

Advent 2011



**Christmas God Sightings
Christmas Reflections
Expressions of Thanksgiving**

**From The Body of Christ at
Stanardsville United Methodist
Church**

Advent 2011

May the love, peace and joy of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you throughout the days of Advent and beyond.

Many heartfelt thanks go out to all of the Body of Christ at Stanardsville United Methodist Church in offering the gift of your Christmas God Sightings, Christmas Reflections, and expressions of Thanksgiving presented here in this devotional booklet.

God is always present, is always working in and through us... there is no better testimony to that fact than when the Body of Christ bears public witness to His presence in their own lives.

Our prayer is that you will use this devotional booklet throughout the coming days of Advent and reflect upon each one yourself, and that the witness of our Brothers and Sisters in Christ will become a spiritual blessing for you.

-Worship Ministry Team
Stanardsville United Methodist Church

O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together. Psalm 34:3 (NRSV)

My Christmas Blessing

Every good and perfect gift is from above.
James 1:17 (NIV)

Nothing says “miracle” more for me than the birth of a baby.

Nothing says “I am God” for me than being blessed by witnessing four of my grandchildren being born.

Their first breath, their first cry. This little life grew for about nine months inside their mother and here they are taking over your heart, your every being. What an Amazing Miracle. Who could ever question God? His presence is so strong when that baby is born you can't speak. You can't breath, you can only think *only **God** could produce such a beautiful blessing of a baby with perfect fingers, perfect toes and beautiful eyes that you look into and instantly fall in love with.*

4:00 p.m. Christmas day, 2009... Gatelyn Elaine Noel Perkins was born. Again, what a miracle, an instant change to your life. Me, Granddaddy, anxious cousins, first-time Uncle Jason and Aunt Erin and other aunts and uncles waiting on Christmas Day in the lobby for the new arrival.

As exciting as that day was, of witnessing my new grandbaby girl, I was still very much blessed with the excitement of other three grandkids, Lexi, Morgan and Brady, who couldn't wait to tell their new cousin she was born on our Savior Jesus

Christ's birthday - they keep that excitement around us of how special she was to be born on His birthday.

What a blessed day for me. I saw God everywhere as he blessed us with this perfect gift made only by Him, by His hands... not ours.

Thank you, God!!!!

-Sue Lam

Memories

Coming back to the wide open plains of Iowa, it's so apparent that Almighty God--Our Heavenly Father is everywhere!

Streams, rivers and a quietness pervades the whole atmosphere. Until a storm! Then you know who is in charge.

I remember Rev. Yoder who baptized me when I was 9 years old. He explained everything. He stood in the tank of water while I kneeled--and dunked my head forward three times. Again the feeling of strength and kindness--the love of our Lord!

-Pat Dawson

Never Forget The Lord

Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the LORD promised on oath to your forefathers. Deuteronomy 8:1 (NIV)

When I was on a retreat at Eagle Eyrie, I was really excited and sometimes me and my friends would get too wound up and take our minds off of the Lord. Then we would go straight back to talking about Him. I saw a lot of friendships while I was gone and it was magnificent to see everyone interacting with one another. If someone needed assistance, we would give it. We would rush to hold the door or to help pick up, and that was true kindness. I think we had God telling us to help and that's how much we cared about him. We had God in mind the whole time. It was really great to see that, and I will never forget this trip.

The point I took away with me is that you never forget the Lord. We also got to spend almost a whole day with the band. That was a lot of fun, and when the band came to us and we got to talk to them, it was really cool. I was standing there thinking about how great it was to be there and sending these little packages to the homeless. And how we're actually making a difference and it was all in God's hands and the Lord can do more than we think He can. I mean, we are standing here on this beautiful planet and if Jesus did not die for

us we would not be here. He did all this for us and we should always worship Him and then know what a blessing it is when we do good things for others, and that God is always watching us and we should not forget this and do good things.

I wish our retreat could have lasted longer and we could have done more things for His glory. There are a lot more people that don't have homes, food and even clothes and we should be thankful for what we have and know that God has provided for us.

Never forget the Lord... I thought about Him a lot on this trip and how much I've accomplished and how I have been given many opportunities. I'm thankful for all that God has provided me, and will never forget the Lord.

-Samantha Brunelle



His Presence

Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14

Immanuel – God with us. The words first spoken by Isaiah when he was offering hope and encouragement to King Ahaz. While Isaiah, God's messenger is prophesying about the child that is yet to be born, King Ahaz and all of Jerusalem are losing hope as they watch armies surround their city.

During Advent, it can be difficult to feel the 'presence of God' in each moment of the day. I get busy making sure that I have everyone's gift, baking goodies for friends and teachers, making plans with family and decorating the house – and most of the time it still doesn't get done. I wonder to myself, what am I doing wrong and where is God in the midst of all this? Why am I losing hope?

Yet I know that at the end of the day, what I am called to do is remember that God is indeed with me – even in the middle of the controlled chaos. I am reminded that He came to walk this journey with me - through the birth, life and resurrection of His son Jesus and that He will see me through.

Therefore, because I claim the name of Christian, I too am called to offer a 'sign of Immanuel' – God's presence - to all

people. As my Brothers and Sisters in Christ, this Christmas season, I invite you to consider how you might offer yourselves as a gift – as a sign of hope to others, as you allow the Spirit to work in and through you.

-Julie Nitzsche



Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14 (NRSV)

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 1:18 (NRSV)

Giving From The Heart

Whatever your task, put yourself into it, as done for the Lord... Colossians 3:23 (NRSV)

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NRSV)

What kind of presents do you give for Christmas? What kind of presents do you expect for Christmas?

One Christmas a friend saw me making a Christmas craft. She seemed interested so I showed her how. She was pleased with her creation and seemed glad to take it home. I explained that I was making them to give to my sisters for Christmas. I told her I would help her if she wanted to do the same. She hesitated and declined. In her family giving handmade presents meant one was too poor to afford a "real" present from the store. I was sad for her.

In my family getting a handmade present meant you were special. It meant someone cared enough to put a lot of thought, effort, and talent into the present. And sometimes it meant enduring "blood, sweat and tears" in order to complete the project.

As I grew up we exchanged one store bought present and one handmade present.(It was true we didn't have money to buy more, but we didn't know that at the

time.) My parents encouraged and respected our efforts and talents.

The days between Thanksgiving and Christmas were filled with secrets. There was as much excitement and holiday spirit as if we were elves. We received the special attention of each parent as we were helped and encouraged to think up, create and finish our projects. Working with a parent, just the two of us within a family of four kids, was a special Christmas present right there! We were just as eager to open our own presents as to watch the faces of the others opening theirs. Some of those handmade presents are still treasured today.

What we treasure is that the family gave of themselves. We treasure them and the family memories surrounding the items.

Besides receiving more presents for Christmas, we received many intangible gifts that have been molded into our personalities. Our parents encouraged and helped us identify and refine talents that we still use today. Growing up learning a new craft every year has given us many skills to choose from now that we are adults. We have applied some to our jobs, and the rest to improving our homes and helping our own families. This has also helped us to learn to think and act independently and to rely on ourselves.

We can also look for strengths and encourage talents in children as it was done for us.

I still give handmade presents. When I give a handmade present, I give of myself. I think of that person as I gather my materials and assemble the project. If anything goes wrong while I am working or I have to start over, I persevere. I do it for the person I am thinking about. I want them to have something that is me.

God does not need anything we have. But He is pleased to accept offerings from the hearts of us, His children. He gave us our time and talents. He gave us our abilities and skills. He ordered our lives so we could grow up learning and mastering how to use our God given talents. He gives us the choice to use those talents for Him and others. He is pleased by our excitement and love as we strive to do his will. As our Father, He wants to give us special attention and He waits for our response. He eagerly watches our faces and reads our hearts for our sincerity and love. He gave us presents first; He gave us His love, His only son and our Salvation. It is now up to us to use those presents to glorify His name and spread His Word.

-Lucy Anderson

Thankfulness

God has blessed me in so many ways. I have a great family and a great church family. But let me start by telling

you about my family and how they have blessed me. I have a mom who encourages me, a dad who pushes me to do incredible things, a sister who helps me up when I get knocked down and a brother who helps me get stronger by having play fights in the family room. I have grandmas who give me enthusiasm, and a grandfather who shows me amazing things. My mom has practiced with me so much in volleyball that I made a 14 year old team. My dad pushed me so much that I am a pitcher and a shortstop in softball. Morgan has taken up for me and I have taken up for her. And Brady, who loves to wrestle and Praise God. Grandmas and Grandads who help me get through things when I am sad and bored. I have aunts and uncles that say I love you every time they leave. I am so blessed to have so many family members close in both ways. Those are my family blessings.

I am blessed to have so many good friends. They get me through good times and bad. They are always there for me through everything. That is why I call them my friends.

One of my other blessings is my church. I would not have a chance to tell you this. I am really happy to be doing this. It is an awesome thing to do. This church has really changed my life. I don't think I would be this girl if it weren't for this church. I thank all of you for being one of my many families.

My miracle blessing is my grandma. She has been through a lot, like chemo and

lots of tests. I am so blessed to have her here with me. She has been a blessing to everybody. She gets together birthday parties for other people and always makes them good. I am very happy her tests came back good so she can spend Christmas with us and we hope many more. I love you Grandma.

Me and my brother and sister give the money we get for our birthday and Christmas to either our World Vision child or any other place or person in need. 2 years ago, I gave my birthday money to my world vision child, Morgan wanted books for her library, and Brady gave his money to the Greene County Youth Center Scholarship Fund.

I thank God for all of those things. I would not be here if it weren't for Him. I also thank Him for helping me be the best I can be.

-Lexi Lam

Expectations

Candles in the windows,
Wreathes upon the door,
Christmas lights are twinkling.
What are we waiting for?

The choir is singing carols,
The crowd is in the pews.
The pastor enters quietly
To preach and spread the news.

What is this expectation
This lovely Christmas morn?
Sing, all ye heavenly angels,
CHRIST THE KING IS BORN.

*for to you is born this day in the city of
David a savior, who is Christ the Lord*
Luke 2:11

-Pat Holtzman

God's Creation

*Lord, our Lord, How majestic is your name in
all the earth! Psalm 8:1 (NIV)*

We have all seen God in nature for we know that it is God's creation. Three haiku poems and "Impression" were written while feeling God's presence at the beach:

The ocean expands

Past what my blue eyes can see

Created by Him

-Ruth Hodges

Seeing God at Christmas

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6 (NRSV)

So many places, so many faces, so many opportunities to see God at work in our very midst, but I remember the Christmas my oldest daughter Emily was born. Time stopped as we remembered God that night.

I already had one Christmas baby – Nathan, my oldest had been born on December 23, 1976 and I was able to bring him home from the hospital on Christmas Day itself – the best present I could ever imagine was the gift of that precious child God had entrusted to my care. Why would God ever bless me so mightily! I understood the thoughts of early believers as they would want to gaze into a newborn baby's eyes in order to catch a glimpse into the soul of a tiny being who had just left the presence of God to be placed in his mother's arms. I saw God in my own child's eyes that Christmas in 1976 – how much more profound could a God sighting be?

I believe it came in 1981 with Emily's birth on December 19. People had teased me about having two Christmas babies: "It's going to be a nightmare of activity," they said. "How will you possibly

pull off two birthdays and Christmas all at once?” they exclaimed. “How will your second child, Colin, keep from getting lost in the shuffle?” they speculated. (They had no idea that God would bless us with a FOURTH child, Jocelyn, just 26 months later!) Others had so much anxiety about the whole thing – hurrying us to get all the shopping done earlier – never knew when the baby would come! Making sure all the cookies were baked, cards sent, tree decorated – after all *they* said “What would happen if the baby came and all of this wasn’t done? What if the baby was born on Nathan’s birthday?”

Well, it got done – we were all exhausted. And then Emily was born – and Nathan still had his fifth birthday party complete with balloons and cake and presents, thanks to my husband and neighbors. But would we make Christmas Eve midnight services? “What would we do with the baby? the natterers protested. “How would we manage three children under the age of 6 during the service?”

We managed – all dressed up Christmas outfits, Emily bundled in a little rush ‘Moses basket’ – we filed into church and tucked Emily’s basket between the pews where she slept away unnoticed as the boys leaned on their daddy’s and my sides and played with the wax on their Christmas candles. It was a beautiful service about the Christ Child - born in the middle of the night, hidden away from sight, no one even noticing He was in their

midst. The carols were sung, the candles lit one to another in the hushed silence of the mystery of the Incarnation. And then the service was over.

People began laughing and filing out into the night – and then someone noticed Emily – still asleep in her basket. A hush came over the gathered as they drew near to look at this tiny child born so close to Christmas. All of a sudden time seemed to stop. No one was in a rush to go home. No one was worried about presents or last minute details for ‘the big day.’ No one actually wanted to leave the sanctuary at all. They just wanted to look at the child and remember another Child born on another night so long ago; a night when others had been too busy getting things done to notice God in their very midst.

As the congregation gathered around Emily, one of the women remarked in a hushed tone: “We were almost too busy to notice she was here. But we did! And because we have noticed this child, we can truly remember Another! We can slow down and be still, give thanks and remember Immanuel and truly give God praise!” And with that spontaneous benediction from a congregant, the gathered left for their homes in reverence on this most holy of nights.

That night God transformed Christmas for many as the Lord used a tiny baby girl, Emily – one who some would say had just left the throne room of God – and offered

her as a witness to a tiny baby Boy, Jesus, One Who now sits enthroned in glory at the right hand of the Father in heaven!

Will we notice Him this Christmas amidst the busy-ness and the noise? Will we find Him as we move about in so many places among so many faces? Only if we slow down and be still. Only if we are willing to let time stop so that we might notice. So brothers and sisters, I urge you to **Be still and notice God** this Christmas season! It is amazing what God sightings you will have to share!

-Pastor Catharine



May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. Psalm 72:10 (NRSV)

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11 (NRSV)

God's perfect timing

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son, born of a woman under the law. Galatians 4:4

God's perfect timing, how does it show its ways? When is the perfect time, if left to us, we would always be late, hardly ever early, but if we listen to God our timing will be impeccable.

Let me tell you of a God sighting involving God's perfect timing.

Many years ago, before we moved down here, for some reason, we purchased a set of stainless steel flat wear. I am not sure we ever used it, but for some reason had to have it.

Well, when we moved down here, it was placed in a box and put in a cabinet in the garage. Forgotten. Recently we were doing some cleaning out and found the flat wear in the cabinet. Out it came and got washed, but sat in the deep sink in the basin for a couple weeks. Finally, one fine Tuesday, Norm and I decided to take it to Tuesday's Table and see if anyone needed some flat wear. It was sat, in a box, on a chair to the side of the fellowship hall.

During the evening, a Tuesday table regular, came to me and ask about the flat wear. She wanted to know if it was being given away, I said yes, and she said that during a recent move, they had lost their flat wear, and asked if she could have it.

God's timing, always amazing, and always perfect. During this Advent season, look for God's perfect timing as you go about your daily activity and give Him all praise, honor and glory forever, Amen.

-Carol Recknor

The One and Only

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said

to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.”
“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered.
“May it be to me according to your word.”
Then the angel left her. Luke 1:26-38

In reading this passage, I can’t even imagine the emotional roller coaster that Mary was on. It says she was shaken and confused. That is probably putting it mildly. Can you imagine as a virgin, being told that you are going to have a baby?! Not only that, but the baby is our Messiah. Wow! I would truly love to know what thoughts were going through her mind when this was first revealed. Was she thinking “I must be dreaming” or “What a day; I woke up this morning a happily engaged woman and now I have to explain to my fiancé that I am with child, all while trying to convince him that I am still a virgin and the baby is the Son of God”. Talk about overwhelming!

When we are overwhelmed, what do we do? Give up, get angry or stressed? I will admit that most of the time, I fit into one of those categories. But what did Mary say? “I am the Lord’s servant, may it be to me according to your word”. I pray that one day I will have the faith and courage to wake up every morning and say “I’m all yours God. I give it all to you with no worries or stress. Let your will be done, not mine” I would love to think that I would have done what Mary did, and I guess you never know, but I hate to say I probably would have been a bit more hesitant.

I also wonder how Jesus feels, looking down on us from Heaven as we “supposedly” celebrate His birthday. Has anyone ever forgotten your birthday? Even worse, have you ever had a huge birthday party in your honor, but no one invited you? I can only imagine what it must feel like to watch us celebrate CHRISTmas, and not being invited to the party. Instead of Jesus, we have invited Santa, expensive gifts, anxiety, and busyness. Unfortunately, the tables are all full and we are turning Him away at the door. Just like when He was born and no room left at the Inn, we have no room left at the party.

So what now? Can't we just squeeze everything together and fit Him in? No, He doesn't want to be squeezed in. We must get rid of the things that are squeezing Christ out of Christmas. Let's give Jesus the ultimate gift, ourselves. He wants our time, our worship and our service. Let's clear out the party and have only one guest. The one and only, Jesus Christ. Amen

-Erin Lam



“Daddy’s Hurt”

*I raise my eyes toward the mountains.
Where will my help come from? My help
comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven
and earth. God won't let your foot slip. Your
protector won't fall asleep on the job.*

Psalm 121:1-3 (CEB)

I could sense a heightened level of anxiety in her voice as she talked, and even spotted a tear on her cheek as my Mother hung up the phone. “Your Daddy’s been hurt, get your coat and galoshes on, we’re going to the hospital”, she said to me in a calm, but direct voice.

It was one of those snow-filled winters of so long ago, I couldn’t have been more than 5 or 6 years old, but that scene remains in my mind like it happened yesterday. I also remember tons of snow... snow that my Dad had been clearing from the long driveway of an elderly, well-to-do couple that he had been caring for. He was using a large snow-blower on the front of a tractor they owned. While adjusting the chute to blow the snow in a different direction, he had slipped in the snow and ice and his left foot slammed into the augers that plowed snow back and into the fan. His foot now mangled, he had managed to crawl to the door of the couple’s house and have them call for help.

My next memory of the events of those days was seeing the biggest cast I

have ever seen on my Dad's leg and foot as he lay in the hospital bed. In my mind, it was bigger than me!

It's interesting what things engrain themselves as a permanent photo in your mind. I seem to retain memories of my incredible Mother as she reacted to stress; and trust me, I will never forget that cast!

Some things aren't always so clear as they unfold in front of us. Sometimes God's grace takes hindsight to see. God was there with my Dad that day, even though it has taken me 50 years to see. I remember him saying "... for **some reason**, I did disengage the clutch to the blower just before I pulled on the chute..." He usually left it engaged to save time. So instead of the augers being powered by the engine, they were coasting to a stop when they snagged his foot. If God had not "nudged" him to disengage the blower, his entire leg likely would have been drawn into the machine, or worse.

There was weeks of recovery, and ultimately one toe had to be amputated, but my Dad recovered from his injuries and never walked with any sort of a limp.

"Some Reason" – God, of course.

-Tim Worley

Blessings

God has given me so many blessings like my family. My mom, my dad, my brother, but most of all, my sister Lexi. We were also blessed with a beautiful Grandma and a handsome Granddaddy. Also, my Nana, she loves me a lot and I love her back. I have been blessed a lot, but most of all,

I have been blessed with a church like no other and all their love. Every one in our church loves all. I am so blessed with all the things I have. I love every one the same.

God has given me so much. My Grandma has Amyloidosis. The doctor said that she was going to die in a year, but we prayed, prayed and prayed and now she is still alive and healthy. Amen.

-Morgan Lam

God's Plan is Given

Isaiah 7 tells us, *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.”* We are told **what** is going to happen but not **when**.

Matthew 1 tells us, *“Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. ...Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit...She will*

bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus.”
Now we are shown **when**.

Isaiah 53 also tells us, *“He was oppressed he was afflicted...like a lamb that is lead to the slaughter...”* This is a prophesying of God’s wondrous love and grace that would come through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

John 19 tells us, *“Then Pilot took Jesus and had him flogged...Then he handed him over to them to be crucified”.* Just as we were told Jesus suffered and died for our sins.

Luke 24 tells us, *“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”* Christ is risen, he is **ALIVE!**

Mark 16 tells us, *“Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.”* This is what **WE ARE TO DO!**

These passages are meant for each one of us. They told us what **WOULD** happen, they tell us what **DID** happen, and they tell us why **IT IS** important.

Dear Heavenly Father, help us read your word and dwell upon its meaning that we may know You and do Your will each day of our lives. We pray in the name of God the Maker, Jesus Christ the Messiah, and The Holy Spirit sent to live in us. Amen

-Norm Recknor

Twass the Night Before Christmas

God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, Genesis 1:16-17 (NRSV)

It was Christmas Eve and my father was working, so it was up to my older brother Warren and I to help Mama, as we were the oldest. There was a tricycle and wagon in the barn hidden from Mary Anne and Al, my younger sister and brother. Warren and I were sent to the barn to bring the tricycle and wagon to the house.

As I looked up at the heavens with only the stars and moon shining and in the quiet stillness of the night, I thought surely God was there.

-Christine Davis

Trust in Him

Hello my name is Matthew Davis. I would like to tell you that church is a big part of my life and I enjoy being joined with youth. I see God every day in my life. It's like he is with me in the hall ways of my school guiding me through my day. He is really with me everywhere I go.

One of the best things in life is my grandmother GG. She helps me with my walk with God by showing me her smile even when she is not feeling well. I really want her to see me graduate from High School; I pray that she will be there.

I would like to share my favorite verse with you today. It is Isaiah 40:31 – *But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.*

This verse became important to me this year when I had a bad all-star tournament. This verse help me find renewed strength and not lose faith in myself. It gave me courage to continue to play baseball and find success later in the year.

We all face challenges in our lives. Even a 12 year old does and needs encouragement. This verse helped me and it can also help you get through hard times so let me say it to you again.

“But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint”. Thanks for listening.

-Matt Davis

Caleb and Jacob - A Shepherd's Tale

From Luke 2:8-20

Another cold night in the fields. The sheep are finally quietly sleeping. I can see Jacob over on the hillside with his flock. We are the two youngest shepherds these days. Most of the shepherds are a lot older than we are. They all think we are too young to do this job! But Jacob and I are good with our sling shots and we haven't lost any sheep to the wild prowlers of the night. Even some of the older shepherds have lost sheep every now and then. We are gradually earning their grudging respect.

It is not easy work, being a shepherd. The sheep are always wandering off and getting tangled in the thorns and briars. You have to keep track of them all the time. It gets pretty lonely out here, but my family needs all I can earn. There aren't many jobs for boys to be had. I don't mind it too much. At least I don't have to muck out the stables or work inside all day like some!

Jacob is my friend and we work together sometimes and share our stories about the animals in our care. Just the other day, one of Jacob's sheep got stuck in the thorny brush and it took both of us over an hour to get that dumb sheep untangled! But we did it! Crazy animals can't take care of themselves at all. Lucky for me and Jacob or we would be out of work.

Hey, what is that bright light? Jacob sees it too. He is pointing to the sky near him. I see some of the other shepherds running over there too. I'm going to check it out. The sheep are quiet and gathered close. They'll be all right for a few minutes.

"Hey Jacob, what is that light?" "I don't know Caleb, let's walk over there and see what is going on." "There has been a bright star shining over there by Bethlehem tonight. Did you see it?" "Yes, I did notice it just as it got dark tonight. Come on Jacob everyone is over there on that hill. Let's hurry!"

The shepherds were all standing and looking up in the sky. Then all of a sudden, they saw an angel. We squatted down low because we were terrified. What is this? It looks like angel would look, I think! But I have never seen anything like this before! What is he saying? "Do not be afraid--I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people." What good news? "What does this mean, Jacob?" "I don't know Caleb. Let's get closer so we can hear. Come on."

"To you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger" Then suddenly the sky was as bright as day and there was singing and praising God. They said, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favors."

Caleb and Jacob couldn't believe their eyes. All the shepherds were talking at once. Everyone decided to go to Bethlehem, the city of David, to find out if it is true. Caleb and Jacob went too. Big Nathan and Daniel stayed behind with the sheep as everyone ran to Bethlehem. We were a little afraid and very excited. The bright star was right over Bethlehem and we followed it. It led us right to this stable. We went inside. Others had gathered about too.

Sure enough, there was a little baby sleeping in the straw! Poor baby, his bed in a manger! Lots of people were in the city to pay their taxes and they had to stay here. Jacob and I squeezed up close so we could see the baby. He looked like any other baby, but the angel said he was the Messiah. Can it really be true? The rabbis have talked about a Messiah coming for ages. "Jacob, I thought the Messiah was to be a king. But this baby looks poor. His blanket isn't fancy and there are no fancy clothes around this stable! How can our Messiah and Lord be born even poorer than we are?" Our Messiah in a stable? I just don't understand.

"Jacob, if this is our Messiah, we need to give him something to honor him." Caleb said, "I don't have any thing to give". "Me either." "All I have in my pack is a sling shot and some stones." What do you have?" "That's all I have." Let's give him that-- he may be a shepherd some day, like us, even if he is not a king."

As the two young shepherd boys crept forward, they left the only gifts they had to give the baby. They laid the sling shots and stones at the manger. It seemed like the baby smiled at them as they left. The stones seemed to sparkle and shine in the straw about the manger. The bright star shone down upon those ordinary stones given by these poor shepherd boys. The baby's first gifts. The older shepherds were humbled by their generosity. Each left something behind from their meager belongings. Some a blanket, or a few small coins, a woolen shawl or hat. Not much for a king, but all they had.

As they all left to return to the fields, Mary and Joseph were amazed. The meager gifts were all about the stable as people came and went. Jacob and Caleb's generosity was repeated throughout the night. There would be all that was needed. Enough food, blankets and coins from those first visitors.

Caleb and Jacob returned to the fields and pondered what happened that special night. They would never be the same. They would remember that night forever.

-Pat Glassmyer

“Merry Christmas!”

This very day in King David’s hometown a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11

Have you ever felt like you were just going through the motions? I felt that way a number of years ago, as I was preparing for Christmas. I had been very busy shopping, baking, decorating, getting together with friends and colleagues, and attending school and yes, even church activities. This particular Christmas Eve morning I went shopping, desperately searching for a couple of gifts I still needed to buy.

As I was leaving JC Penney at the mall, I met a young man, a total stranger, who gave me a beaming smile and enthusiastically wished me a “Merry Christmas!” I guess you would say I had an epiphany, because his words suddenly made me realize that I was missing out on Christmas. I don’t mean all the “stuff” that goes with Christmas, but I almost missed out on what it is all about.

I realized that no matter how diligently I shopped and looked, I would never be able to match the gift that had already been given, the perfect one size fits all gift of our Savior, Jesus Christ. How blessed I felt that someone took the time to remind me of that gift. That young man’s simple wish, one that I had heard and exchanged without much thought many

times before, suddenly took on new meaning.

I consider that encounter a God sighting because suddenly the burden I was feeling to make everything perfect had been lifted. My wish for all those who are reading this is simple. May you have a very, " Merry Christmas" and a blessed new year.

-JoAnne Worley

God is Love.....

God has given us his Sprit. That is how we know that we are one with him, just as he is one with us. 1 John 4:13

The True Meaning of Christmas for me will always be the birth of Jesus Christ. Bring Hope and Joy to all of God's Children. As children enjoying our special gifts on Christmas morning, spending time with my Sisters and Brother, sharing with my family. Our Christmas morning breakfast of Oyster Stew, and Country Ham Biscuits! And best of all, The Christmas evening desert. My Mom's Coconut Cake, and Strawberry Jello with Walnuts. These are my special Christmas memories. Christ Jesus lives, he lives within my Heart.

-Danease Arrington

Thankfulness For His Love

I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything. On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul. All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth. They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD. For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me. The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands. Psalm 138 (NRSV)

This Psalm reminds me that God will always love you and that his love is always in your heart.

I am thankful for my family, the joy of waking up in the morning, my pets, my friends the Earth we live on and most importantly, God and his dream for us.

That is not all: I think this Psalm relates to me because I know that I praise God with all my heart and I have walked

through trouble and He has helped me through it.

Like when I was voted Treasurer in my school. The "trouble" to me was making all the signs and writing a speech that I had to say in front of all 3 grades in my school. He was with me and helped me stay calm. So, never think you are alone when you are going through "trouble".

-Alexis Wayland

My name is Jacob and I am thankful for God that made the flowers and for David fighting the giant with help from God.

I am thankful for my family and my toys. I just have that much that I am thankful for.

-Jacob Wayland

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.
Isaiah 9:2 (NRSV)

Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles — the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.
Matthew 4:15-16 (NRSV)

Being Thankful

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

2 Corinthians 4:7-12 (NRSV)

I think this means to be thankful for what you have, like if you don't get something, don't get all frustrated because some people don't even have half the things you do. When I don't get a video game, I'll say "hey, I have food, a house and water", because some children don't. I'm thankful for my family, food and water; basically all my needs. And last, but definitely not least, that Jesus died on the cross.

John 3:16 says "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Now that's something to be thankful for.

-Hanna Neal



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