

NORTHMINSTER DAILY DEVOTIONS



DECEMBER 1-31, 2008

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Northminster Devotionals

May these devotionals be a blessing to you as we are guided through the daily bible readings from *The One Year Bible*.

This resource has come to you because people from NPC have offered their gifts, to be a blessing to the entire Northminster community, to Tucson and beyond. Don't forget... this entire resource is on our website at www.godmorning.com. So tell your friends!

If you would like to use your God-given talent to become a part of the devotional writing team, call the church at 520-327-7121 and talk to Publications Editor, Jim Peck. This is a very flexible ministry and can be done from anywhere!

The next issue of the Northminster Daily Devotions will be available on Sunday, December 28, 2008.

Cover image: Church in Gimli, Manitoba, Canada

The grey boxes that appear on every page direct you to pray for a particular church, organization or group each day. These come from the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s 2008 Mission Yearbook for Prayer & Study.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Daniel 8:1-27

1 John 2:1-17

Psalms 120:1-7

Proverbs 28:25-26

Turn on the Light!

by Jennifer Monroe

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him. -1 John 2:9-11

There you are, awake at 2:00am, and your stomach is rumbling. You toss and turn but you just can't get back to sleep. What you really want, you think to yourself, is a little snack. A peanut butter sandwich? Some leftover turkey and stuffing? A few spoonfuls of ice cream? Certain that you know where you're going and not wanting to wake up anyone else in the house, you quietly slip out of bed in the darkness and head toward the kitchen, when suddenly, you step squarely on the matchbox cars junior left in the hallway. You lose your balance and crash headlong into a bookcase, knocking it and all its contents onto the hardwood floor. If only you had turned on a light!

John says that the one who claims to know God and yet does not love his brother is like the sleepy nocturnal traveler who stumbles around in the dark, hurting others and himself in the process. Sometimes it's easy to say we know who Jesus is and that we are followers of him, and we might even think we know where we're going, but when it comes to the hard work of actually loving other people, we are about as skillful as a man suddenly blinded in an unfamiliar room. John is urging his readers to go beyond just paying lip service to what they say they believe, and actually obeying Jesus' commands, "walk [ing] as Jesus did" (2:6b). And what's the lamp that will light our paths? Love. If we can begin to love our brothers with the real and costly love of Jesus, we will begin to see our way through the gloom, be able to make tough decisions, and follow in the footsteps of the One who is the light.

Youth: Can you think of some ways that love is like a light? What kind of light is it most like? A spark? A floodlight? A flashlight?

Adults: What is one way you can start to love others the way Jesus did?

Prayer: Jesus, you who are the light and life of men, give us the courage to really follow you, even when it means engaging in the hard work of loving others. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Grace Presbytery (Texas)

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Daniel 9:1 - 11:1

1 John 2:18 - 3:6

Psalm 121:1-8

Proverbs 28:27-28

Bent But Not Broken

by Dick Leon

I lift up my eyes to the hills - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip - he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep ... The Lord will keep you from all harm - he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. -Psalm 121

This psalm refers to those who were traveling up to Jerusalem for worship and passing through lands filled with danger. Bad guys hid in the hills so pilgrims would watch the hills for trouble. And the hills were also the sites of shrines to local pagan gods and if you believed in those gods you looked to them for protection. In other words: life is dangerous!

The psalm affirms that the Lord's protection is better than any local god ... wealth, or security systems, or guns and tasers ... for we have a living God who is the Maker of Heaven and earth! This is the sleepless God who watches over our coming into the world and our going out of this world and that is a promise no other local god can make or keep!

So, what do we say when we have been hurt? We live in a broken world and being a Christian does not mean we have a cotton cocoon around us that keeps the evils of our days off our backs! I believe the meaning of the Lord's protective promise is that none of the troubles of this world can break us! We all will be bent by sickness or accident or tragedy but we have a Care-Taker-God who always ... always ... always sustains us and restores us to wholeness. We may get bent ... but we will not be broken!

Youth: Where do you turn when you get hurt? Do you have resources any better than those that come from the Maker of Heaven and earth?

Adults: Think over the times you have been bent low by life's trials and ask yourself this question: "How did I survive except by the Lord's help?"

Prayer: Mighty Lord, thank you for your remarkable and gracious help to us as we travel along life's dangerous trails. When we bend under the weight of trouble, keep us from being broken as we place our trust in you! Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Indian Nations Presbytery (Oklahoma)

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Daniel 11:2-35

1 John 3:7-24

Psalm 122:1-9

Proverbs 29:1

Have You Been Born of God?

by Frank Shallenberger

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. -1 John 3:9

Have you ever done anything that got you as dirty as possible, as sweaty as possible, as grimy as possible? Remember taking off those dirty clothes, taking a long hot shower, using your favorite washcloth or brush and your favorite soap and giving yourself the best bath you ever had? Remember how good it felt? Remember saying to yourself, "I don't want to get that messy again if possible." Not that you won't dirty your hands at times or develop a good sweat exercising or at work, but you will not persist in any activity on a regular basis which messes you up like that.

If you have ever experienced such an event in your life, then you have a good idea of how it feels when one is "born again of the Holy Spirit." You are refreshed and renewed and have become, literally, a new person. When John wrote "born of God," it was this of which he was speaking. He means that we will never continually do the same sin over and over. With the Holy Spirit, "God's seed," dwelling within us we cannot possibly do the same old sins continually. We have been "born of God," we have been "born again!"

Are you persisting in committing the same old sin over and over again? If you are, you need to go over your commitment to Jesus Christ. Perhaps you need an extra dose of the Holy Spirit. Whatever it is, don't neglect rechecking your spiritual connections.

Youth: Are you getting into bad habits? Do you do the same "dumb things" repeatedly?

Adults: Have you settled into a comfortable old sin that almost seems a part of you? It's so easy to do when you let the Holy Spirit level in your tank get low.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, it's so easy for we humans to settle down with a favorite sin. Each time we pray Lord, fill us up with the Holy Spirit. Help us, Lord, to avoid the occasions that make our favorite sin so easy to accept. With you, O God, nothing is impossible. We, who are sinners, cry out to you, O Lord. Lord hear our prayer. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Mission Presbytery (Texas)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Daniel 8:1-27

1 John 2:1-17

Psalms 120:1-7

Proverbs 28:25-26

Tough-Minded Faith

by Marshall Worden

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. -1 John 4:7-11

Most folks in Alpha at Northminster come to learn and ask questions about the fundamentals of Christianity. Some know very little about what Christians believe and others are believers who want to grow in their faith. But invariably, people in Alpha are surprised on the first night to hear that Alpha is all about building a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and that relationship is one of love. In fact, 1 John 4:7-8 is a cornerstone verse in Alpha at Northminster. We sing it every time we are together to proclaim the truth that “love comes from God” and that “God is love.”

Think of the questions that leap out of the passage above. What does it mean for me to be born of God? What does it mean for me to know God? How do I really love others? Do I have the strong faith to do that? Why would God send his son to be a sacrifice for me? Alpha intentionally causes each of us to think how we individually relate to others and to Jesus in all the places of our daily life.

Earlier in 1 John 4, however, we learn more about the character God wants us to have. We are told to “test the spirits to see whether they come from God.” We are suppose to be smart and cautious, to question the things that are going on in the world around us, to not believe everything others might say, and to be tough minded because there are bad and evil things out there.

Youth: Do you love and show kindness to all the people around you in school? What makes it hard for you to do that?

Adults: Do you show loving kindness to all at church, in your neighborhood and work, and in your family? Why do we struggle in doing that?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for first loving us so that we might know how to love one another. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of New Covenant (Texas)

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Hosea 1:1 - 3:5

1 John 5:1-21

Psalms 124:1-8

Proverbs 29:5-8

God's True Gift to Us

by Judy Williams

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. -1 John 5:11-12

In this holiday season, we see reminders everywhere, telling us again of how God chose to send his only Son to be here with his people. Of humble birth, Jesus grew up in a human family, experienced day-to-day life, knew happiness as well as sadness, had friendships, and came to tell mankind of God's love for us all. It was this gift to us of his Son that has given us the opportunity for eternal life with God.

If we have received Jesus Christ, we have received eternal life. Scripture assures us of that. However, if one does not accept God's gift through his Son, that person does not have eternal life. Amid the celebration and bustle of this Christmas, sit back and reflect on your own personal acceptance of God's great gift to you.

Some words in the hymn, *God's Love Made Visible*, written in 1975 by Iola and Dave Brubeck, beautifully describe God's awesome gift:

*God's love made visible!
Incomprehensible!
He is invincible!
His love shall reign!
From love so bountiful,
blessings uncountable
make death surmountable!
His love shall reign!*

*God gave his Son to us
to dwell as one of us—
his blessing unto us!
His love shall reign!
To him all honor bring
heaven and earth will sing,
praising our Lord and King!
His love shall reign!*

Youth: As you and your family plan for this season of gift-giving, will you keep in mind God's greatest gift to you — his only Son, Jesus? And will you remember to thank him for loving you and promising you life forever with him?

Adults: In what ways can you share God's great gift of everlasting life through Jesus with others during this special season of celebration? How can you let those you meet know the Good News of salvation through accepting Jesus Christ?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I praise you and thank you for giving me the opportunity to live with you forever. Such a gift is wonderful beyond measure. Let me never take your love for granted, and enable me to share your promise with those who do not know of your great gift. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Palo Duro Presbytery (Texas)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Hosea 4:1 - 5:15

2 John 1:1-13

Psalms 125:1-5

Proverbs 29:9-11

Behind the Drywall

by Scott Coverdale

A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control. - Proverbs 29:11

In college I had a friend named Andrew who was passionate (for some reason) about professional football. One Sunday in January, several students were at a professor's house for a Super Bowl party, watching the "Big Game." Andrew's favorite team, the Cincinnati Bengals, were playing, and trying to make a big comeback. Then, on a crucial play, their quarterback was sacked and Andrew was so mad that he punched the wall of his professor's living room.

If you ever decide to punch a wall in a frame house, chances are pretty decent that your fist will go through the drywall and create a hole that needs patching. Not smart, perhaps, but nothing that some compound and paint can't fix. Andrew was not so lucky. Behind the drywall where he expressed his football anger stood a double two-by-four which was singularly unimpressed by Andrew's fist. Andrew broke two bones in his hand and set himself up for a lot of unnecessary suffering. He had to learn to write with his left and couldn't type very well or play guitar for a long time. His venting of anger cost him a lot of trouble.

I have built a lot of walls, and I know that they are full of two-by-fours and pipes and wires. And just like we don't know always know what lies behind the drywall, we don't always realize what damage we may do with our words and actions when we speak and act out of anger. Anger is natural, an inevitable part of our human experience, and it is okay to feel it. We need to be careful, though, how we deal with it. If we let anger run wild with our hearts and minds, it can lead to a lot of unnecessary suffering and damage that is not easily repaired.

Youth: Did you ever get mad and say or do something that you wish you hadn't?

Adults: Has your anger resulted in injury that you need to address? What would the first step look like?

Prayer: Thank you, God, that you are able to heal our anger. Please help us to be wise even when we are angry. Thank you for your loving compassion. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of the Pines (Arkansas and Louisiana)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Hosea 6:1 - 9:17

3 John 1:1-15

Psalms 126:1-6

Proverbs 29:12-14

Are You Ready?

by John McKee

Evildoers will continue

To wax ever worse

As the Day of the Lord draws nigh

While God's righteous people

Pray for Christ's prompt return

And watch daily for him in the sky.

Are you ready for Jesus?

He's returning, you know

He could come back in Glory today!

At his second coming

He won't return as a baby

No, he'll arrive in a far different way.

The heavens shall be ripped open

As Christ arrives with his angels

Victorious in power and might.

And every eye will behold

His triumphant arrival

Whether it's during the daytime or night.

His light will shine forth

And illumine the earth

A dazzling white light from above.

As he calls his Church to him

The Choir of Angels will sing

A glorious medley of his tender love.

The wicked are to be judged

And the righteous redeemed

As he separates goats from his sheep.

Will he find your name written

In the Book of Life then?

For what we sow ... we also shall reap.

Are you ready for Jesus?

He is returning, you know.

Won't you to join the joyous throng?

Don't delay your commitment

Accept Jesus Christ as your Savior

He's been waiting for you all along.

Let us join in prayer for:

Union Theological Seminary

Presbyterian School of Christian Education

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Hosea 10:1 - 14:9

Jude 1:1-25

Psalm 127:1-5

Proverbs 29:15-17

Love Your Children

by Karen Foss

The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother ... Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul. -Proverbs 29:15,17

A trip to any grocery store or Wal-Mart will convince you that some parents are not very good at this discipline business. You see kids in check out lines that take candy off the shelf and start to unwrap it or sitting in the toy aisle banging on some box to get the toy out and the parents just ignoring them. Have you ever thought to yourself, "If they can't control them at this young age, what will they do when they get older?"

Unfortunately the newspaper is full of stories of teens and young adults getting into trouble. One of my mother's favorite sayings was "If you love your children, discipline them so others will love them too." Proverbs 23:13 tells us "Do not withhold discipline from a child." One of the hardest parts of disciplining your children is that you have to be consistent. Sometimes you feel like the biggest nag that ever was. This is a tough world we live in and children that know right from wrong and how to get along with others have an advantage.

Youth: How do you react when your folks discipline you? Do you realize it's for your own good?

Adults: How is disciplining your children working out for you? Are you proud of them or ashamed at some of their actions? Sometimes we get tired of correcting our children even when we know that it's for their own benefit.

Prayer: Dear Father, help us be diligent in raising good children, who know right from wrong and make us proud. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of South Louisiana

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Joel 1:1 - 3:21

Revelation 1:1-20

Psalm 128:1-6

Proverbs 29:18

A Grandmother's Dream

by Anne Price

May the Lord bless you from Zion all the days of your life, may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem, and may you live to see your children's children.

-Psalm 128:6

As I read this verse, I felt like I had just won the lottery. However, money would not have given the lasting joy that having one's dreams come true can have. When I was a little girl being raised by grandparents during the time of war, atom bomb threats and their age, I prayed each night that I would not lose them and be an orphan.

They lived many years to see me grown, married and having children of my own. Then I prayed to live to see my own grandchildren. Now I realize that this verse has come true. God has blessed me beyond my wildest imagination.

There are days that I miss being the old-fashioned grandmother that had her family around her every day to take care of. I have had to accept that with my grandchildren living in California and Texas having exciting lives of their own, I have the opportunity to live a full, useful life today.

I am not what I would have imagined a grandmother should be fifty years ago. However, God puts us where he wants us to be. God give us the Bible to show his love for us. We are never left orphans, are we?

Thank you father for answering our prayers.

Youth: Do you have a special love for your grandparents? Have you told them?

Adults: Can we show love for older people when our grandparents are no longer with us?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we know that there are no grandchildren in Heaven, for you are Father to us all. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Tres Rios (Texas)

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Amos 1:1 - 3:15

Revelation 2:1-17

Psalm 129:1-8

Proverbs 29:19-20

When God Spoke to Me!

by Jerry Smith

Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

-Revelation 2:4-5

Ephesians has always been one of my favorite books in the Bible and it grieves me to think that they would have fallen from grace. But it grieves me even more to admit that I also fell from his loving presence. After a miraculous conversion in a small Presbyterian church in Milton, Florida and 25 years of following Jesus I began, gradually, to distance myself from the Church, the Word and Prayer.

Oh, I could offer some reasons but they would be lame at best and certainly not very complimentary. This separation went on far too long and it's not that I ever doubted my salvation. It's just that I was in the same boat as the Ephesians.

One morning while lying in bed a message came to me, "Jerry, you must return to your first love." Was it a voice or a silent message. I can't tell you. But I can tell you this, I had no doubt where it came from and what it meant. We were living in Bristol, Rhode Island at the time and our options were limited. There was a Baptist Church in town and the pastor loved the Lord and he preached the Word. We started going there and got back on track. To give you an idea of the size, Esther my son and I sang in the choir and made up 3/8ths of the total. We had a weekly Bible study and great fellowship and from that experience I have never looked back. Each day with the Lord just keeps getting better and better.

Youth: Looking for love? Look to God, nobody loves you more.

Adults: Are you where you should be in your walk with the Lord? He's waiting with open arms.

Prayer: Father, we are so sorry that we stray from your loving arms and we are so thankful that you never close them to those who seek you. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Human Rights Day

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Amos 4:1 - 6:14

Revelation 2:18 - 3:6

Psalm 130:1-8

Proverbs 29:21-22

De Profundis

by Frank Shallenberger

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.

-Psalms 130:1- 4

I have read Christian commentaries and devotionals which imply that no good Christian should ever be depressed. Unfortunately, we know differently. Wherever one goes in the world, one will find at least one third of the population depressed at any one time. Sometimes depression follows events over which one has absolutely no control; unexpected sickness or death, trauma and accidents to name a few. Sometimes depression follows sin; dreadful, uncompromising breaks with Almighty God. Such is the occasion that caused David to write the above words.

David was immersed in a pit of sorrow and grief having broken two of the Ten Commandments: adultery and murder. It is a rare Christian who would find himself or herself in such a horrible situation. David had initially tried to gloss over these sins telling himself no one had even known about it. Nathan showed him otherwise. It was only then that the actual realization was more than he himself could bear. He had failed his God, who had saved him so many times. His sorrow was so severe he could not bear it. He became melancholic. He became depressed. It is from the depths of his depression that he cries out this prayer. But he had the same hope then that we have today. Our God is a forgiving God. If we but confess our sins he will forgive us and make us righteous.

Youth: To whom do you turn when you realize you have done something wrong?

Adults: Is confession a part of your daily prayer time?

Prayer: Most merciful and loving Lord, it is to you we turn when our souls are red with sin. You give us great comfort when we know that when we confess our sins to you, you will forgive them and remember them no more. Spare us the depression Lord that comes from trying to conceal our sins from you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Synod of the Trinity

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Amos 7:1 - 9:15

Revelation 3:7-22

Psalm 131:1-3

Proverbs 29:23

He Knocks

by Jennifer Hager

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. -Revelation 3:20

This amazing verse reveals God's nature to us using a beautiful metaphor of our home and a meal. The Almighty God comes to our door and knocks! Can you imagine the overwhelming joy we would feel if we answered a knock at our door and it was Our Lord who stood there? However, this is just what he tells us that he does. He comes to us where we are.

The Lord knocks and *if we hear* him and open the door, he will come in. But can we hear him? I believe we can if we prepare using the tools he has given us.

The Lord has given us the Holy Bible, filled with his love and wisdom to prepare to hear his knock. The Lord has given us the Holy Spirit, prayer, worship, fellowship, small groups and music. These are the tools that will sharpen our listening of him and prepare us to hear his knock.

This verse tells us that after we open the door to the Lord, he will come in and eat with us. This a beautiful way of the Lord reassuring us that he will be with us always. The Lord says "I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

Youth: What can we do to listen better?

Adults: Are we using the tools the Savior has given us to grow in our relationship with him?

Prayer: Almighty God, thank you for the tools you have given us to know you better and to hear you when you knock. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Beaver-Butler (Pennsylvania)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Amos 7:1 - 9:15

Revelation 4:1-11

Psalms 132:1-18

Proverbs 29:24-25

Heavenly Worship

by Lisa Grenier

The twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." -Revelation 4:10-11

As I considered Revelation 4:1-11, the Lord brought to mind how perfectly awesome worship will be in Heaven. In this passage, the twenty-four elders fall down before God who sits on the throne and they worship him. They cast their crowns before his throne with the knowledge that their good deeds were accomplished not by their own effort, but by the power provided by God through the Holy Spirit (The Lord Almighty says in Zechariah 4:6, "*Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit*"). Therefore any reward belongs not to the elders, but to the Holy One who deserves all honor and glory!

The power of the Holy Spirit that produces good deeds in us also makes it possible to worship God not just on Sundays when we are led by the praise team or choir, but also everyday of the week. Nobody knows what Heaven will be like (1 Corinthians 2:9), but certainly our earthly worship is only a mere shadow of the awesome worship we will enjoy in Heaven where there is no sin or any distraction to take away from full participation in worship.

In this season of Advent, we are reminded of God's amazing gift of love given at Christmas so that we can be reconciled to him and have eternal life. Now doesn't that make you want to shout praise to God?

Youth: While singing a familiar song or hymn during worship, have you ever considered closing your eyes to focus more on the Lord and keep from being distracted?

Adults: Will you seek God today praising and thanking him for what he has accomplished both in and through you?

Prayer: Creator and sustainer of all, I worship you, for you are so worthy of my praise. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Carlisle (Pennsylvania)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Jonah 1:1 - 4:11

Revelation 5:1-14

Psalm 133:1-3

Proverbs 29:26-27

Lord of the Sabbath

by John McKee

As Jesus with his Disciples
Were passing through a grain field,
The men plucked and ate heads of grain.

Pharisees present were shocked
For this was a Sabbath day
And to Jesus, they began complain.

However, this act they protested
Just added grist to their mill
For the Pharisees had a diabolical plan

To compile enough charges
Against the Lord Jesus Christ
To legally execute the Son of Man.

*“Look, why are they doing
“What is not lawful on the Sabbath?”*
The pompous men indignantly said.

Christ reminded them how David
While in need and quite hungry
Entered God’s house to eat the *Showbread*.

The *Showbread* Christ spoke of
Or, *Bread of the Presence*,
Was prepared using fine flours and yeast.

It was unlawful to eat *Showbread*
In the House of God
Unless one was a Levite Priest

After creating the universe
And all that’s within it
God needed a ‘Day of Rest.’

Thus the seventh day ... the Sabbath
He set aside for that purpose
A day our God hallowed and blessed

***“The Sabbath was made for man
“And not man for the Sabbath.”***
Said Lord Jesus to everyone there

***“Therefore the Son of Man is Lord
“Even of the Sabbath.”***
He concluded with authoritative air.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Outreach Foundation

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Micah 1:1 - 4:13

Revelation 6:1-17

Psalm 134:1-3

Proverbs 30:1-4

Merry Christmas or Happy Holiday?

by Dick Leon

All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever. -Micah 4.5

What do you say to the merchant who wishes you “Happy Holiday?”

I love this joyous Christmas season and all the music and the lights and decorations that permeate our public and private places. But, the Christmas season also carries some tension as it uncovers the cultural wars that are going on in our society today.

Do we say “Merry Christmas” or “Happy Holiday” to shoppers and merchants? I plan to say “Merry Christmas” with a gracious smile regardless of how others greet me and I hope you do the same!

Micah reminds us that we all “walk in the name of our gods” and for too many in America that does not mean Jesus Christ. We need a strong dose of tolerance to cope with the diversities of our culture. But “tolerance” is not being wishy-washy in the face of diversity! “Tolerance” for me means that we never compromise our convictions but we express our views graciously and we behave lovingly toward those whose gods are different. What merit is it if we only love those who are like us; how does that make us any different from the rest of the world?

We need to keep on “walking in the name of the Lord our God, forever and ever” but walk in such a way that we do not come across as arrogant or nasty or mean-spirited to those walking in other ways.

We will be poor witnesses to the love of God in Christ if we fail to hold firm to our faith ... and we will be poor witnesses if we are nasty or mean-spirited to the pagan world around us! Have a Merry Christmas!

Youth: Are you shy about your Christian faith to your friends?

Adults: How are you showing your love for the God of love to those in your working or social life who don't believe in Christ or Christmas?

Prayer: Forgive us, Lord, for being too timid in showing our faith in Jesus Christ to our unbelieving neighbors. Give us firm and gracious ways to be good witnesses to Jesus in this season of his birth! Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Donegal (Pennsylvania)

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Micah 5:1 - 7:20

Revelation 7:1-17

Psalms 135:1-21

Proverbs 30:5-6

His Word is Flawless!

by Marie Ruiz

Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.

-Proverbs 30:5-6

The flawless nature of the Scriptures cannot be underestimated. It is interesting that this same wording also appears twice in the Psalms. When Scripture repeats itself, it usually is an indication of significance.

This idea of something being flawless (meaning perfection) can only be equated with the one who gave us these words, God himself. No one is perfect but God alone (Matthew 5:48). And yet, we who have made a profession of faith and place our trust in God are called to be perfect. The only way we can live a blameless life is to feed on the word of God which is a shield against the imperfect and sinful world we live in. We, of course, have sinned, and cannot be perfect as Christ is perfect, but his redeeming power has made it possible for our sin to be washed away.

This idea of the Word of God being a shield is very picturesque for me. I remember seeing a battle scene where the metal shields were the protection from fiery arrows being shot at them. These shields not only covered the entire body of the person, but were impenetrable by the arrows being shot at them. This is the same kind of protection the flawless Word of God provides.

The second part of our key verse for today is so important. We must never think we can improve upon God's word by adding to it. God's word stands alone and is all that we need for understanding and living a blameless life on earth.

Youth: What do you think about this verse calling us to live a perfect life? How can we do that here on earth?

Adults: Like a flawless diamond, how can we brilliantly shine like the light of Scripture when we know his Word and live as Christ commands?

Prayer: Thank you Lord for your Word that is flawless and gives protection to us every moment of every day while here on earth. May we feed on your Word as our strength and guide. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Huntingdon (Pennsylvania)

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Nahum 1:1 - 3:19

Revelation 8:1-13

Psalm 136:1-26

Proverbs 30:7-9

Audacious Goodness and Love

by Jennifer Monroe

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His love endures forever. -Psalm 136:1

In the face of collapsing economies, natural disasters, political upheaval, personal tragedies, environmental decay, questions, doubts, worries, fears, loneliness, anger, despair, prayers that seem to go unanswered, and needs that appear to be unmet, two of the most audacious things you can believe and declare are that “God is good” and that “God’s love endures.” He is not just nice, in a benign, grandfatherly way, like a divine Santa Claus who delivers presents once a year and then goes on his merry way. He is really and truly good — the embodiment and definition of everything pure, lovely, beautiful, and true. And he is not merely tolerant, bearing with foolish people who disobey him and break his laws. He wholeheartedly and unabashedly loves us, desiring nothing but that we become the real human beings he created us to be. If these two things are true, what other response can we have but thankfulness?

The psalmist begins Psalm 136 by making these two audacious claims about God, and then brings up example after example from Israel’s past as evidence. Not only has God created an awesome and beautiful universe, but he has singled out Israel and been faithful to her through all of her turbulent history. This model would be a good one for all of us to follow in times of struggle, doubt, and fear. Even though the present may seem dark and unclear, think of times in the past when God’s goodness and love have been evident. Retell the story of your life, courageously laying claim to the truth that God is good and that his love endures forever, always remembering to give thanks to this God of Gods and Lord of Lords.

Youth: Is it hard or easy to believe that God is good? Why?

Adults: What are some examples from your own life that you could cite as evidence of God’s goodness and his love?

Prayer: Lord, we believe that you are good and that you love us. Give us courage to cling to these truths in times of trial, boldness to proclaim them to a world in need, and above all, gratitude. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Kiskiminetas (Pennsylvania)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Habakkuk 1:1 - 3:19

Revelation 9:1-21

Psalms 137:1-9

Proverbs 30:10

Idols in Our Idle Moments

by Judy Williams

Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!' Or to a lifeless stone, 'Wake up!' Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him. -Habakkuk 2:18-20

How often we find ourselves in awe of something manufactured by human hands. Our desire for more things, newer technology, the latest gadget, or the item our neighbor just acquired blinds us to the fact that we are really making idols of those objects. These idols cannot speak!

As the gift-giving season is surrounding us and as we are bombarded with television and newspaper advertisements for things we or our children must have, we would do well to step back and assess the degree to which we have allowed ourselves to enter the trap of the sort of idol worship about which Habakkuk warned us in his prophecy.

Rather, it is for believers to understand the importance of finding silence among the voices competing for our attention — silence to hear God speaking to us.

While exchanging gifts with family and friends is a traditional and happy part of our celebrations, the true gifts at Christmastime are those of time and sharing the love of God with those around us. Quiet times of remembrance with our loved ones are of real and lasting value.

Remember the reason for the season!

Youth: How many things are on your Christmas "wish list" this year? How could you change that list to include time to do something for someone else?

Adults: Will you spend too much money again this year or will you instead spend time sharing your self with others? Are your idols in the way?

Prayer: Loving Father, help me focus on your truth and your guidance. Help me remember your living spirit and keep me from being swayed from worshipping you by earthly distractions. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Lackawanna (Pennsylvania)

The Message of the Seven Thunders?

by Frank Shallenberger

Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun ... He ... gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "... do not write it down." -Revelations 10:1-4

Apparently this is not the first time John has seen an angel such as this. John saw "another angel." What a dramatic appearance this angel had, clothed in a cloud with the rainbow for a crown. His face shone like the sun for he had just left the presence of Almighty God. The rainbow was testimony that God had sent him. He shouted with a mighty voice. In response the "seven thunders" spoke. John was about to write this down when he was told to make no record of it. Have you ever wondered what the seven thunders said? This is the only time in the Bible when "seven thunders" are mentioned. Seven is a holy number and God's voice is often described as "thunder." Dr. Vincent's commentary says "the Jews were accustomed to speak of thunder as 'the seven voices.'"

You and I are free to let our imaginations wander as we consider what the seven thunders said. I believe God was warning John about future visions. God was letting him know that when the chips are down, he is in control. You and I may never have been spoken to in a voice like seven thunders, but we have been spoken to many times in our hearts, in our times of contemplation and prayer.

Youth: Have you ever noticed that you have bad vibes about a contemplated activity? Where did you think that came from?

Adults: Have you been waiting for a voice of thunder when a silent voice has been heard in your heart?

Prayer: Father God, help us to pay more attention to the quiet way you speak to us in our hearts. Sometimes dear Lord, we fail to consider the source of ideas which come to us in prayer. Open our eyes that we may see, our ears that we may hear and our hearts that we may understand, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Lake Erie (Pennsylvania)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Haggai 1:1 - 2:23

Revelation 11:1-19

Psalms 139:1-24

Proverbs 30:15-16

Amazing Love

by Scott Coverdale

Oh, Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise. You know my thoughts from afar. -Psalm 139:1-2

I work for a non-profit agency that provides emergency home repair for low-income people. It's a great job, and we do good work and most people are very appreciative of our efforts. Many people tell me how thankful they are for the assistance, and how great our staff and volunteers are. But whatever people say to me, I realize that they don't really know me very well — they simply know the work that I do.

When I get home from work, usually on my bicycle, my ten-year old son comes running outside to greet me. "Daddy!" he exclaims, and hugs me and asks me how my day was. He is unabashed in his love for his father. This boy, by the way, knows me well. He knows me better than the people who I work for. This boy knows that I can be impatient or grumpy or irritable. He has seen me angry, has seen me uncharitable, has seen me act foolishly. His love for me is especially humbling, especially sweet for all of that.

Psalms 139, my all-time favorite, reminds me that God knows me thoroughly, knows all of my history, my "secrets," my thoughts, the smallness of my faith, hope and love. And yet he loves me greatly. And yet he desires and designs goodness for me. And yet he watches over me. That is amazing. That is better than all of the accolades that a person can hope for from the people among whom they work and live. To be known and yet loved is far better than to be acclaimed by those who see only what we do in the public arena. God's love for us transcends all other loves because, since there is nothing we have done to earn it, there is nothing we can do to diminish it. It surrounds us like the mountains surround a valley.

Youth: Do you think there is anything that God doesn't know about you? Do you realize how much God loves you? Wow!

Adults: What does it mean about God that he both knows and loves us greatly?

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for your great compassion that lets you love us even though you know us completely. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Lehigh Presbytery (Pennsylvania)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Zechariah 1:1-21

Revelation 12:1-17

Psalms 140:1-13

Proverbs 30:17

All is Well

by John McKee

Upon reaching the goal
Of the life everlasting
Upon achieving this ultimate prize

We'll sing praises to God
For at last ... *all is well*
As He wipes every tear from our eyes.

When we're welcomed to Heaven
By Lord Jesus and hear,
"Good and Faithful servant ... well done."

He'll give a Crown of Life to us
For our fidelity and say
"All is well, child ... your race has been won."

When we see our dear loved ones
Who crossed over before
Run to greet us with arms open wide

Reveling in their embrace
We will know ... all is well.
And forever more with them we shall abide.

Our imperishable new bodies
Will never grow old,
Nor ever become ill or feel pain

We'll give him thanks forever
Praise his name ... all is well
For bringing us home to remain.

As we sing with his angels
Praising God's Holy Name
For the sacrifice of his only Son

We sing our praises to him
Hallelujah ... all is well!
Laud and honor to the Three in One.

Let us join in prayer for:

Christmas Joy Offering

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Zechariah 2:1 - 3:10

Revelation 13:1-18

Psalms 141:1-10

Proverbs 30:18-20

The Second Time God Spoke to Me

by Jerry Smith

If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements...and I will give you a place among those standing here. -Zechariah 3:7

I chose this verse because the last portion of verse seven in the New King James version says, "I will give you a place to walk among those who stand here." Walking is what I would like to talk about. Some of my earliest memories are about walking. If I got bored I would head for the woods and walk and observe nature for hours. I even walked to school from kindergarten to high school graduation, never living closer than a mile to any of the schools I attended. I just loved walking. Even after I moved out to Arizona, I would wake up at the crack of dawn and walk for two miles. Never with a Walkman because of the pleasure of God's wonders to observe. I also believe we have denied our children an opportunity to enjoy the pleasures of walking. One of the reasons I enjoy golf is the opportunity to walk (and now ride) some of the most beautiful landscapes the world has to offer.

This all came to a screeching halt when I contracted Valley Fever. For I didn't get the one to two week variety but the two to three year variety. When it lasts that long the cocci fungi starts traveling through your body and it settled in my knees and prostate. I was soon bone on bone on both knees, had a very high P.S.A. and at the same time was diagnosed with diabetes. One day as I was praying and asking God why this was happening I again very plainly heard, "My grace is sufficient for you."

Now I don't claim to be in category with Paul for I'm not worthy to carry his sandals. None the less that's what I heard and I've taken it to mean two things:

1. When things are going too smoothly my mind and heart stray from where God wants them.
2. I wasn't going to walk great distances in the woods any more but my walk was going to be much closer and more fulfilling as I walked with the Lord.

Youth: Do you wish you were older? Be patient you will get there soon enough!

Adults: Do you wonder why certain things befall you? God has the answer if you will listen.

Prayer: Father, you have promised that you would keep us from bearing more than we could withstand. We pray our faith will help us to hang on until we get your promised help. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Northumberland (Pennsylvania)

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Zechariah 4:1 - 5:11

Revelation 14:1-10

Psalms 142:1-7

Proverbs 30:21-23

Lowly and Little - High and Mighty

by Dick Leon

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. -Revelation 4:1-3

There are two great scenes of the Lamb of God that make this Christmas season complete. The first is the babe in the manger, lowly and little, who has come to redeem the world. The second is at the end of history of the Lamb of God, high and mighty, standing victorious on Mt. Zion. Both scenes are needed to celebrate Christmas rightly.

We need to know that God took on human form in its most universal feature: lowly and little. The greatness of God is that he became little for us. This means he knows us through and through ... and we can know him as he reveals himself to us in the physical, earthly life of Jesus!

And we need to know that God triumphs over the evils of this world; all our sins cannot deter him from accomplishing his purpose for his creation. At the end the Lamb stands high and mighty as Victor, leading all his followers in a new song of triumph and joy. We need to be in that throng!

As for the number, 144,000, let me add this note. I believe in the book of Revelation the numbers are symbolic not literal. The number in this text comes from multiplying 12 x 12 (the Old and New Covenants of 12 tribes and 12 apostles) times 1000 (the number that means unlimited, boundless) ... therefore a countless multitude of all Jesus' faithful flock.

Youth: Is your Christ-child large enough to include the Lamb of victory?

Adults: Will your worship of Christ this Christmas include both his lowliness and his mightiness?

Prayer: Mighty Lord, help us catch the full vision of who you are and what you have done in your birth as well as in your resurrection to reign forever and ever and ever! We pray in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania)

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Zechariah 6:1 - 7:14

Revelation 15:1-8

Psalm 143:1-12

Proverbs 30:24-28

Your Unfailing Love

by John Cheek

I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land ... Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. -Psalm 143:6,8

Christmas Eve is always bittersweet for me, because December 24 was my mother's birthday. When she was little, her grandparents, who reared her, combined her birthday with Christmas. My father, sister, and I always tried to spoil my mother by giving her birthday presents and a cake on her birthday, and then Christmas presents the next day.

When I was a teenager, I assumed I would have her forever, but she died when I was nineteen. That was for me a time of pain and anger and being lost. I didn't have enough sense to even stretch out my hands to God. I was just broken.

But God brought me back into relationship with him, and filled my life with sweetness, grace, and his unfailing love. I truly do lift up my soul to him.

Youth: Think about a time when you were really sad. Did you know that God loved you completely, even in your sadness?

Adults: How has God's unfailing love ministered to you in your losses and griefs? How did you respond to that love?

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for your unfailing love, which calls us back to you and heals our hurts. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Pittsburgh Presbytery (Pennsylvania)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Zechariah 8:1-23

Revelation 16:1-21

Psalms 144:1-15

Proverbs 30:29-31

Hand in Hand!

by Andy Ross

Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.

-Zechariah 8:23

Two of the most amazing words, right? “with you.”

It can be thrilling to know that such an important life and force, is really with you!

I will never forget the time, as a brand-new father, that I was given my newborn son, Jeremy — placed in my arms. My own son, now with me! I remember marveling at how his hands were so tiny ... I marveled that his grip around my thumb, wouldn't even go around my thumb! And yet, there he was, this living, squirming, warm bundle — with me, in my arms.

Could it be that God at last chose to be with us in such a form? Could it be that the Creator who spoke life into existence took on a form whose hand would not at first reach around our thumbs? Could it be that now, because of how Jesus grew and lived, died, and rose again — can be with you now? On this day of all days?

Oh what a wonder! What a gift! Today — I pray you might get lost in the worship of it all, and simply sing, if not hum — “O Come Let Us Adore Him!”

Young People: How does Jesus hold our hand now? And how does God's hand holding yours make a difference?

Adults: Whose are the hands you need to hold today, as we act out the love that God has given us, in his own Son?

Prayer: Dear Lord, we pause to pray on this special day for your care and blessings on those whose hands we may not be able to hold today. Keep our loved ones, those we are separated from, along with any others who are feeling lonely, in your care this day. And thank you for coming to us, as a baby, so that we might live now and always in the grip of your love! Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Nativity of Jesus Christ

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 26 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Zechariah 9:1-17

Revelation 17:1-18

Psalm 145:1-21

Proverbs 30:32

Messiah!

by Jennifer Monroe

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey ...He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

-Zechariah 9:9, 10b

I cannot type the words of today's Scripture without hearing them sung by a melodic soprano voice in my head. They are the lyrics to one of the arias in Handel's famous oratorio *Messiah*, a grand and glorious piece of music that is often performed around Christmastime. In Handel's typical fashion, the melody of this piece perfectly accompanies the lyrics, actually seeming to rejoice as it trips quickly and merrily all over the scale, slows down to reflect on Christ bringing peace to the nations, and then returns to joy and merriment at the end of the piece. We often associate *Messiah* with the season of Advent because of some of its other great arias and choruses that celebrate Christ's birth: "For unto us a Child is born" and "Glory to God", for example.

But *Messiah* is about much, much more than just Christmas as it reflects upon the world's need for a Messiah, the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ as its Messiah, and anticipates Christ the Messiah's eventual return in glory. It's good to remember, on the day after Christmas, that our celebration of this season is not actually meant to be the climax of the Church's liturgical year, but rather one chapter in the long story of God's work to redeem the earth. The really big moments are still to come during the Holy Week of Easter. That's when we celebrate that the baby born in the manger grew to be the messiah king who, as the gospel writer Matthew points out by quoting Zechariah in chapter 21:5, really did come to his people riding on a donkey, died on a cross, was raised from the dead, and brought peace to the earth. And that's definitely worth singing about!

Youth: Which holiday do you look forward to more, Christmas or Easter? Why?

Adults: What's one way you can start anticipating Easter now?

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for your birth, your life, your death, and your resurrection. We celebrate you today. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Redstone (Pennsylvania)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Zechariah 10:1 - 11:17

Revelation 18:1-24

Psalm 146:1-10

Proverbs 30:33

Only God Reigns

by Anne Price

Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. -Psalm 146:3-4

Looking at long term trust in mortals is like reaching out for a lifeboat that continues to move away from our reach so that we may drown.

Now that our elections are over, we just know that whoever will become our President in 2009 will have his followers and his detractors. Some day he will be just a memory replaced by another. He will have his successes and his failures.

As Christians, we hear the trustworthy call from our Lord only, rather than from other human beings. It takes diligence to not follow one new idea after another. We pray for guidance from the true source of wisdom. God never gives up his Kingdom no matter what man does or does not do.

When we start to judge another for their weakness, especially public figures, we must remember our own inability to always avoid the temptation of sin.

Accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior rather than following the latest guru is the only way to lead a spirit filled life and a place in Heaven with our only true King.

Youth: What do you think when one of your heroes does something wrong?

Adults: How can we treat others as mere mortals and still show them respect?

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for always being the King of my world. Help me to understand others without being judgmental. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of Shenango (Pennsylvania)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Zechariah 12:1 - 13:9

Revelation 19:1-21

Psalms 147:1-20

Proverbs 31:1-7

Extol the Lord

by Marie Ruiz

He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes. He hurls down his hail like pebbles Who can withstand his icy blast? He sends his word and melts them; he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow. -Psalm 147:16-18

I grew up in the Boston area and remember vividly the frequent Noreaster that would blast through New England leaving mounds of snow, followed by bitter cold. This was winter and as a young girl I learned to shovel snow and dress appropriately for the coldest part of the year. This verse reminded me of many a December and also reminded me that it is God alone who sends his commands to earth and whose words are given life on earth. Just as he sends his words filled with winter, there is a spring that follows that provides rain and causes the grass to grow and food for the cattle. God has given life to all things on earth and delights in all of his creation as stated in Genesis: "It was good." But what God favors the most and even delights in are those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love. Wow! This is a mystery but it is borne out in the very nature of God in sending his son to this life and to die so our sin could be redeemed on a cross.

This Christmas season just past with all the glitter, beauty and wonder and points us to the reason Christ was born — to die on a cross. As we begin a new year in just four short days, let us renew our hope in the God of unfailing love, with reverent fear and praise him; our great and mighty Lord who grants peace and blessings.

Youth: The seasons of our year come and go and we listen to the meteorologist for reports. But did you know that God orchestrates our climate and determines the number of stars? What part of God's creation most fascinates you?

Adults: Do you ever become confident in our own resources and forget that nothing happens on earth without God sending his commands? It is fitting to praise God.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for your miraculous creation that we enjoy every day. Help us go through this life singing praises to you for it is fitting to praise the lord! Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

New Church Development

MONDAY, DECEMBER 29 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Zechariah 14:1-21

Revelation 20:1-15

Psalms 148:1-14

Proverbs 31:8-9

Do You Believe in Prayer?

by Frank Shallenberger

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it... And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened... If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelations 20:11-12a, 15

John watched the dead, kings and peasants, standing there before God Almighty awaiting their judgment. As each one presented himself, God looked for his name in the Book of Life. If that individual's name was not written there, he or she was immediately cast into the lake of fire. That person would dwell forever in Hell. They had had the opportunity and they threw it away.

Those of us who have been "born again" know that our names are indelibly recorded in God's book. But I wager there are few members of this congregation who don't know someone who has never accepted Jesus Christ. I am sure most of us have done our best to lead them to salvation but there always is an excuse; "I just can't believe that," "I'm not ready yet," "don't you ever mention that to me again, I mean it."

If we persist too much, the third response above is sure to be heard. So while we can try for a while, eventually we need to stop. So what's the best course? Prayer. Prayer. More prayer. That's all we can do. You and I will never know the intimate relationship of another individual with God Almighty. There may be a relationship there about which we know nothing. After all, it is God himself who makes a final determination, who sees into the minds and hearts of each one of us.

Youth: Do you pray for those companions of yours who reject your invitations to join you and others here at Northminster?

Adults: How many relatives and friends do you have who are lost? Are you still trying and above all are you praying?

Prayer: Oh Lord, help us to be faithful in prayer for our relatives and friends of the workplace etc. who reject you. We cry out to you, oh Lord, with all of our needs and we have but one request, "hear us, oh Lord." We send this prayer to you through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

Upper Ohio Valley Presbytery (Ohio and West Virginia)

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 30 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Malachi 1:1 - 2:17

Revelation 21:1-27

Psalms 149:1-9

Proverbs 31:10-24

Communicating with God

by John McKee

I climbed a mountain one day
To commune with my God
And after reaching the highest peak

I knelt down on my knees
Beneath the aspens and pines
To listen for the Lord God to speak.

As the wind softly blew
Through his beautiful trees
With his birds singing sweetly above

God spoke to my heart
In his calm, soothing manner
To reassure me of his infinite love.

I put out to sea in a sloop
To commune with my God
Just me with his seagulls and fish.

I listened intently for him
In that serene setting
As gentle whitecaps brushed by with a ... *swish*

I said a prayer of thanksgiving
For his bountiful blessings
While steering the boat with the wheel.

He sent the Holy Spirit
To fill my troubled heart
With his genuine peace I could *feel*.

I took a hot air balloon ride
To commune with my God
While aloft by myself in the sky

I prayed for him to forgive
All my past scarlet sins
As the landscape below drifted by.

But we needn't go to these places
To commune with our God
He's been with each of us right from the start

We may rest assured ... *always*
God hears our every word
For he listens within each person's heart.

Let us join in prayer for:

Washington Presbytery (Pennsylvania)

Praise God in the New Year

by Judy Williams

Praise the Lord, Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. -Psalm 150:1-6

As New Year's Eve is upon us, let us each pause to remember what God desires from his people. We know that he desires our praise! The psalmist in today's passage appropriately reminds us where, why and how to show our praise. We are to celebrate God's greatness with sincere enthusiasm! Whether or not we have musical instruments, if we are alive we are to praise him! Our One Year Bible explains that the English translation of the words

Praise the Lord is from the Hebrew "HALLELU YAH." That gives a new appreciation of the thrill prompted when we hear Handel's Halleluiah Chorus sung!

Throngs around the world will be watching and listening for the ringing of midnight bells to signal the beginning of a new year. Many eyes will focus on a ball slowly falling to mark the final countdown.

While that is happening, let us, as followers of Christ, focus our hearts on God, praising Him and fervently asking for his guidance and blessing in the year ahead.

"Let everything that has breath Praise the Lord!"

Youth: New Year's Resolutions are fun to make. Will you resolve to praise God for his power and greatness every day in 2009? And will you remember to be thankful for all the blessings you enjoy?

Adults: In your prayers, will you remember to praise and thank God every day as well as listing your requests and petitions? And will your praise be sincere and enthusiastic?

Prayer: Dear God, We are awed by your majesty! We praise your power and give you thanks for the love you bestow on us daily. We thank you and praise you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, and for your Spirit abiding with us year in and year out. Grant us wisdom in the decisions we make in the days ahead. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Let us join in prayer for:

The Presbytery of West Virginia

God's Holy Plan

By John McKee

God is still in control
Throughout Heaven and earth
In accordance to his Holy Plan.

Soon the arrogant actions
Of Satanic madmen
To gain power over their fellow man

Will be brought to an end
As his peace and joy
Supplant hatred, bloodshed and sorrow

For within God's Holy Plan
His Son is to return
If not today ... then perhaps tomorrow.

In Paul's epistle to Timothy
Evil will wax ever worse,
Until Jesus returns here in Glory

To bring his Peace upon earth
For one thousand years
It will then be a quite different story.

Just when shall this take place?
Only the Father in Heaven
Knows the hour Christ's rule will begin.

During his Millennial Reign
Satan is to be bound
Where he cannot tempt people again.

Following the one thousand years
He'll be loosed for a time
To again stoke man's evil desire.

Gathering many nations to battle
Against the Holy City
But God shall destroy them by fire.

Then comes God's Final Judgment
From his Great White Throne.
Of the great as well as the small

And those whose names are not written
In the *'Book of Life'*
Will be cast out beyond Heaven's wall.

Christ said there'd be a new Heaven
And a new earth
For the old ones shall pass away.

"Nevertheless ... come quickly Lord Jesus ..."
Please return to us soon
Hear our plea, Lord ... we *earnestly* pray.

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