

The image features a lit candle as the central focus. The candle is lit, with a bright flame at the top and a warm, golden glow emanating from the wax. The background is dark, with some faint, out-of-focus light spots. Overlaid on the candle is the title 'The Light of Advent' in a white, elegant cursive script. The word 'The' is at the top, 'Light of' is in the middle, and 'Advent' is at the bottom. The text is centered and follows the shape of the candle's flame and wax.

*The  
Light of  
Advent*

A Four Week Devotional

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Downloadable copies of this publication and daily podcasts of this devotional series are available at:

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11/30/2014

## First Sunday of Advent

### The Candle of Hope

This year, we are challenging our members to take the light of Christ beyond the walls of their homes. We are asking you to find one person or one other family that you can specifically and intentionally bless this Christmas.

After you light the first Advent candle, the Candle of Hope, pray as a family that God will give you a name of a person or of a family that you can be a blessing to.

Remember that blessings can take many forms. It could be visiting someone, hosting a meal, offering a ride, babysitting, or any number of things.

Be willing to step outside of your circle of close friends and your family / church family if that is where God calls. Maybe God is calling you to bless the neighbor with the annoying dog, or a co-worker who makes fun of your faith. Maybe he is calling you to bless someone that you barely know. It is in those moments of surrender that you become the hands and feet of Christ.

Once you know who it is that God is calling on you to bless this Christmas, write their name below. If you aren't sure yet don't force it. Pray specifically for guidance, trust in His timing, and write it in when He reveals it.

This Christmas, our family is going to bless:

12/1/2014

## The Word

*John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (NASB)*

Those who are new to Christianity, or those who wish to have a "back to the basics" Bible study, are often encouraged to begin by reading the book of John. Not only does John's gospel give us an account of the things that Jesus did, but it establishes beyond any doubt who Jesus was.

Here in the opening volley of John's testimony of Christ is the establishing statement upon which everything else hinges. Before the reader goes any further, before any other information is presented, John begins by affirming the Deity of Jesus Christ.

In fact, most Bibles label this section of text "The Deity of Christ."

This statement of belief, this testimony of experience, is the basis upon which the entire gospel rests.

In Matthew Henry's commentary on this verse, he says the following: "This proves him fit to undertake our salvation; for life and light, spiritual and eternal life and light, are the two great things that fallen man, who lies so much under the power of death and darkness, has need of."

As we prepare to celebrate the Advent season, the foundation of that celebration must begin here. Because Jesus was fully God and fully man, because He was worthy to die for our sins, we are able to receive the greatest gift ever given.

12/2/2014

## The Word Became Flesh

*John 1:14 <sup>14</sup>“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (NASB)*

In his classic theological text *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis had this to say about Jesus: *“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.*

*That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse.*

*You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”*

We can light candles, hang wreaths, sing carols, send cards, attend services, and set out nativities. Yet if we do not begin by accepting Jesus for who He claimed to be, we may as well save ourselves the trouble. Celebrating the birth of Christ is not about nostalgia or ceremony, it is about saying to Christ, You are who you said You are, you did what you said you would do, and I am willing to stake everything on it.

12/3/2014

## The Confession

*John 1:29* <sup>“29</sup>*The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, ‘Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’”*  
(NASB)

John’s use of terminology in this verse establish two things regarding Jesus and His reason for being on this earth. First, John identifies Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God. His audience that day would have had two associations with that terminology: the Paschal lamb & the Messiah. The Paschal Lamb was the sacrifice made during Passover to celebrate the deliverance from bondage in Egypt.

In Isaiah 53:7, we read <sup>“7</sup>*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth”*  
(NASB)

John’s reference to Christ as the Lamb of God establishes him as both the Messiah and the means by which the people will be delivered from their bondage of sin.

The second thing John does in this passage is expand the scope of Jesus’ salvation. He didn’t say that Jesus would take away the sins of the religious, or the sins of the Jewish, or the sins of the people who tried really hard to earn it, John says the Lamb will take away the sins of the world.

John knew that God’s plan was bigger than one city, one nation, one region, one people. God’s plan was to so thoroughly shatter the bondage of sin that no one would ever be beyond the reach of grace.

12/4/2014

## We Have Found The Messiah

*John 1:40-42* <sup>40</sup>“One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. <sup>41</sup>He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which translated means Christ). <sup>42</sup>He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).” (NASB)

Though he didn’t know it yet, Peter was about to embark on a journey that would take him from a simple fisherman living in an out-of-the-way town in a nation under foreign occupation, and transform him into the leader of the early church.

There was no way he could have foreseen what this encounter with Christ would mean, no way he could have predicted how his life would change, no way he could have understood the choice he was about to make to either follow Christ, or keep on fishing.

I am always fascinated by how the twelve disciples came to Jesus. These men weren’t interviewing with church leaders on their last day of seminary, sending out resumes with a written philosophy of ministry, putting their profiles on a bulletin board, or checking the want ads for open positions.

Instead, time and again we see them being brought to Jesus by others. First Andrew comes to know Christ through the testimony of John the Baptist, then he uses his own testimony to bring Peter to meet Christ. How is God wanting to use your story? Who is He putting in your path? How has He called you to share the gift of grace with this Advent season?

12/5/2014

## The Invitation

*John 1:45-46* <sup>45</sup>Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote— Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' <sup>46</sup>Nathanael said to him, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.'" (NASB)

How do you reply when someone rejects your testimony? What do you say when they look at your church and say "No good can come of religion!"?

It's not an easy position to be in. As people of faith, who know God and walk with Him daily, the tendency is to immediately jump to His defense. We want to prove our faith, defend our God, and convince people of the truth we have come to know.

Yet maybe what we are called to do is not to enter into an intellectual argument. Maybe, just maybe, we need to do exactly what Phillip did.

Notice he wasn't casting down judgment, he wasn't attempting to bring shame or guilt, and he wasn't trying to convince Philip of the error of his way.

How did Philip reply?

"Come and see."

How would such a reply change the way people view your testimony? What would our church look like if our response to those who doubt was simply "Come and see"?

12/6/2014

## The Revelation

*John 1:47-51* <sup>47</sup>“Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, **‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!’** <sup>48</sup>Nathanael said to Him, ‘How do You know me?’ Jesus answered and said to him, **‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’** <sup>49</sup>Nathanael answered Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.’ <sup>50</sup>Jesus answered and said to him, **‘Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.’** <sup>51</sup>And He said to him, **‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’**” (NASB)

The water has not yet been turned into wine. Lepers have not yet been miraculously healed. Five thousand men are yet to be fed, and an after dinner stroll across the waters of Galilee isn't even on the radar.

None of the things we think of when we ponder Jesus' ministry and life on earth had taken place. I wonder what Jesus' face looked like when he said this to Nathanael. In my eyes, I see him smiling a bit. I picture this moment where Jesus is trying to convey to Nathanael just what he was going to experience if he stays and becomes a disciple.

I picture a twinkle in Jesus' eye and a smile on his face as he looks at Nathanael, Philip, Peter, Andrew, and the other men beginning to gather around Him, and then looks through eternity at you and says “You haven't seen anything yet! Just wait and see what my Father is going to do next!”

12/07/2014

## Second Sunday of Advent

### The Candle of Love

Has God revealed to you a name yet?

After lighting the second candle of Advent, The Candle of Love, share with one another how the love of Christ has changed you.

How does it change the way you see yourself?

How does it change the way you see others?

Now think about the person God has laid upon your heart. How is He calling you to show them love?

What way can you be a blessing to and how can you ensure that the glory goes to God?

Tonight, pray specifically as a family that God will reveal to you how to be a blessing. Pray that He will be the one who receives the glory. Pray that He will make this time an act of worship for you and for your family. And finally, pray that this challenge will be used to show others the love of Christ.

In the space below, write down how you feel God may be calling you and your family to be a blessing this Christmas.

12/8/2014     **Born Again**

*John 3:1-3    <sup>1</sup>Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; <sup>2</sup>this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.’ <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered and said to him, **‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’**”*

It’s interesting to note that Nicodemus didn’t meet Jesus in the temple, or while he was out preaching, or when he was healing the sick. Instead, Nicodemus comes under cover of darkness to meet one on one.

Nicodemus begins the meeting by giving Jesus some props. In verse 2, he acknowledges that the Pharisees know that Jesus came from God.

What Jesus does next, is surprising. He completely ignores what Nicodemus just said and replies **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”**

In one moment, Jesus bypasses all of the religious rhetoric and goes straight to the heart of the matter. Wherever Nicodemus was planning to go no longer matters.

In a single sentence Jesus lays out exactly who he is and why he’s here on this earth. When we stand before God, it is not going to matter how many days we sat in church, how many people we invited, or how many faith based posts we put on Facebook. The **ONLY** thing that will matter is how we answer the question “Are you born again?”

12/09/2014

## The Law of Grace

*John 3:4-8* <sup>4</sup>“Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?’ <sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, **‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.**

**<sup>6</sup>That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup>The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.’”**

For his entire life, Nicodemus had been taught that the way to earn eternal life was to follow the law to the strictest degree. The faith of a Pharisee was consumed by his own ability to know and keep both the written law and the oral law. There was no room for error, no allowance for deviation, and no place for grace.

Nicodemus was onto something in verse 4. In pointing out the impossibility of a man re-entering his mother’s room to be physically reborn, he was inadvertently pointing out the impossibility of earning our way to salvation.

In verse six, Jesus spells it out, the flesh cannot achieve anything other than making more flesh. Paul sums it up for us in Ephesians 2:8-9 <sup>8</sup>“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (NASB)

12/10/2014

## A New Healing

*John 3:12-15 <sup>12</sup>'If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? <sup>13</sup>No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup>As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; <sup>15</sup>so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life.'*

Nicodemus was so focused on the here and now, so consumed with following every single letter of the law that he completely missed the point of why he was following it in the first place.

In this passage, Jesus takes the Pharisee way of thinking, reveals it for all of its flaws, and makes it known that something new is about to happen.

Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man, giving authority to what he is about to say next. Then, in verse 14, Jesus predicts both the means of his death and the effect it will have.

Back in Numbers 21, the Israelites were being killed by the bites of venomous snakes. God had Moses create a bronze serpent on a pole and hold it up, and if anyone was bitten, they would look at the serpent and be healed.

Jesus knew that all mankind had been bitten by the serpent of sin. He understood that the venom within us was fatal and that apart from his intervention, it would result in our death.

Unwilling to leave us in death, he allowed himself to be lifted up, to be the sacrifice for our sin, to be the one on whom we look to have eternal life.

12/11/2014 **For God So Loved**

John 3:16-17 <sup>16</sup>*“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” (NASB)*

If you grew up in the church, chances are that John 3:16 was one of the very first verses you memorized.

There is a reason for that.

In this one statement, Jesus proclaimed the greatest news that the world had ever known or would ever come to know. It is the reason he came to earth, it is the reason he was crucified and resurrected, it is the reason we have the hope of salvation.

Without Calvary, the manger loses all meaning.

It is the cross that gives Christmas its relevancy. It is Christ who is the focus of our celebrations. No matter what gifts we give this season or what gifts we receive, none will even come close to the gift of grace that Christ has given us.

As the hustle and bustle that accompanies this time of year begins to intensify, be intentional in keeping your focus on Christ. As you celebrate his birth and read the stories of the angels and shepherds, remember this passage.

The baby lying in a manger was here for a purpose. “...***that the world might be saved through Him.***”

12/12/2014

## ***The Light of Advent***

*John 3:19-21* ***“<sup>19</sup>This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup>For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”***  
(NASB)

Two contrasting reactions to Jesus are presented here. Two choices are placed before us. Two outcomes are made available.

The Pharisees, who were consumed by power and narcissistic pride, would eagerly proclaim the law and hurl condemnation on “commoners”. Yet Jesus saw through their charade time and again. In this passage, he reveals the motivation behind what they do. They withdraw themselves from The Light because of the evilness of their deeds.

One of the most zealous Pharisees, a man named Saul, encountered Christ in the form of a blinding light. From that moment forward the evil deeds of his past were forgiven, and the motivation for his life was forever changed.

For the rest of his time on earth, the theme of “In Christ” would repeat itself, as the man now called Paul, made it the central focus of his letters. And, as he neared the end of his life, Paul gave all glory for this change to God.

Today you can choose to allow the light of Advent light to fill your heart, remove the stain of sin, and to change the course of your life.

12/13/2014

## Lavish Gifts

*John 3:33-36* <sup>33</sup>**He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true.** <sup>34</sup>**For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.** <sup>35</sup>**The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.** <sup>36</sup>**He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” (NASB)**

I don't quote from The Message often because it is paraphrase and not a translation. Yet, I was especially moved by the way that Eugene Peterson interpreted this passage *“The One that God sent speaks God’s words. And don’t think he rations out the Spirit in bits and pieces. The Father loves the Son extravagantly. He turned everything over to him so he could give it away—a lavish distribution of gifts. That is why whoever accepts and trusts the Son gets in on everything, life complete and forever! And that is also why the person who avoids and distrusts the Son is in the dark and doesn’t see life. All he experiences of God is darkness, and an angry darkness at that.” (THE MESSAGE)*

As a parent, I know what it is like to want to give lavish gifts to your children. We want to show them our love, to fill them with joy, and to see their eyes light up as they come running into the living room on Christmas morning.

Yet far more valuable than the stocking stuffers and wrapped packages we shove under the tree every year are the spiritual gifts that God has freely given to all of us.

What great gift has God given you that is yet to be unwrapped? What new work is He calling you to accomplish?

12/14/2014

## Third Sunday of Advent

### The Candle of Joy

How has God given you joy this year?

So many people struggle during this season with depression, loneliness, financial worries, and the overwhelming desire to make everyone else happy.

Can you still find joy in those moments? Can you still hear His small voice calling out to you, offering quiet comfort and peace?

Take some time to share those times of difficulty when in the unlikeliest of moments, you still had joy.

Now, how can you help bring joy to someone else?

Do you have your name yet? Has God revealed how you can be a blessing to that person?

This week we will look at the gifts Christ gave in the book of John. As you study The Word, create a plan of action for how you will be a blessing. Assign tasks, make a check list and get the final pieces in place to be the hands and feet of Christ.

12/15/2014

## Gift of Love

*John 4:11-14* <sup>11</sup>"She said to Him, 'Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?' <sup>12</sup>You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?' <sup>13</sup>Jesus answered and said to her, '**Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; <sup>14</sup>but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.**'"

Jesus didn't have to go through Samaria. Nor did Jesus have to stop in this village and wait for this woman to arrive at the well. He knew she would be there, he knew she was living in sin, he knew the Samaritans did not interact with Jews. And yet, Jesus sent his disciples away and sat down at the well to wait.

With a purpose he went among those who were considered "lowlifes" and social outcasts.

With intention, Christ went to those with whom the church would never associate.

Jesus transcended the boundaries of social structure, race, gender, and theology. He did not demand the Samaritan woman to clean up her act, turn from her sin, and only then come and seek him.

Instead, fully knowing her brokenness and her unworthiness of receiving what he was about to offer, Jesus reaches out to her in love and offers her the best that he has, the ability to thirst no more.

12/16/2014

## Gift of Healing

*John 5:5-9* <sup>5</sup>“A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, **‘Do you wish to get well?’** <sup>7</sup> The sick man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.’ <sup>8</sup> Jesus said to him, **‘Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.’** <sup>9</sup>Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk.”

One of the most surprising things about this passage is Jesus response to the seeing the man lying there. **“Do you wish to get well?”**

It seems almost absurd to ask. In that era, being unable to walk would have been seen as a curse or a punishment for sin. The man would have been scorned and hated his entire life. Why would anyone not want to end this?

What is even more intriguing is the response that Jesus gets. The man doesn't answer in the affirmative, he instead explains that by his own strength he is unable to be healed. Though he can see where he needs to be, and knows where the source of healing comes from, he does not have the power to attain it without help.

Jesus, rather than promising to help the man enter the pool, demonstrates his own authority by healing him instantly. The story becomes the perfect illustration of Jesus' mission. He has come to break the bondage of sin that so thoroughly binds us and offers freedom to any who are willing to be healed.

12/17/2014

## Gift of Sustenance

*John 8:10-13* <sup>10</sup>Jesus said, **“Have the people sit down.”** Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. <sup>11</sup>Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup>When they were filled, He said to His disciples, **“Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost.”** <sup>13</sup>So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

Anyone who has ever had to plan for a large crowd can appreciate that logistics can be the biggest challenge. This was especially true in the days before fast food and rapid transit.

Jesus’ teachings were drawing massive numbers of people and Jesus had compassion for them and wanted to ensure they had something to eat.

Jesus knew what hunger was like. He had spent forty days fasting in the wilderness and was tempted to make a loaf of bread to eat. Yet he resisted because he knew the motivation would not be meant to honor God.

Here, it is different. Here he performs essentially the same act, yet it was done for the glory of the Father. When you strip it all down, Christian service is not about what you do or how you do it; the only thing that matters is why you do it and who gets the glory. Let that principle guide you as you bless others.

12/18/2014

## Gift of Salvation

*John 5:7-11* <sup>7</sup>*“But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them ‘**He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.**’*

<sup>8</sup>*Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup>When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court.*

<sup>10</sup>*Straightening up, Jesus said to her, ‘**Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?**’ <sup>11</sup>She said, ‘**No one, Lord.**’ And Jesus said, ‘**I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.**’”*

You would be hard pressed to find a passage of scripture more mis-used than this one.

Some like to drop the second half of verse 11, (when Jesus calls the woman’s sexual deviancy a sin and commands her to stop doing it) from this passage in order to justify their own rebellion. Others read this and believe that they can never witness to anyone without being a hypocrite.

Both positions are wrong.

This story is neither a free pass to live our lives however we see fit and demand that no one be allowed to challenge us, nor is it a moratorium on speaking out against sin.

Instead it’s an amazing picture of a God who sees our brokenness, lifts us from the guilt and shame of our sin, restores us to a relationship with Him, and empowers us to live as His people.

12/19/2014

## The Gift of Sight

John 9:1-5 *“<sup>1</sup>As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ <sup>3</sup>‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup>As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’*

Jesus would go on to heal the blind man. Yet this passage is about much more than physical healing. In his interaction with his disciples, Jesus confronts a far greater issue than physical blindness, he is addressing spiritual blindness.

Like the Pharisees, the disciples were raised in a faith of moral equivalency. They believed that the level of physical, financial, and social wellness you held, (or the lack thereof) were a direct reflection of your personal holiness. Today, there are many who still believe and teach this “prosperity doctrine”. It is as wrong now as it was then.

Jesus came to bring light not only to our need for a savior but also to illuminate our misunderstandings about what it means to be God’s people. He took everything we thought we knew about God, turned it on its head and forever changed our relationship with Him forever.

We don’t live our faith because of what we can get, nor do we live it in fear of God punishing us if we mess up. When the Light of Advent began to illuminate the world, it changed the focus from rules to a relationship.

12/20/2014

## The Gift of Resurrection

John 11:40-44 <sup>40</sup>Then Jesus said, ***'Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?'*** <sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, ***'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup>I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.'*** <sup>43</sup>When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, ***'Lazarus, come out!'*** <sup>44</sup>The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, ***'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.'***

This was the final miracle recorded in John before the start of "Passion Week". Soon, Jesus would be entering Jerusalem in The Triumphal Entry which we celebrate as Palm Sunday.

All of the pieces were now in place, and as he stood on the precipice of his crucifixion, Jesus astounds his followers with a preview of what he was sent to do.

By waiting until Lazarus was dead three days, Jesus both proved that he had power of death and gave the disciples a visual aide of what was going to happen to him.

Many like to dismiss Jesus as a good teacher, or a great prophet, or a philosopher, or merely a historical figure. Yet in this moment, he proves he is far more than any of those things.

The Light of Advent was the Light of the World. God incarnate, present at the dawn of time, sent as a ransom to redeem your soul. He was the greatest gift ever offered to mankind, freely given in a love that is beyond all measure.

12/21/2014

## Fourth Sunday of Advent

### The Candle of Peace

*Hebrews 13:20-21 says: “<sup>20</sup>Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, <sup>21</sup>equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”*

Finding peace can be difficult. We live in a world ravaged by war, in an economy that is teetering on the brink of collapse, and in a society that is increasingly hostile towards the gospel. How in the midst of such things can we find peace? It comes in surrender. Not surrendering to governments, or the demands of society, but to Almighty God. God is present daily, guiding and leading us into His perfect will. Nothing that happens in the world is unknown to Him, and nothing that will happen tomorrow that will catch him by surprise.

David said it best when he wrote *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”*

Are you experiencing the peace of Christ this Advent? Are you sharing it as you bless others? Of all the gifts you can give, services you can render, tasks you can accomplish, and blessings you can bestow, none are as great as sharing with someone the hope that is found in The Prince of Peace. For the Christian, a testimony of a brother or sister in Christ can be our greatest source of encouragement. For the unbeliever, it can be the greatest story ever told.

12/22/2014

## The Light of the World

*John 8:12 <sup>12</sup>Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, **'I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.'***

This is one of the strongest claims Jesus makes about his Messiahship. In Genesis, God begins creation by saying "Let there be light." Just as that statement laid the foundation of all creation, so too does the Light of the world lay the foundation for all salvation.

Light pushes darkness away in an instant. Where light exists, darkness cannot exist. Darkness has no power to subdue light, to stop it from spreading or keep it at bay.

Light is also not relegated to an individual or a particular group. It can be seen by all who have the gift of sight and illuminates each one equally. When Christ became the light of the world, he removed the barriers to salvation.

The gift of grace was now being extended to both Jew and Gentile, to rich and poor, to learned and ignorant, to nobleman and commoners.

Like bugs which run for cover the moment a light is turned on, the lies which Satan designed to keep people from a true relationship with God are revealed and flee in a panic when the light of Jesus Christ is shined upon them.

Do not let your joy be robbed by one who has already lost the war. Let Christ's light overshadow you and his peace fill you.

12/23/2014

## The Gift of Sweet Perfume

*John 12:1-3 "1 Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. 3 Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."*

The book John is filled with gifts that Jesus gives to others. But in chapter twelve, we have a rare moment when someone gives something back to him.

The value of the gift was astonishing. The perfume Mary poured was worth an entire year's wages. Think of what you made last year. Now imagine spending every last dime of it for the most expensive bottle of perfume you ever had. Now, imagine pouring in on someone else's feet.

Could you do it? Would you give something THAT valuable away?

Mary did. And when Judas chastised her, Jesus stopped him. He saw the heart of what Mary was doing and he saw it as preparation for his burial.

God may not be calling you to give away the most expensive thing you own, or to spend a year's wages on someone else. But the one thing that He is asking is to become the priority of your life. He is asking to be the one thing in your life that you treasure above all others.

12/24/2014

## Christmas Eve

*Luke 2:2-14 (KJV) - <sup>2</sup>And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup>And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.*

*<sup>4</sup>And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David) <sup>5</sup>To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.*

*<sup>6</sup>And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. <sup>7</sup>And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. <sup>8</sup>And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.*

*<sup>9</sup>And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. <sup>10</sup>And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. <sup>11</sup>For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*

*<sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, <sup>14</sup>Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."*

12/25/2014

## The Gift of Authenticity

*John 12:42-46* <sup>42</sup>Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; <sup>43</sup>for they loved human praise more than praise from God. <sup>44</sup>Then Jesus cried out, **'Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. <sup>45</sup>The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. <sup>46</sup>I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.'** (NASB)

The church had a huge problem. In John chapter 12, the scriptures identify it and Jesus addresses it directly. The leaders of the people, those who should have been leading the way to the Messiah, had instead lost their focus.

Verse 43 tells us that they had come to love human praise more than praise from God. It's a bit absurd when you think about it. I imagine most of us, if we were given a choice of being praised by others or praised by God, would pick God every single time. Yet so often we find ourselves doing the very same thing these leaders were doing. In our eagerness to be accepted and liked by other people, we lose sight of our true calling and no longer focus on living to please The Lord. When that happens, we are walking in darkness.

Yet despite our poor performance, Jesus was not content to simply leave us in the dark. Instead, he reminds us that in Him, we see the Father. In him, we have hope and joy. In him, we have the acceptance and the praise that truly matters. Because of him, we can live in the light.

12/26/2014

## The Gift of Service

*John 13:12-17* <sup>12</sup>When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. ***'Do you understand what I have done for you?'*** he asked them. <sup>13</sup>***'You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 'Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 'I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 'Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 'Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.''***(NASB)

On his last night on earth, at the last meal he would ever eat, during the last “normal” moments he would ever spend with his disciples, Jesus made a point of teaching his disciples the importance of blessing others.

Taking that which was considered menial and demeaning, Jesus transformed it into something divine.

In verse 17, Jesus says that his disciples will be blessed if they do these things. So many people see that and misinterpret it. Jesus wasn't giving his disciples a lesson in financial gain. He was instead giving them a formula for spiritual health.

When we take on the role of a servant and begin to put the needs of others above our own needs, something fundamentally changes within us. Our focus begins to shift, and the Holy Spirit begins to work. If you want to see renewal and revival in your life and in your family, learn to humble yourself and to bless others.

12/27/2014

## The Light of Christ

*John 14:1-4 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. <sup>4</sup> You know the way to the place where I am going."* (NASB)

From a purely human standpoint, the life of Jesus was unremarkable. He came from a common family, lived in an obscure village, worked as a simple tradesman, and lived under the occupation of Rome.

He didn't travel the world, study at a university, fight in the army, or amass great wealth. He wasn't a politician, never held an office in the church, and didn't associate with nobility.

For three years he traveled the countryside without so much as a roof to call his own. When he died, the only thing he owned was the clothing on his back and it was gambled away by his executioners.

Yet, in his commonness, Christ's true divinity shone. Jesus did not come to be a ruler. He didn't speak to be famous or to sell books or to receive accolades. From the manger to the cross, a singular and unfaltering mission drove every action he ever took.

He came to be our savior. Christ was and is the Light of Advent, the redemption for our sin, and the one true hope for a world that is lost in darkness and in death.