reclaim and restore family members from a position of debt and slavery. Beyond this, they were also responsible for being justice bringers for murdered loved ones.

Picture with me, Jesus standing next to you as your Kinsman. Jesus, being the One who would personally go forth to win you back from the grasp of slavery to sin and death. It is in this scenario that we see Jesus demonstrating His perfect love for us. Not only has Jesus come to be your Redeemer, but to rename you as His redeemed. You, child of God, are free! Your debt is fully paid, your past has been forgotten and cast as far as the east is from the west. You are loved endlessly and called a friend of the Most High - all because of our Kinsman Redeemer Jesus Christ.

I encourage you to reflect on what Christ being your Redeemer means to you in your specific season and circumstance. My prayer for you today is that you sink into the beautiful truth that Christ has come to be your Kinsman Redeemer. Do you believe Christ has settled your

Jesus Is Jehovah Rapha, My Healer

"I am the Lord who heals you."

~ Exodus 15:26

One thing that causes us most anguish is when we or our loved ones are sick. I recall when I first got the news that my dad had kidney failure - which also led to nerve damage and paralysis. It was devastating! The physical toll on him, and the financial, mental and emotional toll on the family was *almost* more than we could bear. We prayed for him fervently for 13 years. And while he showed remarkable improvement, eventually, I got that most dreaded call that my dad had passed away suddenly. So were all our prayers in vain? Absolutely not. We saw God's hand throughout dad's illness. He provided for our financial needs and granted us His joy and peace that passes all understanding. He proved that indeed He is the God who walks with us even when we traverse through the valley of the shadow of death. God also physically touched my dad - he regained a lot of his mobility and lived well past what the doctors had predicted. But most importantly of all, my dad, who rarely set foot in church except for special occasions, surrendered his life to Jesus at home one night! So while healing did not necessarily come in the package we expected, there is absolutely no doubt that Jesus intervened in our situation.

The enemy attacks the church through sickness and brokenness. We or our loved ones experience illness, strained or broken relationships, emotional distress, or mental anguish. At times the situation seems downright hopeless. But there is hope in the Person of Jesus Christ.

In Exodus 15, God presents Himself to the people of Israel with a new name: *Jehovah Rapha*. *Jehovah* means "I AM God". *Rapha* means "healer" or physician", but it also means "to mend, cure, restore thoroughly, make whole." So this name can be used to describe the Lord Jesus who heals us and makes us whole again. *Jehovah Rapha* heals broken bodies, broken minds, broken hearts, broken lives and broken relationships.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus the Great Physician, healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, made the lame walk, and even brought back the dead! He restored hope to broken families and comforted those who struggled with insecurities, shame and hopelessness. The Lord Jesus went to the cross and died to make all forms of healing - physical, emotional and spiritual - available to every one of us. "But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed" Isaiah 53:5. When the Lord Jesus went up on the cross, He took all the sin, sickness, brokenness and shame that was ours and replaced it with forgiveness, health, wholeness, joy, a sense of belonging and eternal life with Him.

Are you broken-hearted today? Are you sick? Is your relationship on the brink of breaking? Are you mentally and emotionally exhausted? Call upon *Jehovah Rapha*, your Great Healer. Luke 4:40 recounts to us this truth: "As the sun went down that evening, people throughout the village brought sick family members to Jesus. *No matter what their diseases were*, the touch of His hand *healed every one.*" Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. He changes not. He is still in the healing and miracle-working business. "So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most" Hebrews 4:16.

~ *Liz Thuo*

Reflection

Jesus |s El Olam, Everlasting Father

*From everlasting to everlasting, You are God.
~ Psalm 90:2b*

When racial conflicts escalated in the land of our birth, my family was among the many who left for safety and refuge in other lands. Our life was marked by insecurity, rootlessness and confusion. Perhaps Mary, the mother of Jesus, almost at the end of her pregnancy, experienced similar feelings as she set off on a long journey with her husband Joseph to register for census in Bethlehem. She would be far away from her mother and all her female relatives who could have helped her at the time of delivering her baby.

When life suddenly takes twists or turns, do you ever wonder whether you are walking in the will of God? Then you are a candidate, as Mary was, and as my family was, for discovering *El Olam* – the Everlasting God, the Eternal God. He sees down the corridors of time whether backward or forward, beyond anything known to man. '*Olam*' means secret, hidden, mysterious. Everything that happened to Joseph and Mary and their Son was in the full knowledge and purpose of *El Olam* who had planned and accomplished every detail regarding the birth of God in human flesh.

Friends, what comfort and confidence we all gain from the knowledge that *El Olam* has absolute control over all the unknown and all the stormy situations of our lives which are beyond our comprehension - such as the sudden death of a loved one, the loss of a job, conflicts in family and among friends, and the diagnosis of ill health. *El Olam* not only sees, but also brings good out of those situations.

Abraham had been experiencing increasing discouragement and insecurity at the repeated loss of wells of water. It was at this point that Abraham made a new discovery of God as *El Olam* who overrides all the uncertainties of life. In Genesis 21 we read that the King of Philistines acceded that Abraham was the owner of the well he had

Jesus Is My Promise Keeper

*For no matter how many promises God has made,
they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through Him the "Amen" is
spoken by us to the glory of God."
~ 2 Corinthians 1:20*

When I was a teenager, my parents would continually remind me to not make promises I could not keep. Unfortunately, I did not always follow my parents' advice because I wanted to please everyone and couldn't bear to say "no, I can't". I found myself time and time again, over-committing and not being able to fulfill the promises I had made. Before long, I came to realize that my word didn't mean much to most people anymore. It was a difficult truth to face - that I had let people down, disappointed others and even failed some, simply because I had broken the promises I made.

Over the years, I have learned to make less and less promises, especially to my children, because I know that I cannot control the future, the economy and even the weather. Things come up, plans change and since I don't know what tomorrow holds, it's best not to make any promises I'm not sure I can keep.

But did you know that there is Someone who will never break any promises He makes? He is the never-forgetting, always promise-keeping God, and His name is Jesus. Abraham knew Him as a promise-maker. Moses knew Him as a promise-keeper. We know Him as the One in whom all the promises of God are yes and Amen!

When we think back to the day Jesus was born, over 2,000 years ago, we are reminded that many God-fearing people were waiting, longing, hoping for the fulfilment of all that God had promised to them. And when Jesus came into the world, all the promises of God concerning the Saviour of the world were fulfilled.

In Jesus, there is now no condemnation against you. In Jesus, you did

not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but a spirit of adoption by which you cry out, "Abba, Father!" In Jesus, the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed. In Jesus, you know that He who did not spare His own son, but freely gave Him up for us all, will also with Him freely give you all things. In Jesus, there is nothing that can separate you from the love of God.

What has God promised you that is still unfulfilled in your life? Have you given up on it or deemed it is too difficult? As this year draws to a close, declare this simple truth over your life: "God's promises are true for me!" Don't let doubt keep you from experiencing His blessings this new year. Move forward in faith, believing His Word, always trusting Him, being faithful and obedient. Jesus, the One in whom all the promises of God are yes and Amen, will keep His promises to you!

~ S. Foerster

Reflection

Jesus Makes All Things New

He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

~ Revelation 21:5

Christmas celebrations are over, and the New Year is upon us! Many of us ended last year with new toys, new clothes and new gadgets; but we are also starting off the year with new things like new resolutions to attempt to live by and a new calendar on the wall. Everybody likes new things, including our Lord Jesus. In fact, in Isaiah 43:18-19 He declares "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." The marvellous thing is that our Lord Jesus offers this reality to all those who will give up their past with its sins, failures, loss, pain and heartbreak, and trust the Lord with their future.

Last night we celebrated the dawning of the New Year as The Lakeside Church family, as we welcomed 2020 and said goodbye to 2019. The One who makes all things new knows that dwelling on the past, on what is of no benefit to us, will only keep us captive and hold us back from seeing that our faithful Saviour and Lord is making a way for us in the wilderness and providing streams in the wastelands.

Like the people of Israel, we are on a wilderness journey, but the Lord promises to go before us: "My Presence will go with you and I will give you rest" Exodus 33:14. He did not say His Presence would stay with us, but rather His presence would go with us. God's Presence has a 'go' in it, so in the power of the Holy Spirit and with Jesus, we can GO forward into the future as a vibrant, Spirit-filled, loving, serving, Gospel-sharing people. We may not know the path we have to travel this year, but we know Who goes before us, and that makes all the difference.

In Joshua 1:9 we are admonished to "Be strong and courageous. Do not

be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." Therefore, we can look forward with expectancy and hope for the future, for He who is faithful and true will make all things new.

Are you ready to receive all the Lord Jesus has for you? He promises us new mercies, new grace, new blessings, new opportunities, new responsibilities, new victories, new testimonies, and new people coming into His kingdom.

Happy New Year!

~ B. Foerster



I Have Decided To Follow Jesus Christ

The Lord's Invitation To You

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me" Revelation 3:20.

Prayer Of Salvation

Lord Jesus, for too long I've kept You out of my life. I know that I am a sinner. I cannot save myself. No amount of good works could ever gain me entry into heaven. No longer will I close the door when I hear You knocking. By faith I gratefully receive Your gift of salvation. I am ready to trust You as my Lord and Saviour. Thank you Jesus, for coming to earth. I believe You are the Son of God who died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead on the third day. Thank You for bearing my sins and giving me the gift of eternal life. I believe Your words are true. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus, and be my Saviour. Amen.

Now What?

- If you've prayed this prayer and you believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord, you are now a born-again follower of Jesus. This is a fact, whether or not you feel any different. The Bible tells us that your eternal salvation is secure! "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" Romans 10:9-10.
- Share the good news with someone - especially a fellow follower of Jesus so they can encourage and pray for you and with you.
- Get into the habit of daily reading the Bible and talking with God through prayer. The Book of John is a great place to start.
- Join a local church that preaches the *whole* Gospel of Jesus. Journey with other believers by joining a care/cell group.

Congratulations! Welcome to the family of Jesus!

At The Lakeside Church you are never alone. We are a community of believers devoted to the Word of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to love and build up one another, and evangelize for Jesus.

There are many resources within the TLC family available to support you as you journey through this life with Jesus, the Lover of your soul.



On-Line Resources

Visit **The Lakeside Church's** website for inspirational weekly bulletin articles and sermon notes and audio. You may also call or email the pastors at 647-738-5685 or info@thelakesidechurch.ca.

www.thelakesidechurch.ca



Visit **Seen to Unseen Blog's** website for insights into how God take what we learn in the natural (seen) world and translate those powerful lessons to inform how we are to live godly lives.

www.seentounseen.com



Engage with The Lakeside Church (TLC) family beyond the walls. Be updated on TLC news and ongoing events. Join the conversation online on **Instagram** and **Facebook**.

[Instagram.com/lakesidechurchto](https://www.instagram.com/lakesidechurchto)

[Facebook.com/lakesidechurchtoronto](https://www.facebook.com/lakesidechurchtoronto)

Worship With Us

Join us every Sunday at 10:30 am for our worship services. We have programs for all age groups. We meet at the Scarborough SDA Church building: 4350 Lawrence Ave East, Scarborough, Ontario.



You will seek Me and find Me
when you seek Me
with all your heart.

Jeremiah 29:13