

December 25

Merry Christmas from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. This year's advent devotionals have featured readings from publications by Pittsburgh Theological Seminary faculty members. Today's reading comes from the book *Reclaiming the Old Testament from the Christian Pulpit* and is written by Donald E. Gowan, a retired professor who still teaches one course per year at PTS. The book is published by T & T Clark Publishing and is available through Cokesbury.com.

The reading is found on page 141:

I'd like to tell you about the quietist Christmas I ever spent. Then I'll explain why I'm telling you this. It was 1951, my first year out of college. I was working in Richland, WA, at one of the Atomic Energy Commission plants run by the General Electric Company. The plant and the town we lived in had been built by the army during the war and in 1951 the only housing available for single employees was in dormitories, so I lived in one room on the second floor in a dorm across the street from the plant where I worked. As Christmas approached some of my friends planned a trip into the mountains and asked if I would like to go along, but for some reason which I don't remember I decided not to. Perhaps it was because I was in the choir at church and they were giving a concert on Christmas eve. At any rate I went to that midnight service and to refreshment for the choir afterwards, then back to my room to open the presents my folks had sent from Iowa. Next morning I got up late and walked down to a nearby restaurant for dinner, ate supper at the same place, and spent the rest of the day in my room. There was no one around the dorm, as most people who had anywhere at all to go had cleared out. By evening I realized that I had gone through an entire Christmas day without seeing one person that I knew.

But it was not a bad Christmas. I remember doing two things: writing a letter home, and spending a lot of time thinking about what Christmas really meant to me. I didn't know any theology then and not very much about the Bible, but I did know that a Christian is never really alone, anywhere or anytime, and I was fully convinced that day that a Christian especially cannot feel alone on Christmas day.

Now, why tell you this story? To make you feel sorry for me? Not at all, for there was nothing to be sorry for. I tell it as a small illustration of what Matthew says is the meaning of Christmas: that with the coming of Jesus, God was with us, in human flesh. I consider this sentence to be the Bible's best promise: God is with us. It is a promise which God has repeated consistently through the history of his dealings with humanity. God is with us.

Prayer

Amazing God, you have astounded the world once again by coming to us in the form of a human baby. Help us to comprehend the great love that you have for us that compelled you to enter our lives to be here among us. Let us live with

bold joy and faith knowing that we are not alone. On this Christmas Day and every day, may we praise you without ceasing. Amen