

Blessings Remembered

God's Word, along with various images and occasional history, are presented on this devotional website page. "Blessings Remembered" will hopefully prompt memories of many personal blessings from God in your lives. May you always trust in God's promised blessings, past, present, future and for all eternity.

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Hebrews 13:8

"For to us a child is born - For unto you is born"

From Isaiah Chapter 9 and Luke Chapter 2



Photo: Bill Van Nostrand

I took the above photo at Christmas in 1978 in my grandmother's house. Almost like a *Norman Rockwell* Christmas card, the scene depicts the "typical" home with tree decorated and presents wrapped, just waiting to be opened. Even my Aunt Carol's collie, "Prince", stands ready to join in the excitement of gifts about to be unwrapped. Perhaps, such scenes prompt "*Blessings Remembered*" of past Christmas Days in your life.

Long before Christmas arrives, the media of TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, and Internet will begin the frenzy of shouting "Happy Holidays" until it grows louder and louder in our ears. The "shouting" attempts to secularize the season and employ various ways around speaking the name of "Jesus" and even the word "Christmas."

Yet, the Church also contributes to the "frenzy", if you will, with its services and suppers, practices and programs, concerts and cantatas. In the midst of it all, it may become difficult to remember that the wonderful blessing of Christmas is **PEACE**... "*peace to God's people on earth*", as is declared in our worship of Divine Service Setting One, and based on *Luke 2:14*

God's Peace in Jesus means that the shouting is over, as well as the disobedient struggling and selfish grabbing that goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden ... where peace with God was shattered by His voice demanding of Adam and Eve, "*What is this that you have you done?*" from *Genesis 3:13*

Christmas means remembering the blessing of what God's Peace signifies. For the biblical word "*shalom*" - peace - means that things are the way they ought to be, the way God planned them to be, the way God is working them out to be ... things are made right again between God and sinful mankind.

Christmas always begins with God. How long have you been getting ready for Christmas? The calendar begins to fill to overflowing, making preparations and plans, various lists, gift lists, food lists. There are carols, services, gatherings, programs and concerts, hopes and dreams...and, of course, memories. Like no other time of the year, Christmas is when we plan for it all to "come together", to take on meaning and purpose. Hopefully, it's the time when we especially consider the many preparations involved in Jesus Christ's coming - not just with the visit of the angel Gabriel and the journey to Bethlehem, but even before - reaching back

into history, God's own preparations, His plans for the coming of Jesus Christ. For, when Christmas finally arrives, we often let it all simply come to a stop. That is, do we remain prepared for what God had in mind, in the first place, when He sent His Only Begotten Son in human form to be born among us?

From the Bible we find how Christmas never stops, it continues. We learn of our Lord's baptism, His temptation in the wilderness, His calling of the disciples and training them so that they would one day proclaim His Word to us. We learn of our Lord's preaching and teaching, His healing and helping, His confrontation with those who opposed Him. We discover His focused, selfless, determination to fulfill the Father's will for the redemption of the world. We "unwrap" God's gifts of Palm Sunday, the upper room, Gethsemane. We witness the high priest's courtroom and Jesus standing before Pontius Pilate, the whipping post, the way of sorrows, His crucifixion and what it all means for our forgiveness, salvation and our hope of God's promised eternity in heaven.

God's prophet Isaiah spoke; ***"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."***

Isaiah 9:6

Jesus was born in the way that He was, **for us**. That's where Christmas goes. The body once laid in a manger was laid at last in a tomb...and raised alive from that tomb on the third day **for us**. What began on Christmas carries into all eternity - of life everlasting with God in which, by faith, all believers are participants. Christmas never ends with our celebrations. Actually, it's always a beginning! The Christmas gift giving, hymns and services will end. Yet, our life with and our praises to God will never end with our Lord Jesus who was born to be **with us**, and we with Him.

The account of Christmas is so familiar we almost know it by heart. Yet, as familiar as it is, for many it isn't deemed central to Christmas. A survey in recent years found that only 37% of people who identified themselves as Christians considered the birth of Jesus to be the most important part of Christmas. While the story of the birth of Jesus may be familiar, those tidings of comfort, peace and joy are not necessarily held at the heart of what a majority of Christians celebrate as Christmas. It seems many people largely forget the great significance of the birth we celebrate.

Therefore, it's good, it's vital, that we hear again the words of the angel to the shepherds in Bethlehem's fields and to ponder them in our hearts: *"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **For unto you** is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

Luke 2:10-11

These words are spoken *"for all the people,"* not only for the shepherds of Bethlehem. These words remind us that this gift of God lying in a manger has been born to us, and more specifically **"to you."** "To you" is given the Good News, the Gospel of Christmas. Those words deliver this Child **to you**; they place this Child in your ears and upon your hearts. The Savior, Jesus, was personally born **to you**, to save you from your sins, to deliver you from your death, to redeem you from the Law and the wrath of God. God came when no one asked for Him. He was born into this world where there was no room for Him. Before He was invited, He came in the most humble of ways. Before we called on Him, He called upon us. Before we treasured Him in our hearts, God took us into His own heart, and gave us His Child, our Savior. God Himself has come down to save **you**. That's the length to which God has gone to rescue you! Where we deserve hell, God brought us heaven.

Christmas, may often seem to be for some other time and place or for someone else. We may dream about the "ideal" Christmas, one that always seems better than what we experience. Perhaps that's why some people have such a hard time with Christmas. We hold such high expectations. Just maybe this year we'll be able to put it all together with just the right combination of gifts, music, food, and people that will make our Christmas perfect. Yet, we never quite pull it off.

As a result, Christmas can easily become nerve-wracking, even depressing. Then eventually, after the "busyness" of Christmas, we simply return to our day-to-day routines. Yet there truly is peace for us, not in some future goal or some other situation but right here and right now. It's not that special Christmas remembered from childhood; it's not even the family gathered around the table or good friends and good food and good fun, as precious as they are. No, there's certain peace found only in Jesus, Who bore the sorrows and the burdens of all people. There's **Peace in Jesus**, Who took all our hurt and guilt into His own body in His suffering and death. There is **Peace in Jesus** through the promise of our sins forgiven and life-everlasting in Him and Him alone.

There's peace for us in His Holy Gospel, the Word of God. **There's peace** in His Holy Supper, where Jesus Christ freely and graciously gives us to eat and to drink of His Body and Blood, the final offering and perfect sacrifice for our sin. **THE PEACE OF CHRISTMAS IS PERSONALLY FOR YOU...**and that's Good News of true blessings remembered and treasured, now and always!

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 2 Peter 1:2



Photo: Bill Van Nostrand

***Therefore, since we have been justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus
Christ.*** Romans 5:1–8:6.

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All Scripture quoted from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2016) Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.