

Advent Devotions



Preparing
for a Season
of Hope, Peace,
Joy and
Love

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As I write, a radio station in Richmond is playing Christmas music. That's right! And it's not even November, yet. 2020 has been a hard year! In the midst of COVID-19, people are looking for hope, peace and joy, and they'd like to have it now; it seems this radio station is happy to oblige!

Anticipating an announcement for a vaccine, surely we are all hopeful for a better 2021. But we cannot lose sight of a far greater message of hope that was announced 2,000 years ago:

“And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11)

This is good news! It is the one thing that can truly bring Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Somewhere—in your community or around the world—someone is waiting for you to share this Good News.

Once, when my wife, Kathy, and I were serving in Brazil, we were out doing an evangelistic campaign. A young lady named Marilena came up afterwards during the invitation. Later, as I was putting away the projector and film (you can tell this was a few years ago!), I glanced around and saw the same young lady in earnest conversation with my wife. I stopped what I was doing to join them.

Marilena began to tell us her story. “All my life,” she said, “I have wanted to know God.” Looking up into a night sky filled with thousands of stars, she continued to speak. “When I look into the heavens and see the beautiful stars, I know there must be a God that put them there. And when I stand on the rocks and look out over the beautiful ocean, I know there must be a God that created this beauty. One day I went to my parents and asked them about God,” she said. “But they didn't know what to say,” she added. Marilena even walked seven miles to the closest church and spoke to a priest in her search for God. “He told me many things, but I could not understand them,” she said in a low, sad voice.

But then Marilena turned to me and brightened up. “Tonight,” she said, “when the volunteers shared the difference Jesus had made in their lives and when I heard you preach the Gospel, my heart understood, and I accepted Jesus as my Savior and Lord!”

Then she said something I have never forgotten. With happy tears streaming down her face and with one of the biggest smiles I've ever seen, she said, “Thank you! Thank you for coming to tell me about Jesus!”

As we celebrate the birth of our Savior and Lord, remember that over **3,000 people groups** are still waiting for someone to come and tell them about Jesus. **154,937 people are dying each day without Christ.**

It is a joy to provide these Advent devotions; I am grateful to Jamie Work and Bill Langley for their hard work and pray this resource will bless you during the Advent season. **May they also remind and encourage each of us to go and share this Good News across the street and around the world.**

Terry Sharp

Convention and Network Relations Leader

Co-leader Diaspora Coalition

Is There Any Hope?

“Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.” (Hebrews 10:23)

On December 17, 1927, the crew of a U.S. Navy submarine was trolling beneath the waters of Cape Cod Bay. They were engaged in routine testing of their vessel. The Coast Guard also had one of its ships traveling across the surface doing the same thing. The two vessels never saw each other. The submarine broke the surface just in time to receive a deathblow from the ship. The submarine, with its crew of 40, sank more than a hundred feet and came to rest on the ocean floor.

Rescue attempts began at once but, due to insufferable weather, it took 24 hours for the first diver to descend to the wreckage. As the diver's feet hit the hull, he immediately heard tapping. Survivors were trapped inside the submarine. Pounding out Morse Code on the hull with a hammer, the diver discovered several crewmen were still alive. With their air supply dwindling, the survivors tapped out this haunting question, “Is there any hope?”

Everybody needs hope! We can't live without the expectation things are going to work out for us in the end. In a world that may look like it's coming apart at the seams, hope is critical. Hope is the spark that keeps the human spirit alive.

In 2 Corinthians 4:16, Paul said, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Life is hard right now and, honestly, things could even get more difficult before they get better. But cheer up! Why? Because the Bible assures us in Romans 8:18, “the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us!”

Is there any hope? Absolutely! We have the hope that one day this broken world is going to get fixed. We have hope that Christ is coming back to this sinful planet a second time, not as a suffering servant but as the King of Kings, and right all the wrongs. We have the hope that one day this earth is going to be filled with the glory of God. We can look forward to the future because we have the reassuring hope that soon we will see Jesus Christ face-to-face!

Let this Advent season be a time of renewing your hope. “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,” says the Lord, “thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).



Hope That Overcomes

*“Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Put your hope in God...” (Psalm 42:5)*

Habakkuk is one of the most fascinating books in the Bible. It opens in chapter 1 with complaining, but it closes just two short chapters later with praising. What makes this so significant is that not a single circumstance had changed. The crime rate was terrible in chapter 1; it's just as bad in chapter 3. The criminal justice system was perverted in chapter 1; it's just as twisted and corrupt in chapter 3. The Babylonian army was breathing down Judah's neck in chapter 1, and they've only just picked up steam in chapter 3. Nothing has changed; at least not circumstantially. Yet, instead of complaining, when we get to chapter 3, Habakkuk is rejoicing.

Habakkuk 3 is a prayer. Actually, it's a psalm or a song that was sung as an expression of worship to the Lord. The theme of chapter 3 focuses on the fact that God is going to set the record straight. Even though, at times, when it looks like God isn't doing anything, He is. God is always doing something.

Something interesting happens in Habakkuk 3:16. The prophet's fear turns to faith and he says, "I will wait quietly for the coming day when disaster will strike." That's how the NLT puts it. The KJV says it like this: "I will rest in the day of trouble." That's what we want, isn't it? We want to learn how to wait patiently and calmly for God's ultimate victory. We know it's coming. We know how things are going to turn out. We've read the last chapter and we know Jesus wins in the end. We just want the kind of faith that will enable us to make it to that point.

While Habakkuk thinks about the coming judgment of God, as well as the devastation and destruction his own people are going to endure at the hands of the Babylonians, it fills his heart with trembling. Yet, he says, "I will wait patiently for God's ultimate victory to come. More than that, I will rest in the day of trouble."

None of us look forward to problems. None of us enjoy pain. In fact, everything inside us, humanly speaking, wants to do all we can to avoid it. But experience in this world has taught us pain is unavoidable. Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation ... but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Do you need hope? Meditate on those wonderful words of Christ throughout this Advent season: "I have overcome the world!"

**Come, Thou long expected Jesus born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.**

(Charles Wesley)

Hope for Acceptance & Approval

“I no longer call you servants... Instead, I have called you friends.” (John 15:15)

Thirty-five thousand high school students who were active in their church youth group were asked to give a one-word answer to a single question: “What do you think Jesus Christ thinks about you?” The answers are more than interesting – they’re enlightening. The top four answers given were:

- 1 “Disgust” A lot of the students, who had been in church the majority of their lives, said they felt like if Jesus evaluated their lives He would look at them and say, “I poured out my life in agony and bloodshed on a cross for you, and you can’t make a commitment to me that lasts longer than a few days! You disgust me!”
- 2 “Anger” Some of these kids sat under pastors whose preaching sounded like they were “ticked off for Jesus!” It didn’t matter what passage was being preached, every sermon echoed the same theme – God’s mad at you and He’s going to get you!
- 3 “Disappointment” A lot of Christians feel like if Jesus evaluated their lives He would simply say, “I’m so disappointed in you. I had such high hopes for you. You have done so little with the gifts, talents and abilities I’ve given you.”
- 4 “Distant” These students felt like Jesus has so many other important things on His mind, like calamities and catastrophes all over the world, that He never gave them a second thought.

These were the top four answers to the survey, and they were given by people who had grown up in church and say they’ve known the Lord for years. But if any of these evaluations are true, what is the wonderful message of hope you and I have for the world? “Come to God through Jesus Christ so He can be disgusted with you!”

I’m thrilled to say none of those answers comes close to hitting the mark of what Jesus thinks of you. If you belong to Him, here are some of the things He says about you:

You’re chosen! You’re not on my team because I had to pick you. You’re on my team because I want you.

You’re accepted! You don’t have to do anything to earn my approval. You don’t have to wait until the end of the race to hear me cheer. You get my smile and my acceptance at the very start.

You’re secure. Jesus will never leave you. He will never walk out on you. He’s with you always!

You’re loved. How do we know we’re loved? We are certain of God’s love because He gave the ultimate demonstration – while we were sinners, Christ died for us!

Let the gracious love of God fill you with hope during this Advent season, and use these days of opportunity to share this incredible hope with others!



“In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” (1 Peter 3:15)

Peter wrote this book at a time of incredibly intense persecution. In the face of incredible mental anguish and physical suffering, Peter writes to his brothers and sisters in Christ and tells them not to be troubled. The word “troubled” comes from a Greek word that means “to agitate.” It spoke of something that was used to stir up water. But Peter said you and I don’t have to be agitated. We don’t have to be troubled. We don’t have to be afraid. Instead, we can experience hope and peace even in a troubling world.

What does it take to overcome the world’s intimidation? Look again at verse 15: “In your hearts honor Christ as Lord.” How many hearts do you have? Last time I checked, I only had one. So, if Peter tells us to honor Christ as Lord in our hearts, who is he talking to? He’s talking to all of us. He’s telling us we have to take our stand for Christ together.

Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego stood strong because they stood together. Paul and Silas stood strong because they stood together. Peter, James, and John stood strong because they stood together.

We are drawn to movies where the hero is a reluctant loner. We admire characters like Josey Wales, John Rambo and Jason Borne. Batman is the ultimate loner. He doesn’t need anybody. That may play well in Hollywood, but it doesn’t play well in reality. And it certainly doesn’t play well as we live out our lives as followers of Christ.

A lion hunts by separating its prey from the herd. Peter tells us, in the fifth chapter of his book, that Satan prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. But while he’s prowling around, when he comes to you, if he sees you standing with other believers, he’ll move on to someone else who has wandered off and left themselves unprotected. For that reason, the writer of Hebrews exhorts us saying, “Let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near” (Hebrews 10:25 NLT).

This world is an intimidating place. Anarchy and violence have been amped up in these past few months like many of us have never seen before. However, these are not just days of difficulty. They are also days of great opportunity! So many are ready to be reached with the gospel. The fields are white unto harvest. People are unsettled. They’re looking for answers. They’re longing for hope.

Take advantage of this Advent season to share the wonderful hope you experience in Christ with those who desperately need it.

Hope for a Different Kind of King

“And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” (Matthew 2:11)

When the wise men from the east arrived in Bethlehem and saw Jesus for the first time, the Bible tells us they “fell down and worshiped Him.” What prompted their worship, and what was their worship all about? The gifts they gave Jesus tell us the answer.

The first gift they gave Jesus was gold. Throughout history, gold has been considered a symbol of royalty and nobility. So the wise men, in giving the gift of gold, were affirming the fact that Jesus is a king.

The second gift was frankincense. The book of Leviticus identifies frankincense as a special kind of incense that was used by priests in offerings made to God. Frankincense speaks of sinlessness. It denotes deity.

Everything about the wise men’s arrival points to the fact that they believed this baby was much more than just another human being. They were convinced they were worshiping God Himself. In His wonderful grace, God had led these men by the star of His shekinah glory to a little house in Bethlehem; and in that house He allowed them to see His divine Son, face to face. Charles Wesley speaks of this great experience in his beautiful Christmas hymn: “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail th’incarnate deity; pleased as Man with men to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel!”

The third gift given to Jesus by the wise men was myrrh. Myrrh was a spice used for medicinal purposes. It was also commonly used in the preparation of dead bodies for burial. Therefore, the gift of myrrh was prophetic. This present was actually a prophecy of Christ’s future suffering and death. With this gift, the shadow of the cross fell upon the cradle.

Isaiah 60:6 is an interesting verse: “Vast caravans of camels will converge on you, the camels of Midian and Ephah. From Sheba they will bring gold and incense for the worship of the LORD.” What’s missing? Myrrh. Why? Because this prophecy isn’t referring to Jesus’ first coming. It’s referring to His second coming. When Jesus returns to this earth we will bring Him gold, because He is the King over all kings. We will bring Him incense because He is the Lord God Almighty. But there’s one gift we won’t bring – myrrh. Why not? Because the payment for sin has already been made. Never again will Jesus suffer. Never again will He die.

The wise men brought three wonderful gifts to Jesus. Yet their gifts can’t compare to the gift God has given to us. **During this Advent season, take time to thank God for His priceless gift of salvation. “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).**



Hope That Celebrates!

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“There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (Luke 15:10)

Possibly the saddest statement in the Bible is made in Ephesians 2:12. Speaking of those who don't know Christ, it says, “they are without God and without hope.” Right now, in your community and all over this world many are without God. And because they are lost without God they are living without any true sense of hope.

This is where good news becomes great news. God loves finding things that are lost! Jesus told three parables in Luke 15 that illustrate this so well. The stories are similar. Great celebration is made over the discovery of a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son.

The first story was from the farm. The people of Jesus' day understood shepherding. They understood, not only the economic value of livestock, but the affection and care as well. Sheep are completely dependent upon shepherds for their survival. For one to be lost can quickly lead to death. So, a shepherd finding his sheep was cause for great celebration!

The second story, at first glance, seems to focus, solely, on economics. A woman has ten coins but loses one of them. However, these coins were likely part of a wedding gift so, again, there is great emotional attachment. She moves all the furniture and sweeps the entire house thoroughly until the coin is found. When it is discovered she calls her friends to come celebrate with her.

To bring His point to a climax, Jesus relates a third parable. A father had two sons. The youngest dishonored him by taking his inheritance early. More than that, he shamefully squandered it on sinful living. After the young man blew through the funds and was reduced to a life of begging, he came to his senses and returned home. Instead of receiving condemnation from his father, he received gifts and was the honored guest at a huge party! None of this sat well with the older brother. He was outraged by the grace the father extended to his younger sibling. He was so bitter he wouldn't even dignify the party by coming into the house. The older brother prided himself in thinking he had done more than enough to earn his father's favor. The concept of grace was repulsive to him. All of us know people who think God's blessings in their lives are well deserved. They have difficulty celebrating the grace that is extended to others.

Jesus makes the heart of God easy to understand. He loves sinners and delights in seeing the lost found. **Throughout this Advent season, take time to celebrate the hope you have in Christ. Look for opportunities to join Him in searching for those who also need to experience this great hope.**

Prince of Peace

*“And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6c)*

In 1773, an African-American slave named George Liele was converted to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. George, in his early twenties, and “having been justified by faith,” became a recipient of “peace with God!” (Romans 5:1). His peace, though still a slave owned by another man, soon translated into a life of ministry. When he was converted, Liele declared, “I requested of my Lord and Master to give me a work.”¹ And God did not disappoint George. The Lord put him on a mission, which George took up almost immediately, to teach the Scriptures to other slaves. Soon enough the white church George attended with his master licensed him to preach the Gospel. It wasn’t long afterward that his earthly master gave George his freedom so that he could preach the Gospel of peace without any hindrance.

George Liele became a messenger of peace with God; an ambassador for Christ. The one who had been reconciled to God was given the ministry of reconciliation. And so have we! Paul declared this truth to the church at Corinth when he told them, “Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

George set an example the rest of us should follow. He was serious about God’s purpose and calling—this ministry of reconciliation. A ministry we celebrate during Advent and all year long! George’s heart longed to see others set free in the peace only God can supply. As a result, he indentured himself to a British officer at the end of the Revolutionary War, promising to work for the colonel in Jamaica until his passage to the island was repaid. George took his family and emigrated to Jamaica in 1783, almost 10 years before William Carey, often called the “Father of Modern Missions,” followed God’s missionary call to India. Why? To make known to the African slaves in Jamaica the One who came as the Prince of Peace!

This Prince of Peace compels us still today to “go and tell!” Jesus is God’s Peace! Who will be the one with whom you share this glorious news this Advent season?

¹ Stevens, Robert J. and Johnson, Brian, Editors. “George Liele: Missions Pioneer.” *Profiles of African-American Missionaries*. (William Carey Library: Pasadena, CA, 2012). p. 9.



Perfect Peace

*“The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace,
because he trusts in You.” (Isaiah 26:3)*

If you will take a few minutes to reacquaint yourself with Lottie Moon’s story you will soon discover that she embodied Isaiah’s prophetic words quoted at the top of the page. God DOES keep the steadfast of mind in perfect peace! Lottie exemplified that life as well as anyone ever has. Once described as the most educated woman in the South, Charlotte Diggs Moon was born on December 12, 1840, in Albemarle County, Virginia. She wasn’t always a missionary. She was skeptical of the Christian faith as a young woman and was known to have told others that her middle initial “D” stood for “Devil.” However, just after her 18th birthday in 1858, Lottie announced her faith in Jesus Christ and requested baptism.

At the prodding of her sister Edmonia, who was eleven years her junior and appointed by the Foreign Mission Board as a single missionary to North China, Lottie began to seriously consider God’s missionary calling. On September 1, 1873, at the age of 32, Lottie left the U.S. for North China. The city of Tengchow in the northern province of Shandong became Lottie’s home for the rest of her life. She once lamented, “The needs of these people press upon my soul, and I cannot be silent. It is grievous to think of these human souls going down to death without even one opportunity of hearing the name of Jesus.”

In the midst of utter lostness among the Chinese, Lottie Moon was kept in perfect peace. That’s what Jesus does for His children. Lottie invested every ounce of her life for the sake of the Chinese people coming to faith in Jesus Christ. In 1912, with Lottie’s health in very serious decline, broken by overwork and the impoverished needs of the people of Shandong, it was decided Lottie should return to America. Having given almost all of her money and food to the Chinese, Lottie never made it to America. She died in the harbor of Kobe, Japan, on Christmas Eve, 1912, having served the Chinese people in God’s perfect peace for 39 years. You can read more of her story at <https://www.imb.org/2018/11/27/missionaries-you-should-know-lottie-moon/>.

That our annual offering for international missions bears her name is more than just a kind gesture. It is a tribute to her steadfast mind trusting God in every situation and thereby experiencing His perfect peace in the midst of unbelievably crushing circumstances. **So can you this Advent season by renewing your trust in Him and in His ways.**

Peace Given

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.” (John 14:27a)

One of the ways in which John’s Gospel account is different from that of Matthew’s, Mark’s, or Luke’s is that John unveils the final week of Jesus’ life with details that would otherwise be unknown to us. For example, Jesus’ words of instruction and comfort in John 14-16 are an invaluable resource for all succeeding generations of believers. And Jesus’ intercessory prayer in John 17? Is there anything more beautiful than His words of compassion and concern for all His followers both then and now? How much poorer we would be without John’s record of those words!

Part of Jesus’ words of assurance to His disciples included His promise of peace. Jesus promised to send the “Spirit of truth” (14:17), our “Helper, that He may be with you forever” (14:16). The “Helper, the Holy Spirit... will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (14:26). Where the Spirit dwells there is peace! Both Jesus’ example of faith in God’s unfolding plan, and His presence with believers in the person of the Holy Spirit produces peace in a believer’s heart. Paul instructed believers in Galatia that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

This peace is so overwhelming that after the angel of the Lord announced Jesus’ birth to some shepherds, one angel celebrating this peace was not enough! “Suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased!’” (Luke 2:13-14). God’s gift of peace deserves our highest praise, for indeed apart from Christ’s Advent and His willing sacrifice, we are hell-bound enemies of God.

This gift of peace, still unknown by more than 7,000 people groups around the world, numbering in the billions of people, is a large part of the driving force for our 3,700 IMB missionaries, and their nearly 3,000 children, to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth! **This offer of peace through faith in Jesus Christ will result in the fulfillment of the Revelation 7:9-10 vision of “[people] from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues standing before the throne” one day worshiping God and the Lamb, who has taken away our sin!**



No Peace

“There is no peace for the wicked,’ says the Lord.”
(Isaiah 48:22)

The harsh reality of God’s peace is that those who refuse to put their faith in Jesus Christ will never experience it. There is no other source for genuine, eternal, soul-satisfying peace than the One who came to bring peace. The Hebrew word commonly translated as “peace” is shalom. Similarly, in Arabic, another Semitic language, the word most commonly used for “peace” is salaam. As similar as these two words might look, they do not point to two different pathways to peace. There is only one. One. Both the sons of Isaac and the sons of Ishmael experience God’s peace only through personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Jerry Trousdale, in his 2012 book *Miraculous Movements*, declares that “If Christians can begin to engage Muslims beyond the headlines of burkas and bombs, we will discover hundreds of millions of disheartened and discouraged people. Muslims’ lives are too often bounded by desolation and broken walls, but today many of them are desperate to discover people who love them, a God who loves them, and hope for the future.”¹ Trousdale’s findings affirm Isaiah’s prophetic words – “there is no peace for the wicked” (Isaiah 48:22). That lack of peace is compelling Muslims around the world to put their faith in Jesus.

Trousdale goes on to recount that among African Muslims between 2005-2012:²

- More than 6,000 new churches were planted among Muslims in 18 countries!
- Hundreds of former sheikhs and imams, now Christ followers, are boldly leading great movements of Muslims out of Islam!
- 45 different “unreached” Muslim-majority people groups, who a few years ago had no access to God’s Word, now have more than 3,000 new churches among them!
- Thousands of former Muslims are experiencing the loss of possessions, homes, and loved ones, but they are continuing to serve Jesus!

We can be inspired and encouraged that many of those who are currently living without peace are discovering that through faith in Christ there is real, lasting, life-altering peace. **Let’s join together in prayer today asking God to exponentially multiply His fruit among the unbelieving tribes, peoples, languages, and nations in such a way that the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea!** (Habakkuk 2:14; Psalm 22:27)

¹ Trousdale, Jerry. *Miraculous Movements*. (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, TN, 2012). p. 13.

² Ibid. p. 15.

Incomprehensible Peace

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”
(*Philippians 4:7*)

When Karen Watson was preparing to depart the U.S. to serve with the International Mission Board’s work in the Middle East, she wrote a letter to her church family. She placed the letter in a sealed envelope marked “Open in case of death.” She really had no premonition of her martyrdom just a year later, she was simply being practical. But her words, on display at her funeral in 2004 revealed a heart at peace with however God’s will might unfold. It said in part:

You should only be opening this in the event of death. When God calls there are no regrets. I tried to share my heart with you as much as possible, my heart for the nations. I wasn’t called to a place; I was called to Him. To obey was my objective, to suffer was expected, His glory my reward, His glory my reward. The missionary heart...

- Cares more than some think is wise
- Risks more than some think is safe
- Dreams more than some think is practical
- Expects more than some think is possible

I was called not to comfort or to success but to obedience... there is no Joy outside of knowing Jesus and serving Him. ¹

Karen was experiencing what Paul promised the Philippian believers – an incomprehensible peace! A peace the world cannot give. A peace that is birthed by the Spirit of God out of the believer’s patient, prayerful, trusting, and grateful heart. Paul exhorted the Philippians to “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).

As week two of this Advent season is coming to a close, what is troubling your heart? A family illness? Painful memories? A lost job? COVID-19? Unpaid bills? A broken relationship? A failed marriage? A wayward child? The recipe is unchanged. Jesus is peace. Jesus brings peace. Jesus offers peace. **Turn your anxious heart toward the Prince of Peace. With simple words of renewed trust and gratitude offer your anxiety-producing circumstances to Him. And then allow His incomprehensible peace to flood your soul. “The Lord is near”** (Philippians 4:5b). **He is “God with us”** (Matthew 1:23).

¹ Bridges, Erich and Rankin, Jerry. *Lives Given, Not Taken*. (International Mission Board: Richmond, VA, 2005). pp. 191-192.



Our Peace

*“For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.”
(Ephesians 2:14)*

The racial tensions that exist in America today are not new to humanity. The Bible itself is filled with accounts of racial-tribal conflicts. Jacob vs. Esau. Israel vs. Egypt. Israel vs. Moab. Israel vs. Ammon. Israel vs. Canaan. And on and on the accounts continue. The root? Good vs. evil. Righteousness vs. sin. The story began shortly after God’s creation was set in motion. The slithering serpent appeared on the scene with a mouthful of lies. “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1). An insinuating lie. Then, “The serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’” (Genesis 3:4-5). An outright lie.

History contains even more accounts of tribal, national, and racial tensions. Many of these often result in wars both within individual nations and among multiple nations. Some of these tensions have brought forth attempts to exterminate entire people groups – Nazi’s annihilating Jews across Europe; the majority Hutu in Rwanda exterminating the Tutsi; Bosnian Serbs killing Bosnian Muslims; the genocide of the Rohingya minority in Myanmar, and the list goes on. The culprit? Good vs. evil. Righteousness vs. sin.

Yet God’s global vision for His creation is peace among all tribes, peoples, languages and nations. How can something so counter to human history possibly be achieved? The Advent of Christ! He has the power to change the divisive nature of humanity! The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is just one example. Consider the people groups present that day: “Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs...” (Acts 2:9-11). The Spirit’s outpouring led to 3,000 souls receiving Peter’s call to faith and believer’s baptism, creating a group who “were of one heart and soul... [and] all things were common property to them” (Acts 4:32).

That is why Paul could write to Jewish and Gentile believers that Christ had “made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity... so that He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace” (Ephesians 2:14-15). The message of hope and peace we carry to the nations not only yields peace with God for every believer, but also the potential for peace among nations, peoples, tribes, and languages.

Let’s pray that His peace will saturate all the peoples of the earth.

Joyful, All Ye Nations, Rise

*“Glory to God in the highest ... and on earth peace,
goodwill toward men.”
(Luke 2:14)*

The message of Christmas is a message of joy for all nations. When the angels announced the birth of the Savior to the shepherds on the hills outside of Bethlehem, they said, “Glory to God in the highest ... and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.”

In His commission to us, Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:18-19). He gave us a strategy in Acts 1:8 – “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” We see the fulfillment of the Great Commission in Revelation 7:9 – “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”

The point is simple; the gospel isn’t just for those of us in America. It’s for the whole world. Furthermore, it’s up to those of us who have it to take it to every last person of every race, nationality and language on the planet so they can also receive it.

The book of Acts beautifully illustrates how far the transforming power of the gospel is to go. In chapter 8 we read about the conversion of a man from Africa, the Ethiopian eunuch. In chapter 9 we witness the conversion of Saul, a man from Asia. Then, chapter 10 records the conversion of Cornelius, a European. You remember Noah had three sons: Ham, Shem, and Japheth. They were responsible for populating the entire earth after the flood. Remarkably, in Acts, 8, 9 and 10, we see representatives of their descendants ... African, Asian, and European. The recorded conversions of these three people powerfully demonstrate the universal scope of the Gospel!

Fast forward 2000 years to today; how far are you and I to take the Gospel? To every person of every race and in every place on earth. The great problem Christianity faces is not the deliberate rejection of Jesus by the masses. It is the fact that most people on earth have yet to hear of Him. You can’t spell “Gospel” without “go!” Whether it’s going across the ocean ... going across the street ... or going across the hall at school or work, we have to go. Jesus has called us to be on mission with Him!

Keith Parks, former president of the IMB, made this statement: “As burning is to fire, so missions is to the church.” We can’t be the church and not have a heart for reaching people – people right where we are and people all over the globe.

Joyful, all ye nations, rise! Join the triumph of the skies!



Joy to the World!

“Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. (Luke 2:11)”

“Good tidings of great joy for all people!” Does that describe you? Maybe you say, “Hardly. I’m not experiencing great joy, or any kind of joy for that matter.” The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 that we are to “be joyful always.” A verse like that can bug us, particularly if we’ve been having a difficult time. We think, “Joyful always? Come on. Is that even possible?”

One of our favorite Christmas carols is, Joy to the World! “To the world” – that means everyone. But that’s just a song, right? That’s just a sentiment that may warm our hearts, but it only lasts a moment, right? It’s not really something we can experience continually is it?

The fact is, life has a way of kicking the joy out of you. After you’ve been through enough hard life experiences it’s easy to give up believing things could ever be better. So, we have to realize if joy is going to be our experience we can’t wait for perfect circumstances, because we don’t live in a perfect world. That’s the very message of Christmas! That’s the incredible news the angel delivered to the shepherds. God came to this messed up, imperfect world, in the person of Jesus Christ, and He offers the fullness of joy to everyone who wants it.

Today, you can choose to be discouraged because, truthfully, there’s a lot to be discouraged about. You can choose to be angry, because there are a lot of things in this world that will push you in that direction. You can choose to be cynical. There’s a lot to be cynical about. However, when you look to the Christ of Christmas, you can be filled with joy because, in Him, there is so much to be joyful about. It’s your choice.

The angel said to the shepherds, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.” The shepherds were just out there watching their flocks one night. That was a pretty boring job. All of a sudden, in the middle of their routine, ordinary lives, God brought them a message of good news that filled them with great joy. He wants to do that for you today!

The angel showed up with “good news!”

- Good news – Jesus has come!
- Good news – because of Christmas, your life never has to be the same.
- Good news – God offers forgiveness for all the wrong things you’ve ever done.
- Good news – God cares about the struggles you’re going through.
- Good news – Christ will give you a home with Him in heaven for all eternity.
- Good news – He will give you inner peace and a sense of purpose right now.

That’s the good news of great joy the angel was talking about. **Share that wonderful news with as many as you can during this Advent season!**

Joy that Transcends Trials

“You even had joy when all that you owned was taken from you, because you knew you had something better and more lasting.”
(Hebrews 10:34)

Joseph Scriven lived about 150 years ago and was a missionary to the Iroquois Indians in Canada. He came from Ireland to take the good news to people who had never heard of Christ. After he was settled, he sent word back to Ireland for his fiancé to join him. They were looking forward to being married and serving Christ together. In a tragic accident on the day before the wedding, his fiancé was killed. Joseph had to bury her with his own hands. A year later, after suffering even more tragedies, he wrote a letter to his family in Ireland. The letter contained the words to a poem he had penned:

What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear.
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.
O what peace we often forfeit; O what needless pain we bear;
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful; who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Joseph Scriven had learned an important secret. Joy isn't something you find in your circumstances; it's something that comes from Jesus.

In John 15:11, Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.” When did Jesus say this? Was it while He was walking on the sea? Was it while He was blessing some children or feeding a multitude? No. These are the words Jesus spoke to His disciples while He was on His way to the cross. He was just hours away from His own execution, yet He told His followers that faith in His word would lead to the fullness of joy.

If you go to the ocean you might be terrified by some of the storms that rip across the water. Yet, even when the wind is roaring and the waves are pounding, just a few feet below the surface it's calm. If you were in a submarine at a depth of only 50 feet you wouldn't feel the effects of the storm at all.

Joy is like that. Storms may rip across your life and, certainly, there are emotions that ride on the surface. Nobody wants to go into surgery. Nobody wants to lose a loved one. Nobody wants to experience heartache and disappointment. But faith in Jesus Christ will give you a joy the devil can't shake and circumstances can't take away.

Who do you know that needs to experience the joy of Christ? **Make a point to share the good news of the Gospel with them during this Advent season.**

Finding Joy

“Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory!” (1 Peter 1:8)

In November 1992, a farmer living near Suffolk, England, lost a hammer in one of his fields. He borrowed his friend’s metal detector to search for it. While looking for his hammer, the farmer happened upon something else: 24 bronze coins, 565 gold coins, 14,191 silver coins, plus hundreds of gold and silver spoons, jewelry, and statues, all dating back to the Roman Empire. He didn’t find his hammer, but he found a treasure worth \$2.8 million!

A man in Indiana spent \$30 for some used furniture and an old painting. When he got home, he hung the picture over a hole in the wall that had been bothering him. A few years later, he was playing a board game called “Masterpiece” in which players attempt to outbid one another for artwork at an auction. Much to his surprise, one of the cards featured a painting that looked a lot like the one he had hanging on his wall. It turns out the painting was an original Martin Johnson Heade. The Museum of Fine Arts in Houston purchased it from him for \$1.2 million!

We love stories like those. Jesus also told some stories of his own. In Matthew 13:44-46, Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

These parables were not part of Jesus’ public teaching to the crowds. Matthew tells us Jesus spoke these two parables to His disciples in private. He knew they needed some assurance. They had left everything to follow Him. They had high hopes that Jesus was getting ready to set up His messianic kingdom on earth. They were expecting a revolution. However, at this point, things weren’t looking so promising. The disciples needed to know, just like you and I, that it really is worth it to follow Jesus.

Peter declared, “Lord, we’ve left everything to follow you!” Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age, and in the age to come, eternal life” (Luke 18:28-30).

As a follower of Jesus, never focus on what you’ve given up. Joy comes when you focus on what you’ve gained! **Spend some time this Advent season reflecting on all that is yours in Christ! “In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore!”** (Psalm 16:11).

The Power of Joy

*“The joy of the LORD is your strength!”
(Nehemiah 8:10)*

I had a problem a few weeks ago. Every few days I had to stop by the gas station and put air in one of my tires. I knew the problem had to be a nail or screw but, after investigating, I couldn't find one. Finally, after a few times of adding air, I drove into a tire shop and let them have a look. Sure enough, there was a screw. They removed the screw, plugged the hole, filled the tire with air, and I haven't had any problem since.

I've noticed the joy in my life tends to leak too. Do you remember the joy you had when you first came to know the Lord? Remember the fresh feeling of knowing everything about your life had changed? It's not that everything was perfect. You still woke up to the same issues and circumstances, but you knew God was with you now. The weight of sin had been lifted. You had hope things could actually be different and that filled your heart with joy.

The Christian life is to be a life of joy. At the very announcement of the birth of Christ, the angel said, “I bring you good tidings of great joy.” Jesus told His disciples, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” Paul's prayer for the Christians in Rome was, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy.” Peter described believers scattered all over the cruel Roman empire as being, “filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.”

Joy is not automatic. It's something that continually has to be renewed. If joy is so important, how can we make sure we have it? Joy is found in a constant awareness of God's grace at work in our lives. In fact, the words “joy” and “grace” come from the same Greek root. That means they're inseparable.

Grace means we don't have to earn God's love. God always loves us. Why? Because we deserve it? Not a chance! Because we keep a certain list of rules? No. Why does God always love and approve of us? One reason – we've been bought by the blood of Jesus Christ. That's grace!

Can you imagine what would change if we really started experiencing the joy of Christ in our daily lives? How would it affect us personally? What would happen in our homes? Can you imagine the atmosphere in our churches if the members were constantly filled with the Holy Spirit and His joy? Churches like that would make a God-sized impact on their communities and world! Those who don't know Christ would be overwhelmed. Our lives would become so attractive they would want what we have. People would see our light, taste our salt, and desire to know our Savior. **This Advent season let the joy of the Lord be your strength!**



The Joy of the Lord

“For He endured a cross and thought nothing of its shame because of the joy he knew would follow his suffering...”
(Hebrews 12:2)

This week, our thoughts have focused on joy. We’ve actually been reflecting on the joy that is ours in Christ. But have you ever stopped to think about the joy Christ experiences in you?

When the writer of Hebrews talks about the joy Jesus would encounter on the other side of His suffering, to what was he referring? Certainly, Jesus would know the joy of completing His Father’s will. That’s huge! Yet, there’s more. Jesus experiences tremendous joy from all who respond to Him in faith and become part of His forever family!

Matthew quotes Isaiah’s prophecy when he writes, “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

God sending His Son to be born among us fuels the awe-inspiring celebration of Christmas. By joining us in Jesus, God has closed the gap. He is not a distant God, He is Immanuel, God with us! It would have been enough for God to have announced His love for us from on high, yet, He did far more than that. He stooped and came to planet earth to actually make Himself known to us. More than that, through the incarnation, He became one of us!

As a father (and now a grandfather), it’s easy for me to come home after a long day of work and just want to sit in my chair. The kids are running and playing all around me. I’m right there with them. From my chair I can talk with them and even tell them I love them. However, there is a massive difference on their faces and in their voices when I get out of my chair and make the move to be down on the floor with them. Their countenance lifts and their smiles broaden when I physically enter their world.

This is exactly what God has done for us in Jesus. He has joined us on the floor! In the incarnation, God unflinchingly identifies with us in our pains, sorrows, sin and brokenness. The incarnation is God’s great declaration that nothing will stop Him from coming near to us.

This Advent season rejoice in the reality God has come near to us in Christ. God sees you. He knows you. He hasn’t forgotten you. And with great joy, He receives you in Jesus!

We must let the nations know that unto us a child has been born and a Son has been given—a Savior who is Christ the Lord!

So Much Love

“I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt... so I have come down to deliver them.” (Exodus 3:7-8)

Moses was probably still catching his breath from hearing a voice call to him from a bush that wouldn't burn up. Typically, a desert fire might spring up seemingly out of nowhere, but it would quickly disintegrate its object into smokey ashes. Not so this time. The bush just kept burning. So, when Moses finally decided to examine what was going on, God spoke. He does that. When you least expect it, when you are quite alone in the wilderness of your own thoughts, He speaks. And He doesn't mince words; He speaks directly into our circumstances.

It had been 400 years or so since the Israelites had gone to Egypt during Joseph's reign as Prime Minister. And it had been 40 years since Moses himself had been in Egypt. The details were a bit embarrassing, and Moses might have been tempted to think God was finished with him. But He wasn't. “Moses, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6a). Oh my! Really? After 40 years, He hunts me down in this wilderness? The Bible says, “Moses hid his face...” (Exodus 3:6b)

Sometimes we are also guilty of thinking God might be done with us. Been there, done that. Taught that class; been on that mission trip; shared the Gospel fifteen times with that friend. And then God speaks. I have a mission for you; an assignment; some good works I planned before you even knew Me.

Isaiah was overwhelmed with grief that King Uzziah had died. And then God spoke. “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isaiah 6:8). Mary was just a teenaged girl who took her faith in God very seriously, but she was young. And then God spoke. “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus” (Luke 1:31). Joseph was a young man trying to figure out how he would provide for his soon-to-be bride; consumed with the concerns of life. And then God spoke. “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20).

God has so much love for us that He not only sent His one and only Son on a rescue mission, He also sends us. Just like He sent Moses and Isaiah and Mary and Joseph... and you. **He's not finished with us; He's just getting started. “...as the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21). So much love. For us. For them.**



Love Large

“It is too small a thing that you should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel...” (Isaiah 49:6)

Jeff Lewis wrote in the foreword of his book, *God's Heart for the Nations*, these sobering words:

The major focus of American Christian thought and practice may seem to be “What can God do for me?” Our lives reflect a belief that God’s global priority is to make His disciples more comfortable. Don’t get me wrong, I believe God desires to bless us and that God’s desire to bless his people is a major theme of the Bible. But if we focus on the theme of blessing alone, we distort the truth and lose the context in which God’s blessings are given.¹

This danger is the pathway Israel repeatedly wandered down across their ancient history. God blessed them; they got preoccupied with the blessings and stepped into wayward sin. Their sin led to rebellion, which demanded God’s disciplinary judgment on their sin. In the process Israel forgot that God expected them to be the means by which His declaration became reality: “I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in all the earth” (Psalm 46:10b).

The prophet Isaiah addressed this shortsightedness when he reminded his audience that “It is too small a thing that you should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6).

It was never God’s intent to have only one nation for Himself. He desires to have for Himself people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. His love is large enough for the entirety of humanity! This is why over the next five years the IMB is praying and working tirelessly toward accomplishing these five targets (please join our prayer effort):

1. Mobilize 75% of SBC churches to prayerfully and financially support the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.
2. Send an additional 500 fully-funded missionaries to the nations by 2025.
3. Mobilize 500 global partner missionaries to serve on IMB teams.
4. Engage 75 global cities in comprehensive mission strategies.
5. Increase Lottie Moon Offering receipts by 6% annually to sustain 500 new missionaries.

¹ Lewis, Jeff. *God's Heart for the Nations*. (Caleb Project and Jeff Lewis: USA, 2002). p.3.

Love All

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them...teaching them... and I am with you always...”
(Matthew 28:19-20)

Advent season comes and goes every year, but the truths we celebrate during Advent remain steadfast, immovable, unchanging. They are timeless, and they are reflections of the very character of God Himself. Hope. Peace. Joy. Love. They are infused into every believer through faith when “the old things passed away; behold new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). As transformed people, we become compelled by the same love God has demonstrated to us in the gift of His Son. While we “were yet sinners, Christ died for us!” (Romans 5:8).

Paul clarified the receiving of this love in at least two significant ways:

1. “For the love of Christ controls us...” (2 Corinthians 5:14). This simply means that followers of Christ, when properly relating to Him as Sovereign Lord, are eager to lay down their lives for the sake of the Gospel penetrating every dark corner of the globe.
2. “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...” (Galatians 2:20). Again, followers of Christ, led and filled by the Spirit of God, are glad to live surrendered to God’s purpose of loving the lost.

Jesus’ final commission lays forth the challenge to our propensity to love only those who are most like us. Jesus said, “make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). The Greek words for “all the nations” are *panta ta ethne*, and it literally means “all the ethnicities in the world.” That means we are called to love all of the more than 12,000 identified people groups in the world. And yet, the North American Mission Board has done some research and discovered that of the one million (on average) international students studying every year in American colleges and universities, about 75% of them are never even invited into an American home during their 4-6 year stay in the U.S.

Further, their research suggests that about 85% of these international students living in our communities are never invited to attend an evangelical church gathering. What happened to “crucified with Christ” and to “the love of Christ controls us?” It seems obedience to the mission is a greater challenge when we are pressed to step outside of our comfort zones. The Bible would call this “grieving” (Ephesians 4:30) or “quenching” (1 Thessalonians 5:19) the Spirit who owns us and should be controlling our disciple-making behavior. **Let’s pray today that the Lord of the harvest will send us boldly into His harvest filled with compassion and love for ALL.**



Expensive Love

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16)

We are often quick to say that “salvation is free,” but really it is the most expensive gift ever given and the most expensive gift ever received. The Giver paid for the gift with the life of His one and only Son. The recipient surrenders his or her life in exchange for the gift. There’s no way getting around it. Salvation is not free. It is supremely expensive.

Stephen and Emily Foreman (pseudonyms) can testify to this. They moved, along with their four children, to a Northern African country in 2003 to share the good news in a land where Christianity was illegal. They knew they were called to a life of sacrifice. Their story is now captured in the book Emily wrote after her husband was martyred at the hands of al-Qaeda extremists called, *We Died Before We Came Here*. For six years they labored among the poor, the prisoners, and the abandoned to share Christ’s love with the “least of these” only to see Stephen’s life snuffed out by extremists’ guns just outside his office in the capital city. That is expensive love. A love that was eagerly received as a boy in America; and then gladly given away as a man in Africa.

This is our calling as well. Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). Following Jesus is expensive. It costs us everything, but we gain so much more in return. In fact, Jesus taught: “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25). Real life is only discovered in full surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. After all, He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

For Jesus, the agent of a perfect creation, stepping into the morass of earth set the tone for how His followers should live. Sent. Intentional. Compassionate. Loving. Whether that means six short years loving Muslims to Christ in Northern Africa, or 39 years loving Chinese to Christ in North China, or a lifetime loving friends, neighbors and family in America, the cost is the same. **God’s love has an infinite price tag attached – the life of His Son. To receive it requires the surrender of our life for His! What a beautiful exchange! Live it out.**

Incarnational Love

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us...”
(John 1:14a)

“According to the latest data from the United Nations, in the middle of 2018 there were over sixty-eight million forcibly displaced people in the world and of which over twenty-five million are categorized as refugees.”¹ We are living in an age of unprecedented mass displacement of peoples. It is estimated that over half of the world’s refugees are children under the age of 18. Refugees are people who have fled their home countries because of war, disease, hunger, unemployment, governmental instability, persecution, and other atrocities and are thereby seeking shelter in a foreign country. While thousands of today’s refugees emigrate to Western nations like the U.S., “nearly 85 percent of the world refugee population are in the non-Western world.”²

Jesus was Himself a refugee in several different ways. First of all, while still in Mary’s womb, there was “no room in the inn” (Luke 2:7) for Joseph and Mary to bring their infant son into this world. Second, sometime after Jesus was born in Bethlehem “an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt...’” (Matthew 2:13). Third, and most significant, however, is the incarnation of God the Son into human flesh; He “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7). He left His home in heaven and came to earth to live among us. A refugee.

Most missiologists agree that until Christians comprise about 10 percent of their nation/tribe/people group’s population, they will need outside missionary assistance to reach their own people. In other words, the more than 3 billion people in today’s world who are considered unreached, cannot be reached with the Gospel simply through their own people and resources. The task is too large. They desperately need a loving, incarnational witness of God’s love from believers outside of their culture. Who will go? How will they be sent?

Jesus came to tabernacle among us as a refugee; One not from this earth. Christ is calling us this Christmas Day to become His gift of incarnational love to those who have not yet heard the good news that Christ has come! The nations are waiting. Please consider giving your most generous international missions gift ever to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. **Together we can exceed the \$175 million goal and thereby send even greater numbers of those being called to demonstrate incarnational love.**

¹ George, Sam and Adeney, Miriam, Editors. *Refugee Diaspora: Missions amid the Greatest Humanitarian Crisis of our Times*. (William Carey Publishing: Littleton, CO, 2018). p. xxvi.

² Ibid.



What Love Does

*“Greater love has no one than this,
that one lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)*

In those intimate Upper Room moments Jesus shared with His disciples just hours before His arrest, trial, flogging, and eventual crucifixion, Jesus was laser-focused on finishing what He had started with these precious men. Reading the various Gospel accounts, we cannot help but be transfixed on Jesus’ unfair death sentence and eventual crucifixion. But we should not miss some of the less obvious details in the story of “Love Came Down” (take a few minutes to listen to Kari Jobe sing “Love Came Down” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQge-HcanSM>), because this is what love does...

- Love steps out of eternity into time (John 1:1-5).
- Love leaves exaltation to embrace humility (Philippians 2:5-8).
- Love exchanges ruling for helplessness (Colossians 1:15-18)
- Love patiently awaits God’s unfolding plan (Matthew 3:15).
- Love endures and resists all manner of temptation (Hebrews 4:15).
- Love invests in relationships (Mark 1:16-18; 2:14; 3:13-15).
- Love demonstrates compassion for people (Matthew 9:35-36).
- Love envisions the joyful fruit of obedient sacrifice (Hebrews 12:1-3).
- Love tirelessly teaches (John 14:8-12).
- Love surrenders to God’s way (Matthew 26:36-46).
- Love remembers mercy (Luke 23:39-43).
- Love honors family (John 19:25-27).

The celebration of Christ’s Advent has come and gone for another year, but the example Jesus left behind will never expire. It remains with us until we are with Him. How does He want you to take up His mantle of ministry in the New Year just ahead? Where is He asking you to humble yourself? Into what relationship is He expecting you to invest more deeply? How is He spurring you on to not grow weary in well-doing? Where do you need to demonstrate greater patience, more joyful obedience, or deeper compassion? What temptation do you need to resist and conquer? He is commissioning us, yet again, to carry the Light of the world into the darkness of depravity. All the tools we need He has provided:

1. PURPOSE: The reason we live. (Matthew 28:18-20)
2. POWER: The enabling to carry out His assignment. (Acts 1:8)
3. PROCLAMATION: The message we declare. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)
4. PROMISE: The assurance of fruitfulness. (Revelation 7:9-10)

LET’S GO!

