

ADVENT MEDITATION

Thursday, December 25, 2008

1 John 4:7-16

(supplemental Psalm 2:1-12)

Opening prayer – Lord, help me recognize the meaning of Christmas. Open my eyes, ears, and mind that I might perceive the magnitude of the gift You gave the world by sending Your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Help me to respond to detractors seeking to diminish this holy season. Continuously show me the best way to express and share Your love within my community and in the world. Hear my prayer in the name of Jesus. AMEN.

Devotion – Thursday, December 25, 2008

I wonder how many awake expecting the unexpected. No, not a gift you would not like, but the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Commercialization of Christmas suggest ‘the reason for the season’ is to stimulate the economy; using the power of money to show we care for others; family, friends, and those in need. Various legal challenges to Christmas – to ensure inclusion, avoidance of religious alienation, and separation of ‘church and state’ -- offer us the political correctness of “happy holiday.” The love of God reflected in the first coming of Jesus Christ is sometimes juxtaposed with adoption of a cynical practice of airing grievances against another as suggested by the Seinfeld episode that introduced “happy festivity, a holiday for the rest of us.” Yet, at Christmas we should remember the birth of Christ and consider our personal preparation, living expecting the promised unexpected glorious return of the one in whom we should be placing our hope.

For two millenniums many have looked at prophesies, the heavens, and the world for signs of the return of Jesus Christ. Advent prayers and songs like “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” speak of the one truly able to instill hope, offer relief, and bring change in the midst of a human experience replete with suffering, turmoil, unrest, and chaos. There seems to be a global desire for one who has universal and ultimate power to lead the way toward reconciliation, bringing peace in the midst of warring nations and communities experiencing intentional or random acts of violence. I believe no “ordinary” national or world leader can bring about the kind of everlasting change, relief, or fulfillment of hope we truly need. What we need can only originate with God. Thanks be to God for our Creator’s plan. The salvation of humanity, redemption and reconciliation, are embraced in the one who has known the truth of God through divine intimacy in and since the beginning. We are saved by the shed blood of the one crucified for no sins of His own. Christian tradition identifies this as Jesus Christ, conceived under the power of the Holy Spirit to a virgin named Mary.

Jesus of Nazareth is the one who provided fulfillment of the expected Messiah of the Old Testament. He brought joy to an Almighty God who loved humanity so much He gave us His only begotten Son. Through Christ, we are called to the common ground of faith in God, a demonstrated love of God and love of neighbor. We are to love God for all of the qualities associated with being the all-powerful, all-knowing Creator for Divinity’s own sake. We are to love neighbor for the sake of God as an act of discipleship, reflecting an unselfish agape love that leads toward peace and justice. God has blessed us once through the gift of Jesus. This Christmas, I pray we each prepare ourselves for the Second Coming of Christ, loving God and neighbor. If we do less, we should expect the unexpected.

Closing prayer – Lord, I thank You for sending Your Only Son. Help me live expecting the unexpected. Lead and guide me to be prepared for His glorious return. Show me the best way to reflect Your Divine love to my neighbors, especially those who do not know You and the gift of everlasting salvation available through Christ. I pray You will make me an instrument of Your peace and Your justice in the name of Jesus. AMEN.

-The End-

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DEVOTIONAL TEXT

1 John 4:7-16 (New International Version)

God's Love and Ours

7Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 13We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. 16And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

1 John 4:7-16 (The Message)

God Is Love

7-10My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn't know the first thing about God, because God is love—so you can't know him if you don't love. This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God. 11-12My dear, dear friends, if God loved us like this, we certainly ought to love each other. No one has seen God, ever. But if we love one another, God dwells deeply within us, and his love becomes complete in us—perfect love! 13-16This is how we know we're living steadily and deeply in him, and he in us: He's given us life from his life, from his very own Spirit. Also, we've seen for ourselves and continue to state openly that the Father sent his Son as Savior of the world. Everyone who confesses that Jesus is God's Son participates continuously in an intimate relationship with God. We know it so well, we've embraced it heart and soul, this love that comes from God.

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT

Psalm 2:1-12 (New International Version)

1 Why do the nations conspire ^[a] and the peoples plot in vain? 2 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. ^[b] 3 "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." 4 The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. 5 Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, 6 "I have installed my King ^[c] on Zion, my holy hill." 7 I will proclaim the decree of the LORD : He said to me, "You are my Son ^[d] ; today I have become your Father. ^[e] 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You will rule them with an iron scepter ^[f] ; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." 10 Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. 11 Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Psalm 2 (The Message)

1-6 Why the big noise, nations? Why the mean plots, peoples? Earth-leaders push for position, Demagogues and delegates meet for summit talks, The God-deniers, the Messiah-defiers: "Let's get free of God! Cast loose from Messiah!" Heaven-throned God breaks out laughing. At first he's amused at their presumption; Then he gets good and angry. Furiously, he shuts them up: "Don't you know there's a King in Zion? A coronation banquet Is spread for him on the holy summit." 7-9 Let me tell you what GOD said next. He said, "You're my son, And today is your birthday. What do you want? Name it: Nations as a present? continents as a prize? You can command them all to dance for you, Or throw them out with tomorrow's trash." 10-12 So, rebel-kings, use your heads; Upstart-judges, learn your lesson: Worship God in adoring embrace, Celebrate in trembling awe. Kiss Messiah! Your very lives are in danger, you know; His anger is about to explode, But if you make a run for God—you won't regret it!