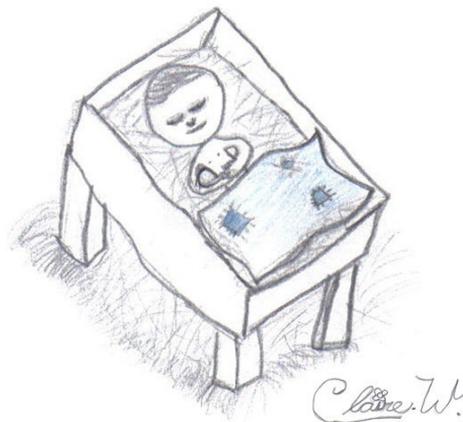
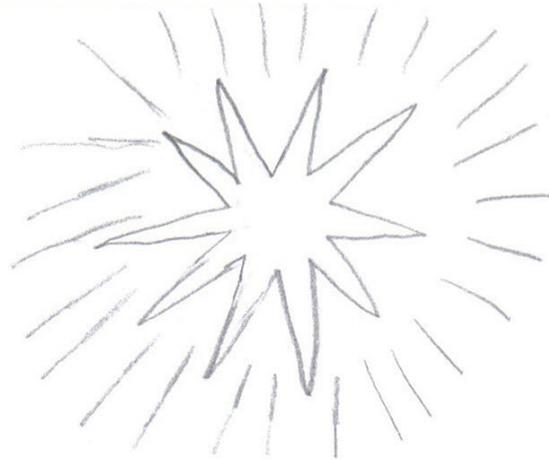


West Vancouver United Church Advent Devotional Guide 2010



Journey towards Christmas with reflections from members of your church family

Sunday, November 28th, 2010

Please read Romans 13: 8-12

"The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber..."

I walked into the Ambleside coffee shop last week in a state that could only be described as "vertical but not yet awake." Crossing the threshold into busy café, I left the cold November rain behind and was welcomed by the refreshing aroma of freshly ground coffee beans. It appeared I was not the only person in West Van needing a "caffeine fix" that morning as the long line up snaked around the counter and almost to the front door. "I feel like I spend half my life waiting," grumbled the man in the crisp suit in front of me. Waiting. As a church family we are moving into a time and season of waiting. Advent, comes from the Latin word *Adventus* meaning "visit" or "coming" or "arrival" and provides a time where we wait for the coming of Jesus Christ in our lives and our hearts. We spend a lot of time waiting in our lives.

Waiting for a new child or grandchild to be born.

Waiting for the employer's call after the job interview.

Waiting for test results from the Doctor's office.

Waiting for a spouse or friend to finally say "I'm sorry."

Waiting for a miracle or sign of faith in a time of trouble.

The Apostle Paul declares that as people of love and faith the hour has arrived to wake from our slumber. "Salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." Salvation, also translated as "wholeness" is nearer than when you first became a Christian. Imagine. This might be the Christmas where you experience wholeness through Christ's love in a way that you have never experience before. That's good news worth waiting for...

***Prayer:** Almighty God, your Spirit is the source of refreshment and revelation in our lives. We praise you for your love and faithfulness to all generations. In this season of waiting, awaken us to your power and purpose in our lives that we may move from darkness to light and rejoice in your gift of Emmanuel – God with us. In the strong name of Jesus we pray...Amen.*

Rev. Dr. Ross Lockhart

Monday, November 29th, 2010

Please read 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

"Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift..."

Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians with words of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving for the people of Corinth and for all the spiritual gifts that God has given to them.

Paul's words remind me of a very special gift that my husband, Brian, and I received and were also able to share at Christmas of 2000. It was at Christmastime that we found out that our daughter Claire was on her way. Claire was to be the first grandchild for both families and we were so excited to share this gift with everyone.

This was a particularly special gift, not only because we were able to share it with our families, but because I had been pregnant earlier that year and had miscarried. This new life was such a treasured and precious gift because of what we had lost. And yet, we had been given so much more. Through our experiences, God had

also gifted us with compassion, shown through the love and support of friends and family; patience, as we struggled to understand why our first baby did not survive; and a stronger faith, as we learned more about God's plan for our family.

Our first baby, the one we had lost, had been due to be born around December 28th. Instead of feeling full of sadness and loss, we were full of thanksgiving: thanksgiving for the gift of a new child on her way and thanksgiving for the many spiritual gifts God has given to us to equip us for our journey through parenthood.

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, as we prepare ourselves for Christmas, we thank you for the many gifts that you give us: gifts of compassion, patience, faith and love. Help us to take the gifts that you give us and share them with those who need them most. Most of all, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus. In his name we pray, Amen

Fiona W

Tuesday, November 30th, 2010

Please read Mark 13: 33-37

"Watch therefore – for you do not know when the master of the house will come,"

The traditional Christmases of my early childhood in Edmonton, during the days of the great depression, were never without anticipation and joy. Yuletide food a-plenty, tree trimming, gift-sharing, and stockings stuffed with edible goodies and small, useful gifts were all part of the celebration of Jesus' birth, even though times were difficult financially for our family of six children ages one through twelve.

Our Christmas meal was always shared with a beloved widow and her adult daughter –the Harrises (Aunt Rachel and Grace) who each year delighted us with their gift of cozy, flannelette p.j.'s, and then became permanent 'family' at every Sunday dinner, often on weekdays as well, through all the decades that followed.

Dad travelled during the week, so mother knew how to cope and care for her lively brood, involved in school, church activities and whenever possible, ice-skating on an outdoor rink and 'cardboard' tobogganing, all the while during Advent, baking light and dark Christmas cake, mincemeat treats, shortbread and the weekly supply of homemade bread and buns.

Dad's Christmas tree 'rules' included a wintry trip to choose a tree of just the right height and balance; shared trimming on Christmas Eve (never, before!); and removal of the glittering symbol, the day after New Year's (never later!).

Looking back, perhaps we were not 'watchful' enough, waiting for a visit from the Master, but I believe the Master's hand was in our meeting and the sharing of our lives with two 'Christmas angels' named Aunt Rachel and Grace. Their love, laughter, time, multiple talents, mentoring and open hearts were the essence of Christ's spirit, and were influential throughout all our lives.

Where love is present, the Master lives.

Prayer: Ever watchful God, may we capture and absorb your Spirit and truth into our hearts, so that we are awake to your visits that call us to love and share. Amen

Norma S

Wednesday, December 1st, 2010

Please read: John 1: 1-5

"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not."

We are lucky to be blessed with big families in Vancouver – children, cousins, grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters-in-law, nieces, nephews, dogs, cats, etc. So Christmas dinner can become quite a massive affair. We enjoy hosting when our turn comes around, and we have had a variety of seating arrangements - tables added to tables to extend the seating, or small tables spread out around the room, or even in more than one room. We have found that everyone brings a dish and that makes it much easier for the hosts. Over the years, I have done minimal baking of the traditional Christmas goodies, and have usually relied on my mother for help in that area. I must say that having a yellow lab food hound, "Shyla" did make things more difficult for me in the kitchen in the fourteen years that she was alive. Sadly this will be our first Christmas without her in all that time. No more shouts of "Shyla got the pate", or Shyla got the cake, or the butter, or whatever food lay within reach. But I think my mother was really horrified the year Shyla's nose drifted by the dessert table and caught a whiff of her rumballs and in an instant – gone! Shyla was really licking her chops after that one! They say that chocolate is bad for dogs, but Shyla really defied the odds in that category because chocolate was one of her favourite foods! We will miss her this Christmas and the unconditional love, licks, and laughs she gave us. But we will have a wonderful substitute – our first grandchild! He will be the light of our lives this Christmas, and we won't need to guard the rumballs.

Prayer:

*Dear God, help us to feel grateful, happy to be alive,
Knowing that each day good things will come,
Like a beam of light shining on stormy seas,
Giving us faith that we can survive troubled times,
Riding the dark waves into the shining light of joy.
And may the light of the world shine through us always. Amen.*

Linda and Gerry H

Thursday, December 2nd, 2010

Please read John 1: 6-9

"The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."

John 1: 6-9 reminds us that the tradition of Christmas began with an event that lies at the heart of many families - the birth of a child.

As the parents of two young children, ages 6 and 4, we see Christmas as the time of year to celebrate family and childhood. A retreat from everyday demands and rituals, a time to relax and reflect, an occasion to draw loved ones close, Christmas is the highlight of our year.

Christmas of 2008 was the first in our West Vancouver home. We invited the "Portuguese side" of our family, which gathers on Christmas Eve, for dinner. Thirty were expected. The cooking, polishing and decorating took the better part of the week. Anticipation hung in the air as we counted down the days to December 24.

Mother Nature had other plans. Snow started falling and didn't stop. Most of our guests decided they couldn't navigate West Vancouver in the snow. Our gathering of thirty turned into a gathering of twelve, we had enough brussel sprouts to feed us for a week! Our Christmas celebration became very small and relaxing.

There are many wonderful memories from that Christmas: seeing the pristine snow around us, building the first snowman (and the first snow dinosaur) in our yard, delighting in our children discovering the thrill of tobogganing and knowing their first truly white Christmas.

The simplicity of that holiday brought us to the meaning of Christmas. Our light was the quiet of the falling snow reminding us of the importance of family at this very special time of year.

***Prayer:** Gracious God, we thank you for all those who share this season of celebration with us. For the laughter of children, the wisdom of parents and the company of friends along life's journey. As the winter wind blows, remind us of Isaiah's promise that you will wash us as clean as snow. Amen.*

John and Victoria M

Friday December 3rd, 2010

Please read: Jeremiah 33:14-16

"I will fulfill the good promise I made..."

I remember the first Christmas Eve after my father left. It was a windy, cold, crisp night, as is typical in Quebec City at that time of year. "You can even bring Teddy Bear to church," my mother said to hearten my younger brother who seemed skeptical that we could ever come to enjoy a 'true' Christmas again. The heavy look on my mother's face was that of a woman longing to offer her two children as normal a Christmas as could be, all things considered.

And so it was that we piled into our aging burgundy Volvo, Teddy Bear at hand, and drove down *Rue Saint-Félix* to the small parish church. The streets were empty as people piled into their homes to celebrate the traditional *réveillon*. Church had already begun. It was somewhere between *that* convenience store (you know, the one where young, underage misfits get their first smokes and beer) and the old municipal center where I took violin lessons that our old faithful Volvo died - without fanfare, explanation, or apparent concern for the fragile cargo it had been entrusted with. Needless to say, Teddy Bear never did make it to church that Christmas.

I can't remember how long we sat there, wind and snow howling around our car. I just remember looking at my mother, her hands still on the wheel, as she silently stared out into the vastness of the night. In that delicate moment, I wish I could have fixed everything, taking away the sadness and feelings of inadequacy that seeped through the cracks in her confident composure. I wanted my mother to know that my brother and I were going to be ok.

But that's just it - I couldn't fix things, and sometimes, we're just not meant to. Indeed, sometimes, Christmas is just meant to be messy, and painful. Whether you are dealing this season with divorce, illness or death, or broken friendships, Christmas can be, for some of us, a reminder of our loneliness. But in all things, there is a reminder that Christmas morning is God making good on a promise of old, that there is a Righteous One who has come to save Judah, to make Jerusalem safe.

***Prayer:** Lord, Righteous Savior, thank you - simply, and deeply. Help us attend in this season to the joys that we celebrate, but also to the brokenness within us and all around us. Amen.*

Simon L

Saturday, December 4th, 2010

Please read Isaiah 60: 19-22.

“For the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.”

Finding the true reason to celebrate Christmas has been a journey for us. After years of being hidden in the shadows of life, the light of the season, the spiritual gift that is Jesus, whose love bestows upon us the greater gift of God in all His glory, revealed itself to us.

Whenever the “Holiday Season” came around, Chris felt that the media’s bombardment of commercials, fliers, and jingles eclipsed the true spirit of Christmas. He was left feeling obliged to go through the motions of celebrating without feeling the true joy of the occasion. Chris would send cards with warm wishes to his friends and loved ones, compile his list and check it twice, and brave the malls seeking presents to dutifully wrap and deposit under the tree. Chris even mounted lights on the eaves in an attempt to bring brightness and warmth to the chilly winter evenings. Some years, he hosted Christmas dinner, hoping that gathering his family together to share a feast would bring back the happy emotions he had felt as a child. Despite all of this preparation, a sense of hollowness, and an absence of light remained.

For Christine, the celebration of Christmas often brought back painful memories of losses she had suffered at a young age. With her father’s passing, many longstanding family traditions began to fade into pale memories. Her family would no longer take part in the neighbours caroling night; dinner with much loved cousins became less frequent; and she could not cheer Dad on as he sweated to clean the oven in preparation for roasting the turkey! Adding to her sadness, the simple act of decorating the tree would coincide with learning of the loss of her close friend. Although she bravely tried to accept these changes and hold on to her faith, the season felt empty, lonely and a little sad. Instead of bringing joy and brightness to her heart, celebrating Christ’s birth became a challenge.

Everything changed when reality caught up with God’s plan, and revealed the path that our faith had led us to. When Chris met Christine, or when Christine first glimpsed Chris if you’d prefer, each knew that this was more than just a coincidence. God’s light illuminated His mysterious plan for them. Love bloomed in their hearts and radiated in their souls. The deeper meaning that they had been longing to find suddenly filled every moment of their lives. Celebrations were no longer sad or desolate affairs that had to be attended. They were now anxiously anticipated opportunities to introduce themselves to each other’s families and friends.

***Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, we pray that your light will be revealed to us as we walk through this advent season. We know that there are times when we will feel sad or lonely. May your light touch all we do as we listen for the soft stirrings of baby Jesus. Amen.*

Christine and Chris B

Sunday, December 5th, 2010

Please read Hebrews 1: 1-3

“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors...”

Preparing for this Advent Devotional, we feel privileged to have been part of our church families in West Vancouver, South Africa and our African families, we so enjoyed. It was a special time, preparing together for Advent and Christmas.

Once again we come, to make time, to be still, to reflect, to listen and hear once again, at a deeper level the Good News of God’s Love for all people. When our children were much younger, John used to get a real charge watching them opening their gifts, ripping away the Christmas wrappings which Joan had so carefully

prepared and decorated. They were interested only in what they might find inside the parcel. The wrappings were simply a nuisance - which delayed the element of surprise and excitement of the gift.

In the same way God prepared His people as we read from the book of Hebrews:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our Fathers – through the prophets, but in these last days – he has spoken to us by a Son.

Advent is not only looking forward to one who is to come, but to celebrate again, the challenge of the One who has already come on that first Christmas Eve nearly two thousand years ago. To reflect on that meaning of that coming for us today. To remind ourselves of the mystery of that humble birth – that in that birth God's word became an event in the stream of human history.

Maybe part of the meaning of Christmas is that we need to make it our message. The challenge to respond with Joy to the meaning of Christ's birth. Don't let us discard this priceless gift as we would a Christmas wrapping.

Prayer: Transform us, O God, from being casual followers of Christ. May this season of Joy and Peace inspire within us a true commitment to His way and those values which enrich all life. Amen.

Rev. John and Joan Gouws

Monday, December 6th, 2010

Please read: Psalm 43: 3-5

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Put your trust in God."

We sat in the cold van and flashed the high beams over the water. For a moment a narrow expanse of the lake was clearly visible in the darkness. My friend Georgetta and I peered anxiously into the night for a flash of light in response. Nothing. Georgetta's two little girls lay snuggled together sleeping on the backseat, blissfully unaware of the unfolding crisis. The peaceful rhythm of their breathing was calming, but neither one of us spoke. We had already done all that we could do. Now we waited for daylight and the RCMP plane to help in the search for the boat carrying those we loved.

What had started as a beautiful spring afternoon at the beach with our friends, the crisp air filled with the laughter of our children and their anticipation of a brief boat ride followed by a wiener roast, now seemed like a lifetime ago. The summer residents had not yet unshuttered their cabin or rolled out their piers. Their boats were all safely stored and winterized. Only a few year round residences dotted the shore line here and there around the huge lake; and because the ice and snow had only recently melted, it was highly unlikely any boats were on their lifts in the water. I had already phoned everyone I knew who lived by the lake year round to no avail.

Our husbands and six of our children had now been out somewhere in the darkness for many hours past the expected time on their return. The same scenarios played themselves out in my mind, over and over...had they hit a submerged log and flipped the boat, had they run out of gas, had they forgotten to make sure all of the plugs were in after the winterizing of the boat, causing it to fill with water and sink. I knew that if they were in the icy water there was little chance of survival. Only the silently repeated prayer, "Please God be with all of us now" stemmed the waves of panic that gripped my soul.

The minutes seemed like eternities and the hours passed without any sign of their return. As though to feel closer to a rescue, Georgetta and I wrapped in our sweaters more tightly around our shoulders; left the sleeping children in the van and walked the short distance down the candy striped pier. We stood by the

empty boat lift straining to see any glimmer on the water or to hear the sound of a boat. The only sound was the lapping water. It was now 4:30 A.M.

Suddenly we saw a dimly flashing light on the water! We thought the light was a long distance away, and we startled when a voice shouted out "Ship Ahoy!" Out in the darkness loomed the bow of the white boat that had left the pier twelve hours earlier. Joy and relief overwhelmed us! We rushed to help them out of the boat. Was everyone okay? They had stopped at Pelican Point they said to do some exploring and when they boarded the boat to return, they found the alternator had failed. The boat ride to Pelican Point in the powerful boat had not taken very long but now without access to a phone or hope of imminent rescue, our husbands had decided upon the daunting prospect of rowing the heavy boat home. Eventually, with the help of the flashing van lights, they managed to land on the right beach! As the children were assisted out of the boat I noticed that Carmen, our nine year old, was not wearing her life jacket and concerned that she had not followed the rule, I asked her why she was not wearing it. She turned and pointed to her three year old brother who had been sleeping. "He was cold, Mama," she said "so I used my jacket to cover him." I hugged her and thanked God for his loving presence.

Prayer: During this time of Advent as we prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus, Prince of Peace and Light of the World. We thank you Father for the light and hope that you give us in the midst of our darkest hours. Amen.

Claudette and Randy F

Tuesday December 7th, 2010

Please read Psalm 20: 1-4

*The Lord answer you in the day of trouble!
The name of the God of Jacob protect you!*

Imagine yourself struggling against the wind. The wind is blowing so strong that you have to lean into it or you will be blown backwards.

Hurricane Juan made landfall in Nova Scotia shortly after 12 a.m. on September 29, 2003. One of the most powerful and damaging hurricanes to ever pound Canada, the storm roared ashore with a Category 2 intensity. The Halifax-area bore the brunt of the storm's force, as wind gusted up to 231 kilometres an hour. I was in my trailer. Because there were no lights I had chosen my bed as the most suitable place to wait out the passing storm.

For about an hour my soul was engaged with the soul of nature. It was a thrilling experience for me. I was not afraid. I felt that I had made the right decision to remain in my trailer. I was free to enjoy the experience. I had been in intense situations with nature before. One other experience was in San Francisco, when an earthquake hit back on Oct 19th 1989. I became homeless for a day and half.

Reflecting on my experience with hurricane Juan I am blessed with two clear responses. First, I am grateful for such an intense experience with the raw side of Mother Nature. The strong 200 KM an hour gusts of wind shook my trailer sideways and up and down. The wind and the heavy rain on the metal roof provided an awesome rhapsody of nature music. My soul was mingling with the soul of nature. Second, as I look back I feel intense gratitude to God I came through the hurricane without harm as well as survived the San Francisco earthquake that killed 63 people. Nature does win out at times. The psalmist in today's reading does not claim that God is so great that no harm will come to us.

And yet, perhaps my “weathering the storm” dates back to my early childhood. I recall being four years old caught out with my Dad in a winter blizzard. Alone I would have been toppled by the wind. We were heading home for supper walking through a field and there was a reason I was not afraid. I remember feeling secure and warm with my dad firmly holding my hand.

Prayer: *Eternal God we give you thanks for your guidance and protection in our times of danger. We ask for your help as we care for others who have been less fortunate in their experiences. Amen*

Rev. Dr. John Stewart

Wednesday, December 8th, 2010

Please read: Psalm 119:105-106

“Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”

Leading up to Christmas last year, a friend suggested the concept of praying and asking God for a word or concept that could act as a theme to guide the year. This seemed like a great idea to me, so with expectations high, I prayed. “Light and dark” was what I clearly felt God saying. My building excitement for getting something a little more positive for the year was looking rather dismal. So I prayed some more; what else could I do? But the more I listened, the more convinced I became that this was for me.

Now that the year is nearly passed, my ambivalence has turned to appreciation. It has indeed been a year of light and darkness, a year of illumination as well as wandering in the desert. I’ve known for some time that life’s lows allow for an appreciation of the highs, and that the times of elation are given roots by times of difficulty. But one of the gifts of this year has been learning that darkness doesn’t necessarily mean suffering. Darkness can mean mystery and it can mean unknowing.

Alternatively, there is the darkness of being far from God’s living word. Without a keen awareness of God’s reality, of listening to the breath of the Spirit, we base our lives on alternate voices. And in this place the mysterious darkness becomes dismal darkness. It is not a darkness that invites us closer to the heart of God.

In advent we find ourselves in a time of darkness. Is it a dismal and meaningless darkness, or is it a darkness that is thick with anticipation? In advent, “our” part of the year--the green and growing time--draws to a close, and “God’s” part of the year begins. Here, we await God’s Great Answer to the mess in which we find ourselves. And it is in this context that we, if we are attentive, find ourselves eagerly awaiting God’s Light.

Prayer: *Jesus, thank you for the gift of light and dark. Grant us the grace to enter into the darkness, and there may you shine your true Light, oh Lord, upon our lives.*

Dylon N

Thursday, December 9th, 2010

Please read John 12: 35 -36

“Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you”

It was Christmas, 1972, and our first child Michael was two months old. We had always led active lives, loving the outdoors and winter sports. Somehow we were not yet enlightened in the changes that a new baby would demand. It seemed reasonable to continue our habit of winter ski holidays in the Okanagan and in consideration of the new baby we borrowed my dad’s camper truck instead of going in the usual MGB-GT. We left Vancouver in a typical mild winter day in light rain. Just past Hope (regrettably named) snow began, but our spirits were high- it was what we were looking for. By Princeton the temperature was minus 5C, but all

was well. We made Mount Baldy, north of the metropolis of Rock Creek, by nightfall; temperature minus 10. I think it was then that we noticed a thin film of ice on the inside of the camper. Not to worry, Lynne was breast feeding, and Michael wouldn't mind. We had a nice family supper in my sister's crowded nearby cabin, cooked over a wood stove (no electricity), and retired to the camper for the night. It was then that we noticed that the snow tracked in four hours earlier hadn't melted despite the best efforts of the propane heater. The ice on the windows was a little thicker, but surely we would be snug in our sleeping bags. We were literally a close family, all bundled up together! The temperature was now minus 15; slightly warmer inside. Michael was pretty happy while breast feeding, but was given to loud complaint at diaper changing time. In the early morning, the ice build up had reached half an inch over the windows, and a quarter inch over everything else. The heater kept us at about minus 5; it was minus 20 outside. We had glorious days under beautiful clear skies in powder conditions, sharing baby sitting in the cabin and retreating to the camper at night. But, after a few days the ice build up in the camper prevented getting the door open, so we surrendered altogether and wedged into the cabin with the rest. Michael viewed camping and winter sports with suspicion for years to come.

We were slow to learn, and continued our winter trips to Baldy with soon to be two babies. The weather was sometimes inclement, but it cemented a closeness with one another and with our extended family, that has endured.

What has this got to do with John 12 verses 35 and 36? Well, it's all part of the wonder of it all, and the light that lit our hearts then we have followed ever since, and still makes for memorable recollections!

Prayer: Dear God, we pray for the blessing of Christmas, the birth of Jesus, the Light that leads us kindled and reborn, hopeful for Peace and Joy in the New Year.

Kyle and Lynne G

Friday, December 10th, 2010

Please read: Ephesians 5: 6-14

"Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

An elderly couple are sitting in a tiny, circular chapel perched atop a hill in central Austria, that seats no more than 20 people. They are quietly praying, and likely paying homage as well to Franz Gruber, the local organist of that town of Oberndorf, who, 180 years earlier, had created the music for the world's most beloved Christmas carol, "Silent Night! Holy Night!" This memorial chapel had been built in his honour in the early twentieth century, because the original church in which Gruber worked, appropriately called the St. Nicholas Church, had been flooded out and demolished.

Suddenly the couple turned around in irritation: a huge tour bus disgorged 32 noisy Vancouver boys, who, unused to the hot, humid July weather and dressed lightly in shorts, t-shirts and ball caps, piled off the bus and crammed into the tiny chapel. Noisy and boisterous as they were, they were not a soccer team: they, too, wanted to pay homage to Franz Gruber, whose carol they performed every Christmas to close out their own concerts and services.

Scowling at the boys, the couple made as if to get up and leave, when the boys gathered themselves at the front of the chapel and started to sing that famous carol, obviously with great affection and meaning, and even in not-too-badly pronounced German, before switching into English. The incomparable sound of boy sopranos filled the rafters, and before long, tears were streaming down the cheeks of the elderly couple (and if truth be

told, down their conductor's cheeks as well). Just as suddenly, the singing stopped, the boys jammed their way through the narrow doorway and returned to the bus, a blue cloud of diesel smoke the only sign that briefly, very briefly, a miracle had happened.

***Prayer:** Dear God, your Word teaches us to "Live as children of light". Perhaps the greatest blessing at Advent is the sense of expectation, excitement and joy that radiates from children around us. Children teach us so much about Christ's unconditional love. Jesus' ray of light, glowing so brightly in children, permeates the darkest of all seasons, illuminating not only the night time, but the darker places in ourselves that often times scowl before we, too, understand and are transformed by love. "Live as children of light." Amen.*

Gerald and Cora vW

Saturday, December 11th, 2010

Please read 1 Peter 2: 5-9

"Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."

A long time ago childhood memory of the advent season came to mind when reading this passage from 1 Peter.

It had snowed and snowed this Sunday in the small town in Quebec where we lived. It was to be the Service of Lessons and Carols that evening and with the weather so terrible it was a challenge as to what to do. At the end of the day, my Mum, the church organist, decided that we should try to make it to the church just in case anyone showed up. We lived a short distance away from the church and on a normal day it was only a ten minute walk. My Dad led the way through the deep snow with the rest of us trying to step in his footsteps. As we reached the top of the hill nearing the church a yellow light shone from the old sanctuary windows. The new building was in darkness but the old part, the old stone building that was no longer used, looked so welcoming. The caretaker who lived next door had lit candles around the hall and warmed the building by lighting an old stove. There was a piano and several chairs as well as the golden light of the candles. Slowly, a few people did arrive, some skiing to the door, a few seeing the light shining from the church windows onto the snowy banks arrived from here and there. The most amazing arrival was a group who had been sitting on a bus frozen into a snow bank waiting to be rescued. They saw the light and as a group plowed their way through the snow to the church. No one was a stranger as we sang carols and felt the joyousness of community that I remember to this day.

***Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank you for your light and for your word. We thank you for joy, love, peace and hope this Christmas season and may kindness and generosity be shown to each person as we walk your way in the glory of your name. Amen.*

Madelyne M

Sunday, December 12th, 2010

Please read Isaiah 60:1-3

"Arise; shine, for your light has come..."

Many years ago Dal was the young Associate Minister of St. Andrew's-River Heights United Church in Winnipeg. This was a large and traditional congregation (some might have said stuffy) and Dal's focus was on families and their children from 13 to adulthood as well as young adults to about the age of 35.

One way Dal kept the youth interested in their faith formation was to introduce them to Biblical stories and concepts through drama and theatre, which would be presented to the congregation on a Sunday morning.

One such 'show' was called Lightshine. For one of the effects at the closing of the play, as the characters were astonished to find that the Light of the Son of God Shines in their own lives, he had obtained a couple of mirror balls from a display at the downtown Eaton's Store. As the cast sang the closing song "LIGHTSHINE," spotlights caught the revolving mirror ball in their sights and filled the darkened church or hall with a thousand flashing lights. It was quite amazing how quickly faces brightened and hearts lifted as the specks of brilliant light encircled the room.

On leaving Winnipeg, Dal took one of the mirror balls with him as a souvenir of the production and it sat in a box behind the organ pipes in the church in Prince Rupert. As Christmas he thought, "What if I could convey the same kind of wonder and delight on Christmas Eve as was done in the Lightshine production?" Without all the technical assistance that he had in Winnipeg he attached the mirror ball to a spinning fishing lure on a bracket that he had attached to the very top of the organ pipe façade. On the bottom of the mirror ball he attached some fishing line and let it drop to the floor. Not having a motorized device to spin the ball, he found an old record player and attached the fishing line through a hole drilled in the spindle. Not having spot lights he found an old film projector and a slide projector in the back cupboard and managed to block the projected light so only very small pin heads of light emerged. These were strategically placed on the floor, balanced on a stack of hymn books pointing up at the mirror ball. All was set. Now to let God's light shine!

Christmas Eve came and the usual crowd packed the church. After the lessons, the carols, the anthems, the story, folk were getting ready for this service to be over and get back to the important part of Christmas: food, parties and opening presents. But one last Christmas Carol – Silent Night. Nothing happened during the first verse, not until the second verse and the line "Shepherds quake at the sight." At that precise moment the movie projectors came on and the darkened church was filled with tiny flecks of light thrown everywhere, reflected off the mirror ball. Then at the line "Glories stream from heaven afar," that old record player came on and turning at 16 revolutions per minute, those flashes of light danced around the ceiling, the walls, the floors and the faces of all in the church. There was a sense of surprise, awe, wonder, even glory! Everyone had their eyes fixed on the brilliant mirror ball that turned and turned. Tired children and bored looking eyes were filled with joy - smiles emerged on faces, young and old alike. No one left that night without having been impressed by the "light that shines in the darkness." Nor could they ever again constrain the light that shone within them. Jesus encourages us to let his light through us, to shine in the darkness of the world. That mirror ball was hung in a variety of ways and a variety of churches over the next 28 years. So let your light, His light shine!

Prayer: God of light and love, surprise us during this season of celebration with the power and presence of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Rev Dal McCrindle

Monday, December 13th, 2010

Please read: 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

"For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ"

The anticipation of celebrating Christ's birth with friends and family over the Christmas season typically brings glowing warmth within that is difficult to describe. Non-regular church visitors cannot bear the thought of missing that special Christmas Eve service at their community church.

For some though the warmth is replaced by a darkness that was not planned but exists just the same. So it was for Bob who at 33 years of age was dying from cancer. He had been told there would only be several months left but he was still here, though quite weak now as the cancer spread throughout his body.

As a child he had attended church with his family but over the years and especially into adulthood he had filled his Sundays with other 'things'. "You need only to believe in yourself and treat others fairly", he often quoted. But now, with death around the corner, he desperately searched for the belief that there was more to his existence than his short life on earth. In his moment of deepest despair, he questioned why he should now ask God for spiritual strength and forgiveness.

I asked my minister to visit and help him deal with his darkness of doubt and despair. After the minister's visit, I was comforted to see Bob blessed with renewed hope as he now realized the Light of God was always there within his heart. He just had to see it. Thanks be to God.

Prayer: Almighty God, where there is darkness we ask for your light to shine within our hearts. Where there is doubt please help us have faith. Where there is despair, please help us find hope. Help us to always to be aware of your Glory in the face of Christ. Amen.

Malcolm and Linda M

Tuesday, December 14th, 2010

Please read: 1 John 1, 4-7

*We write this to make our joy complete.
This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you:
God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.*

To everyone there is a purpose, under heaven.

In a tiny village in Suffolk, England, my cousin was fortunate enough to acquire a large estate home that had originally been built in the 16th century. Next to the churches, of which there were many more than shops, restaurants and pubs combined, the grand house and grounds have been a landmark in the village since Queen Elizabeth the 1st. Bear House stands on Bear Street like old Mother Goose, her skirts sheltering the changing inhabitants of the household. Her many gables and towers have been watching over the villagers for centuries.

On our last visit, our family reveled in the nooks and crannies in the antique country house, its mystery, quirkiness and romance. We enjoyed the gracious grounds surrounding the house, the walks, the styles, the tennis courts and swimming pond, and we mucked in with the dogs and cats, chickens, ducks, ponies, and Waddle, the goose.

It could not be ignored however, that in one of the top meadows, what looked like a "squat" had taken up residence. Old trailers, make shift shelters and numerous broken down baby carriages, carts and other unsightly baggage festooned the field, accompanied by mountains of wood, straw shavings, and tools. A small donkey was tied up. Often random children and dogs scampered about the place. We were curious and finally asked my cousin to explain.

John and his little group of immigrants were called "Gypsies" by the locals. They had rolled in from somewhere years before and had stayed at the pleasure of the land owner as long as he would tolerate them. John and his rag tag family worked hard. He salvaged wood and other bits and pieces which he then sold to anyone in need. He supplied chopped wood to the locals throughout the winter. The post mistress, the shop keepers, the other villagers depended on him to regularly provide them wood at prices they could afford. We watched him cheerfully pushing his cart on deliveries up and down the narrow streets from neighbour to neighbour. His wife and sisters worked as care givers to the elderly in the village. They cleaned and worked

tirelessly at work that few wanted to do. At Christmas Day or Christmas Eve, they would go into the Home for the Elderly and make dinners and care for the tenants so that the regular staff could be at home with their families.

John and his little group were hard working, non-conforming and definitely operated outside the rules. But they were always cheerful, friendly and generous beyond measure. John enjoyed his place in the ecology of that small village and his contribution was invaluable. The countryside was kept clear of rubbish, refuse was recycled, the elderly and sick were cared for and the people were kept warm. Although their transitory ramshackle home kept his little group content, having no official permanent residence did not make the bureaucracy happy. A drivers' license and all other permits and services were not available to John or his people. But since they had so little to begin with, my cousin found their good will and cheerfulness to be a beacon and an inspiration. He enjoyed sitting around their little table, sharing tea and stories and often found their affable and giving nature more enriching than those of his other more fortunate and affluent neighbours. It was a pleasure to accommodate their unusual, if unsightly lifestyle.

Our children, having heard about the squatters in London and other cities, were surprised at my cousin's tolerance.

"Don't you mind them squatting on your property?" the boys asked him. "Mind?" he smiled and his eyes warmed.

"It is a privilege and an honour." he said.

Prayer: *Beloved God, remind us to open our hearts to the unconventional and unusual, looking beneath the surface to your Truth. Help us to see your Light shine through others' wisdom, generosity and love.*

Mary B

Wednesday, December 15th, 2010

Please read Ecclesiastes 12: 1-7

"Remember your Creator in the days of your youth..."

"It's okay Mum, I'm old enough now to baby sit, so why don't you and Dad go out for a date?" asked my daughter, a little too eager to get us out of the house. It was autumn and this was a new experience for our family. The children were now at the age where they could be left on their own – at least for short periods of time. Throughout the fall season leading up to Christmas, Bill and I did take the kids up on their offer, sneaking out for dinner or a coffee and a chat from time to time. Little did we know that the kids were up to something at home. That "something" only became clear on Christmas morning. Bill and I woke up and found beautifully decorated stockings hanging from the fireplace, full of thoughtful gifts the kids picked up throughout the fall (including the Elegant Flea Market at the church!). Every time we went out on a "date night" the kids worked hard on their homemade gifts for Christmas morning. It was stunning. It was lovely. It was memorable. "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth" writes the author of Ecclesiastes before dissolving into a rather discouraging reflection on aging. I wonder, however, whether remaining open to the surprise of youthful kindness and innovation is a way to remain connected to the activity of God in the world. What surprise might God have in store for you this Christmas?

Prayer: *Imaginative God, we bless you for all the ways we come to know your love. For the gift of creativity and for the capacity for kindness, we give you thanks. Help us to remain mindful of the needs of others and willing to surprise those around us with words and actions full of grace. Amen.*

Susan S

Thursday, December 16th, 2010

Please read: Isaiah 40: 1-11

"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God."

When I read the words of Isaiah 40 1-11, in my head I hear the music of Handel's Messiah, which plays a significant part in my Christmas traditions.

Last Christmas was the first my family spent without Husband and Father. David had struggled with depression for about 7 months & tragically ended his life by committed suicide in May 2009 at age 58; leaving my son Andrew, aged 20 & my daughter Moira, aged 19 & me, shocked & sad & struggling to carry on.

We chose to change some of the Christmas customs we had grown comfortable with over the years, as we felt that David's absence would be too keenly felt.

Hollyburn Funeral Home had a service for the families of those who had died in 2009.

My daughter was working away from home & therefore unable to attend; my son felt that he could not. Care had been taken in the preparation of the service. Three local clergy took part and refreshments were provided afterwards.

On my drive home afterwards there was a roadblock on Marine Drive. The policeman asked me how my day had been. I replied, through tears, that I'd had better. He asked for details & on hearing my explanation he very kindly asked if I felt capable of driving home.

I attended the Blue Christmas service at West Vancouver United Church & still remember the beauty & comfort of Sophie Angus' pure sweet soprano voice.

I remember thinking what a supportive, thoughtful gesture such a service provided to lonely people. There weren't many folk in attendance & it struck me what a busy time of year the Christmas season is for the church staff- ministers, choir & organist and how very much I appreciated their efforts.

Andrew & Moira & I travelled to Victoria as usual, pre Christmas. We attended the Christmas Eve service at First Metropolitan United church in downtown Victoria (where my father had ministered until his retirement); Rev Dr. Alan Saunders is currently minister there. He spent part of his youth in West Vancouver & is known to some in the West Van United congregation, as well as to our ministers, Ross & Laura Lockhart. I derive comfort from that connection between the two churches.

It was good to be in a familiar place, with the solace provided by the presence of my children, Mum & sisters and the Christmas pageant & familiar carols & scripture.

Instead of Christmas dinner at my mother's home in Victoria, the Hunter side of the family chose to have a mid afternoon dinner at Butchart Gardens in their marvellous old home, followed by a tour of the Gardens, bedecked in Christmas lights.

Boxing Day has always been celebrated at my sister Alison's home. Weather permitting, we gather for a walk, followed by a smorgasbord & chili fest. Black bottom muffins have over the years become the mandatory dessert; then we snuggle in under cosy blankets in comfy chairs or on the big soft couch to watch a video which has been carefully chosen to suit all present

My sister, Rosemary departed for New Years on Gabriola Island & my children headed off for Mt Washington, one to ski the other to work. A few days later I returned home to West Vancouver.

In preparing this item for the Advent Devotion Guide I realize that Christmas 2009 was a blend of the old AND the new and that some peace & positive remembrances were derived from the blending.

I was very touched by the continued kindness & support of neighbours, family & friends & even total strangers like the West Vancouver policeman. Isaiah's comfort is delivered in many forms by many people, even to the present day.

Prayer: As we prepare for Christmas 2010 help us to remember the centre of it all, God's gift to the world, the infant Jesus. Also help us to remember God's message in the words of Isaiah of comfort, help & freedom from fear & above all of God's permanence. Amen.

Ruth H

Friday, December 17th, 2010

Please read John 9: 1-7

"I am the light of the world..."

Once again we are struck by the Unknowability of God. The passage raises the old question (albeit indirectly). "Why do bad things happen to good people?" We all have our own answers to that question. The certainty is however that bad things do happen and innocent people do suffer emotional and physical pain through no fault of their own.

Ironically the suffering of many people is worse at Christmas – the season of joy – as the disparity between their situation and the joy experienced by others is forced upon them.

One of my boyhood memories is of my father who, at age twenty, was shipped by his company to Canada immediately after World War 1. In later years, at Christmas he would regale my mother with the story of walking the streets of Thorold, Ontario alone and lonely at Christmas looking in windows at other people enjoying themselves. This tale never failed to bring tears to my mother's eyes and she would say "Oh Arthur, don't talk about it". As a youngster I was always dubious about a twenty year old English rip feeling that sorry for himself and was convinced it was just a ploy to get an extra helping of Christmas pudding. But I'm sure the story was at least partly true - loneliness is worse at Christmas.

God may not be able to stop the pain, cure the cancer or halt the tsunami, but He assuredly can give us the strength to face our difficulties with courage and hope.

Prayer: Gracious God. Be with those who are suffering emotional or physical pain at this joyous season and give them extra strength to face life with fortitude and grace. Amen.

Norman A

Saturday, December 18th, 2010

Please read: Luke 3: 1-6

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord"

I once heard a story from the West Vancouver United Church pulpit of three North American engineers, at the end of a hot and dusty business trip in Africa, are finally on their way back to the airport. Their frustration is mounting, however, as their taxi's progress is repeatedly halted, first by an overturned truck, then by an

interminable detour, then by construction on a bridge essential to their route. Their anxiety is fueled by the knowledge that there are only two flights per week that will take them home.

When finally the taxi screeches up to the terminal, they leap out, grab their luggage, and sprint toward their boarding gate. As they round a corner in the crowded terminal, they crash into a little display of pottery that a young girl has set up on a blanket which is sticking out into the passageway. Pots fly every which way. One man stops, but his colleagues grab his arm, saying "No! No time!" Yelling "Sorry, sorry" over their shoulders, they scramble toward the boarding gate, arriving just as it is closing. Sighing relief, they are rushing for the jetway when the third man stops and says, "I have to go back." "What? Don't be stupid!" and "The next plane is Thursday!" gasp his companions. He replies, "No. You go. I'll be back as soon as I can." Astonished, the two dash toward the plane and home.

Turning back into the terminal, the man is shaking his head at his odd decision, but when he gets to the little stand he is glad that he made it, because he can see now that the girl is blind. Her little world of pots blown apart a few minutes earlier, she is now trying to right it, groping for the pieces on the floor.

He apologizes, asks if she is all right, then begins to help her gather the scattered pots and set them back. He collects the shards, vastly overpays her for the broken pots, and offers her a drink of water. He turns to go, back to a taxi and a long ride into the city. "Mister?" her tentative voice calls after him. He stops, "Yes?" Her head turns toward him. "Mister?" she asks, "Are you Jesus?"

Prayer: Dear Lord, Help us to live our lives that our presence and our deeds announce the possibility of God in the world. Let us smooth the rough places and lighten the valleys for those in need around us. Amen

Donna M

Sunday, December 19th, 2010

Please read Isaiah 11: 1 – 10

"...and a little child shall lead them."

When I read these words from the prophecy of Isaiah, it reminds me of a Christmas shopping trip to a large department store in downtown Chicago. We were living in Chicago while I pursued post-graduate studies.

Christmas was fast approaching, so as a family with two young children, we set off to do our Christmas shopping. We entered this very large, crowded and brightly decorated department store. This didn't engage our 3 year old son's attention as he wanted to head straight to the toy department, with us following his lead.

It struck me then with the season of advent upon us that "a little child shall lead them," which he did – straight to the wonderful display of electric trains!

The Little Child who shall once again capture our thoughts and attention and whose birth we will celebrate, will be the Christ Child. Like the shepherds and the wise men, we will all gather as a community of Faith and Love to thank and praise God for the gift of the Christ Child. The One sent to redeem and reconcile all of creation unto Himself.

This was the vision of the Prophet Isaiah. May our prayerful worship this Christmastide include a prayer for the reconciliation of all humankind that peace on earth may become a reality. May God bless you and yours as you journey to Bethlehem in thought, prayer and worship this Advent Season.

Prayer: *Almighty God, Creator and Redeemer, be with us as we pursue our worshipful pilgrimage to Bethlehem this Christmastide. May God in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, become a reality through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Rev. Cliff Henning

Monday, December 20th, 2010

Please read John 15:4-13

*"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you
and that your joy may be complete."*

I was once awarded a plaque for perfect attendance at Sunday School. It was given a prominent place on the wall next to my bed so that I could see it in the morning and in the evening. As the Scriptures said "in my rising up and my lying down", it was to remind me of my duty. It is no wonder that its words come back to me frequently, urging me on. The message was from II Timothy 2:15.

*"Study to show thyself approved unto God,
A workman who needeth not to be ashamed,
Rightly dividing the word of truth."*

I was even more convinced that this passage was meant to guide *me* in my future when later on at a Church summer camp, around the evening campfire, we sang these words as a round over and over, ever diminishing in volume in glorious harmony.

When I read St. Paul's letters, I marvel at the number of passages from the Hebrew Scriptures that rise out of his memory bank to support some teaching he wishes to share with his readers. One of these is in the verse that introduces our reading for today, Psalm 69:9.

"The insults which are hurled at you have fallen on me."

We don't know which insults he may be referring to. Jesus' or perhaps his own. Perhaps he is thinking about his rejection by his Jerusalem brethren, or about some Thessalonians who refused to accept his teaching of a Second Coming of Jesus, or his experience of being jailed at Philippi. It must have cut him deeply to have his qualification for the title of "Apostle" and his leadership abilities questioned by the congregation at Corinth.

Whatever was on his mind, he witnessed to the hope that God inspires in the example of Christ Jesus. It is a hope that creates mutual acceptance, fulfills God's mission for the Jews and enables even the Gentiles to join in the praise of God with one voice. With the support verses from the Torah, the Psalms and Isaiah (Det.32:43; Ps.18:49; Is.11:10), Paul affirms the Gospel of hope for the world's joy and peace.

Prayer: *May God the source of hope, fill me with all joy and peace by means of my faith in him, so that my hope will continue to grow by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Rev. Dr. Paul McKinnon

Tuesday, December 21st, 2010

Please read Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8

*“There is at time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven.”*

Today, we can watch the changing of the seasons out the beautiful windows of our Ambleside apartment but this was not always so. Indeed, we are newcomers to this autumn splendor of ocean spray, bright coloured leaves and swirling snowflakes up the mountain. Our new homeland has brought with it the opportunity to experience seasons and holidays with bright new eyes. Spending our whole lives in South Africa we were used to experiencing Christmas as hot instead of cold and gathering for BBQ instead of a Turkey with all the trimmings. Moving to West Vancouver three years ago to be closer to our children and grandchildren gave us an opportunity to experience a different, more traditional style of Christmas. With snow on the North Shore mountains we could hear the old carols such as “In the Bleak Mid-winter” and “The Holly and the Ivy” with new ears. Here in Canada there is such a difference between the different seasons. It’s ironic that we are experiencing this sense of changing seasons as we begin a new life in a different season of our lives. We love the opportunity to praise God in a new place and belong to a new family of faith. What do the changing of the seasons mean for you in your life of faith?

Prayer: *Eternal God, be with us in the changing seasons of our lives. In this season of Advent and Christmas speak to us once more of your grace and goodness that we find in the cradle and the cross of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Fred & Carol K

Wednesday, December 22nd, 2010

Please read Luke 2: 8-20.

“Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

I am 10 years old and this verse reminds me of the annual Christmas Pageant. Ever since I was 3 years old I have been in the pageant. First as a sheep and then as one of the angels who chorus behind Angel Gabriel. I would probably have continued to be an angel but one year I was the oldest and the Innkeeper’s Wife didn’t show up so I took her spot.

The next year I was the Innkeeper, then Mary, then Angel Gabriel and last year I wanted to be a Narrator but I had to be Joseph. This year I plan to be a Narrator because the regular Narrator (AJ Ives) has graduated and is at university.

Prayer: *Dear God, Thank you for making my life relatively predictable and keeping change to a minimum. And thank you for our annual Christmas Pageant. Amen.*

Anna G

Thursday, December 23rd, 2010

Please read Matthew 4: 12-17

“...the people living in darkness have seen a great light.”

Christmas morning 1946 was full of light in our home. After so many years of darkness during the war my fiancée Len Wannop was home and our marriage was only weeks away. Money was limited and he couldn’t afford to buy me anything for Christmas after paying for our wedding rings and his return airfare back to Aruba where he was working for the year.

On that memorable Christmas morning just weeks before my opportunity to be a “brushing bride” Len gave me a surprise gift. I opened it to discover a free-hand pencil drawing of Man O’War from a small newspaper clipping of the famous horse that he received while working in Aruba. Funny how a gift so simple and thoughtful is what I remember all these years later and not the gifts of great monetary value I received in the years that followed. That simple cardboard sketch symbolized Len’s love of horses from his farm days growing up in Alberta and followed us in all our moves from Aruba to Venezuela to Libya to France to Saudi Arabia and back to West Vancouver. Recently, we had it specially framed with glass and acid free double-matting. If darkness ever threatens now, that simple drawing is a sign of light and love of our 53 years of marriage. The light truly shines in the darkness and overcomes.

Prayer: Dear God; may we rest in peace knowing that you are always there and that our loved ones are with you too. Let the light of your Son shine brightly in our lives giving us hope and encouragement to help neighbours and friends in need. Amen.

Pauline W

Friday, December 24th, 2010

Please read Isaiah 2: 1 – 5

“ ...come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.”

Christmas can be a troubling time. Surrounded by the constant onslaught of sensational news of war, poverty, injustice, excess and abuse entwined with the ravishing advertisements for the vast array of material goods we have become so adept at producing, it’s easy to feel caught up in the apparent reality of life... so easy to attach meaning to it all and to either love it or loath it. We are so close to reality we seem unable to influence or change it, only to create ways of coping with what we perceive life to be. God, if God exists, gets lost in reality, lost in the details.

In the early chapters of Isaiah, he is confronted by a world that sounds very much like ours. But Isaiah has a vision, an unbelievable vision of a world where the “House of the Lord is lifted up” and the people of all nations will flow into it seeking to learn God’s ways and to act upon that wisdom, “beating their swords into plowshares” and trusting in God for judgment. Imagine. He could not be still.

Transformation comes through the unbelievable visions of individuals with courage to risk it all in pursuit of that dream, acting upon it as if it were so. What if a child, the Son of God, was born in a stable many years ago, and has something to teach us even now? What dreams might we dream if that unreasonable possibility consumed us?

Prayer: Unknowable God, whether we gather in community or stand in seeming solitude this day, may we dare to be open to your unreasonable, unknowable presence, may we be transformed by your light, transformed by your grace so that we dream unreasonable dreams and be driven into action. Amen.

Janet L

Saturday, December 25th, 2010

Please read Luke 2:25-33

“...when the parents brought in the child Jesus ...Simeon took him in his arms and praised God...”

Rev. Ross, Simon and I had the amazing opportunity to visit Atlanta, Georgia at the end of October for a conference. The theme of the Conference was noticing, naming and nurturing young people in our congregation into leadership roles within the church family. When I read this passage it reminds me of my

home church in Barrie, Ontario. Christmas Eve was an extremely special time at the church, especially once I went off to college and university. For me, and those I grew up with in the church, Christmas Eve was a super-charged worship service. Warmth and anticipation were tangible on that night. The sanctuary was lit solely by candlelight and the 1890 church was decorated to the max. On Christmas Eve my stomach would be in knots because I was so excited. I was excited because tomorrow would be Christmas day...family, food and presents. I was even more excited about seeing my high school friends who'd returned from college or university far away. The church was so full that chairs had to be set up in the aisles! Young people were everywhere! The service would start and our beloved minister's smile was truly like Simeon's welcome of the baby Jesus.

Our scripture passage today tells of Mary and Joseph, filled with excitement and anticipation, bringing their beloved new child to the temple to be blessed. I think of the excitement and anticipation of university/college parents must feel at this time! It's been a long time since Labour Day or even Thanksgiving! The joy of having your child, no matter the age, home and then joining you for Christmas Eve services is no doubt "super-charged" like when I was a young adult at Burton Ave. United. We as a church family take these young adults into our arms and praise God for them too! Glory be to God for our young people. Glory be to God for coming as a child to dwell amongst us and show us the way.

***Prayer:** God of new beginnings, on this Christmas Day visit us once more with your grace and wisdom. Enable us to give thanks for those who gather around our table this day, from elders to young adults home from school. Remind us that we belong not only to our immediate families and our church family but to the heavenly family we call the communion of saints. Let us rejoice and be glad. Christ the Saviour is born! Amen.*

Rev. Laura Lockhart



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