

P.S. Season's Greetings: A Family Devotional for the Holidays



Heather Roth Johnson, editor

December 1 – Promise

But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.
- Jeremiah 1: 7-8

Dear Friend:

I had a pet cat named Dora. Dora had been my cat for around a decade, when I noticed that she did not seem to be feeling very well. One day, when I was petting her, I felt a lump on her throat. The veterinarian gave me the bad news: Dora was so sick that there was not anything they could do to treat her. I was sad, but I knew in my heart we had to put Dora down. When the vet took her into the room in the back, he said to me, “I know this is hard for you. If you cannot stay with Dora, I want you to know that I will be with her until the end.” I decided that I did want to be with her, and so I stayed with her while the vet set up the medicine that would put her to sleep. As Dora took the medicine, I held her, and I stayed with her until she fell asleep. But the vet stayed too. He stayed with Dora so she would not be scared, and with me because he knew that I was very sad. He reminded me about the promise that God gives us in the Bible – “I am with you.” In fact, that promise is repeated all throughout the Bible. When Jesus is born, he is given the name Emmanuel, which means “God with us.” This promise reminds me that even when we are sad, or sick, or worried, or hurt God is with us. How has God been with you today?

Sincerely,
Your friend, Mandi

P.S. God of promise, no matter what is happening in our life right now, help us to remember that you promise to be with us. Amen.

December 2 - Ornaments

"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." - Luke 2:20

Hello Dear Ones,

When it comes to decorating our house, I am mostly relegated to the outdoors. My wife and daughter decorate the tree. It is truly a thing of beauty to watch, not because our ornaments are anything special (I mean they are – but that is not the point!). It is because my wife knows the story behind every single ornament. Our ornaments do not just decorate, but each one tells a story. Not only does my wife know where each ornament came from and why we have it, but she lovingly passes this information on to our daughter. The holiday season is full of symbols and stories. What sights, smells, or sounds remind you of Christ's birth? What makes you want to tell that story until that day when he comes again?

Faithfully,

Your friend, Chris

P.S. May the sights and sounds of the season inspire you to tell the story the birth of Jesus. Amen.

December 3 - Candle

Light one candle to watch for Messiah: let the light banish darkness.

ELW 240

Hello!

What is your first memory of a candle? Is it on your birthday cake? Or maybe someone else's and YOU wanted to blow out THEIR candles? I remember carrying a candle with batteries as part of my church's Christmas program. Someone got smart and realized that youth should not carry real candles in church! Well, maybe some adults should not either!

During Advent, this time in the church year, an Advent wreath is added in the church. Each week another candle is lit as we countdown to Jesus' birth while reminding us that Jesus is the light of the world.

Remember what God said when God created the heavens and the earth? "Let there be light"; and there was light (Genesis 1:3). God came to earth as Jesus to be the LIGHT. Our candles remind us of God's love for us.

Every time you light a candle -- during Advent or Christmas, on a birthday cake or any day -- give thanks to God for sending Jesus, the light of the world! How many candles will you light on your Advent wreath today?

Blessings to you-
A friend, René

P.S. Dear Jesus, we light the candle of hope this day. Amen.

December 4 – Jingle bells

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!” - Psalm 100:1

Dear friend,

Well, it is beginning to look a lot like Christmas! What makes it look like Christmas for you? I think of things like snow, Christmas trees, and decorated houses. But Christmas has sounds too! I am thinking about what makes it sound like Christmas is coming. Of course, I think about songs that you hear, and that you can download on your phone, but those aren't the only sounds of Christmas. There is the sound of jingle bells too.... I always think of Christmas when I hear jingle bells. You can hear the bells of the song, and the bells of the Salvation Army Santa – but they always sound joyful, without any words at all. The sound of the bells remind us that someone is coming, whether we are hearing them – or whether we are playing them. So, we get ready for the joy of Jesus, I hope you can find some bells and make some noise! I pray for you to spread the noise and the joy of Jesus coming.

In the joy of Christ,
Your friend, Diane

P.S. Dear God, thank you for bringing joy into our lives through the sounds of bells. Amen.

December 5 –Tree

[Zacchaeus] wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. - Luke 19:3-4

Dear Child of God,

Zacchaeus is someone who other people in the town did not like very much. He was so short he decided to climb a tree so he could get a better look at Jesus. Even though other people did not always like Zacchaeus, Jesus loved him and invited him to come down from the tree so they could eat together. On those rough days when you wish you were taller, or smarter, or better at sports, or had more friends, remember that Jesus loves you more than you can even imagine. He always has, and he always will. No matter what. Whenever you look at a Christmas tree or climb a tree in your backyard, you can remember this story – especially how the person Jesus chose to have dinner with was not the person who was the best at everything. He chose the short, lonely guy up in the tree. That sounds like good news to me. Do you like to play in the trees?

From,

A short person (a girl!) who climbed a lot of trees as a kid named Heather

P.S. Jesus, help me to remember just how much you love me. Amen.

December 6 - Snow

The Lord says, "Come, we will talk these things over. Your sins are red like deep red cloth. But they can be as white as snow. Your sins are bright red. But you can be white like wool.—Isaiah 1:18

Cher Enfant, (That's French for "Dear Child!")

There is nothing quite like a fresh blanket of snow in the winter. It is said that the snow falls at God's command. Snow falling from the sky is a process we see, but barely understand. Walking across a fresh-fallen snow is so much fun – *crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch,.....* Seeing where you have been and forging new paths where no one else has been is exciting! The fresh snow covers our ordinary and usual paths and makes everything brand-new! Our mighty God (the same one who commands the snow to fall), forgives all the things we do wrong. God is pretty amazing! We do not need to carry the weight of the mistakes we have made (the red cloth) because we have an amazing God who will turn that red cloth as white as snow! Do you like to play in snow? Do you get snow where you live?

L'amour,

A friend named Becky

P.S. May your prayer this night include the amazing and life-changing God! Amen.

December 7 - Perfect

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. - 1 John 4:17

Hey People,

Growing up I felt that I always needed to be “perfect”. We are given this message in many different ways. Growing up we always had our children’s Christmas Program on Christmas Eve. Our family would gather together for a meal and then whisk us kids off to church for our program. I can remember practicing my lines and attending rehearsals, for what seemed like weeks, ahead of time, trying to get the program just right. On Christmas Eve all that seemed to fall away as we celebrated the birth of God’s perfect love sent into the world. God sent his only Son to abide and to live with us that we may know God’s perfect love and know we are accepted just as we are, mistakes and all we are as a person. We have a perfect love given to us and inside us to share with the world. How might you share God’s love with someone today?

In God’s Love,
Your friend – Stacy

P.S. God of love, remind me always that I was born with the perfect love that came down from heaven. Immanuel, *God with us!* Amen.

December 8 - Comfort

"Comfort, comfort my people!" says your God. - Isaiah 40:1

Dear Loved One,

It is weird how something as simple as my phone can help me to feel better. When I am nervous in a group because I don't know anyone, I look at my phone and pretend to read a text or Snapchat. Has that ever happened to you? Or, when I am lost I use Waze to get home. And when I am scared in the dark, I just use my phone's light. Instead of being nervous, or lost, or scared, I feel comfort. There are - and will be - times when you need more comfort than your phone can provide. My prayer for you, my dear loved one, is that when you are nervous, lost, or scared, God's comforting words of Joy, Hope, and Peace, will help you to feel better. How have you been comforted by God's love today?

In the Comfort of Christ,
Tom

P.S. Dear Jesus, comfort, comfort your people now as you did then.
Amen.

December 9 - Gingerbread House

"Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart...Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." -

Deuteronomy 6:6, 8-9

Dear Child of God,

Are you ready?! Just after Thanksgiving my family loves to pull out all of the Christmas decorations and prepare our home to celebrate Jesus' birth. We talk about all of the ornaments and people who gave them to us. We put the decorations in special places around our house to remind us of God's love and the people who love us. When my kids were younger, we would build gingerbread houses as part of these preparations. The kids loved to pick out the colorful candy. We designed the houses and struggled to make the pieces stick together. Sometimes we ate more candy than we put on the house! All of these preparations in our home helped us to prepare our hearts to celebrate Jesus birth. Is your home and heart ready for baby Jesus? How can you prepare?

From Another Child of God, Emily

P.S. Thank you, God, for my home that is full of love. Amen.

December 10 - Hot Chocolate

*You prepared a meal for me in front of my enemies.
You welcomed me as an honored guest. My cup is full and spilling
over. - Psalm 23:5*

Greetings from Minne-SNOW-ta!

Having lived in Minnesota most of my life, I have spent many snow days playing outside in snow drifts, tunneling to create secret snow passages, building snow men, women, and children, and shoveling. We went skating, sledding down hills and enjoying every single snowflake landing on my snow covered head until my mittens were frozen stiff and cheeks were as red as Santa's hat. There is nothing quite like coming inside after a good snowy play day to steaming mugs brimmed to the top with delicious hot chocolate! I do not know which is better the warmth of the mug or sweet taste of chocolate but just thinking about it makes me *almost* wish for snow. Try reading Psalm 23 reimagining the text on a snowy day. Would God lead you to lie down and make snow angels? Would God comfort you with a warm scarf and mittens? One thing I am pretty sure of is that at end of the snowy day, God would welcome you inside and have a nice hot mug of the most delicious hot chocolate you have ever tasted, complete with whipped cream brimming over the rim! At the end of your coldest days, may you be warmed by God's sweet, sweet love for you!

Warmest regards,
A hot chocolate loving friend, Billie Jo

P.S. Thank you, God, for a life so sweet as Hot Chocolate. Amen.

December 11 - Candy

"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" - Psalm 119:103

Dear Candy Cane Eating Friends,

When I was a little girl, my dad was a pastor so we had lots of people who loved me and my sister and brother, as if we were their grandchildren. One of those "grandmas" brought us identical packages every year. And every year we knew just what to expect: Chocolate Covered Cherries (sometimes called Cherry Cordials). This kind of candy is a chocolate shell with a cherry and some flavored syrup inside. They are really juicy, so if you bite into them you are likely to drip bright red juice on your clothes. My mom made me try one every year, because she said they were a gift of love, but I never liked them. After sixth grade we moved away so no more Chocolate Covered Cherry candy at Christmas. I completely forgot about them, but many years later, a box of them showed up for Christmas. I was reluctant to eat one because I remembered how gross they were, but decided to try one, and guess what? Now I think they are delicious, and they taste like Christmas to me. What is your favorite Christmas candy?

Love,

Your candy-loving friend, Julie

P.S. Thank you God for candy and the loving people who share it with us! Amen.

December 12 - Cards

*Look at what large letters I use as I write to you in my own handwriting! -
Galatians 6:11*

Hi there!

Does your family send out Christmas cards? We get fewer and fewer every year now, because people just post “Merry Christmas” on Facebook or Instagram or Twitter. But Christmas cards used to be something many people sent. You would pick out a card with Wise Men or Baby Jesus on it, and write a message inside, and mail it out to your family and friends. I still keep cards people sent me years ago. Even though it is quicker to text for sure, there is still something special about having a card or letter to read over and over again. You read the words and know somebody cared about you enough to write them. So this year, why not send someone a Christmas card? Tell them your news, and wish them a happy holiday season. And who knows? Maybe you’ll get one back! God bless you and your writing, this Christmas and always!

Love from Elise

P.S. Dear God, help me share my love with others today! Amen.

December 13 – Box

“...the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.” - Luke 2:15-16

Dear Friend,

There are few gifts as cool as a box. A box can make a great drum to bang on with wooden spoons. Cut a few holes and you have a robot like R2D2 you can wear on Halloween. Really big boxes are super fun to get because they must hold really big gifts, right? What about a small box? What super cool gifts can they hold? Sometimes the smallest of boxes holds the biggest gifts of all. Like a cradle box holding a tiny baby named Jesus, the greatest gift of all!

Thinking outside the box, Shari

P.S. Emmanuel, God with Us, Tiny Child: thank you for being the greatest present of love you are today and always. Amen.

December 14 – Elves

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.” - Matthew 11:28-28 MSG

Hey Busy Elf,

Life can be so busy even when it is not just weeks before Christmas. Sometimes I think that we are so busy making sure everything will be perfect that we often miss what makes this time of year so magical. That is why I like to begin my Christmas celebrations a bit early...in September. Yes, I start listening to Christmas music and think of all the colorful lights just after I have stuffed myself full with everything on a stick at the Minnesota State Fair. And sure people think I am pretty strange when I blast “Joy to the World” when it is still 80 degrees outside. But I like to think of it as embracing the season just as Santa’s elves do. The elves are wholly invested into Christmas and never get tired of the season. They live out its meaning of joy and care for the world and the miracle that is God’s creation. So, if you find yourself as busy as an elf this season, don’t forget to stop and take a few minutes to remember who we are celebrating - the birth of the One who came to our home to show us what it means to be whole in God’s eyes. This tiny child becomes the One whom we can turn to when life just gets too busy and too hard. What is your favorite Christmas carol?

Peacefully yours,
The Head Elf, Brian

P.S. May the One who shows each of us how to rest from our busy lives instill in you the unforced rhythms of grace which gives even the busy elf rest and renewal. Amen.

December 15 - Temple

Those who stay behind, wherever they happen to live, will support [the workers] with silver, gold, tools, and pack animals, along with Freewill- Offerings for The Temple of God in Jerusalem. Ezra 1:4

To Whom It May Concern,

I was left behind when King Cyrus said my people could build a new Temple. My grandmother and grandfather remembered God's House, the old Temple, from before they were taken away to Babylon. They were sad for many years, and so were my parents. We were all excited when we heard that the king was going to let us go back. But, he said some of us should go first to get things ready. I wanted to go! My mother told me that Jerusalem would not be ready for us yet. She said that we all have jobs to do. Without my help, the workers will not be able to make God's House ready for us. So, I am waiting here in Persia, and trying to be patient, and remembering that the workers need my help, right here, right now, right where I am. How do you help prepare your house of worship ready for Christmas?

From your patient friend, Matt.

P.S. Dear God, Help me to be patient and be a good worker for you, right where I am. Amen.

December 16 - Fruitcake

"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit." - Matthew 12: 33

Hi friend,

Are you a fan of cake or pie? We have both in my family. Only one of us likes fruitcake. Luckily, fruitcake is her birthday cake every year. Her birthday is Christmas Day. She says it works well since she loves it and no one else likes fruitcake that much anyway. I mean they are made up of plastic cherries and a hard cake-like substance. Eww! She has taught me it is not so bad- we try a different fruitcake every year, and we learn from each other that sometimes you love things you never thought you would. What is your favorite holiday dessert?

Sincerely,
Pastor Amy

P.S. May God help you bear good fruit, and try new things, for the sake of the world. Amen.

December 17 - Eggnog

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31

Greetings, friend!

When I was a child, we had many traditions to prepare for Christmas and the New Year. Maybe you do, too! We put up decorations and a beautiful fir tree filled with tinsel and ornaments. We had special food and drink. Often, our family and friends would visit from far and near to celebrate. One thing my family loved was EGGNOG! It is a traditional drink served only during this time of year. It has been around for centuries. Today, it is even available as a gelato flavor! When we filled our glasses with eggnog, we would gather together and raise them high, blessing one another and thanking God for the gift of Jesus and for the coming New Year. We would ask God for blessings and pray that whatever we would do, it would glorify God. If you could raise your glass of eggnog, what would you ask of God during this holiday season?

Drink some Eggnog,
Karen

P.S. "Good health to you now and forever" - a traditional Welsh blessing for you.

December 18 – Silent

*O God, do not keep silence; do not hold your peace or be still, O God! -
Psalm 83:1*

Dear Friends Young & Old,

The word “silent” brings to mind the beloved song, Silent Night. That song is precious to me as it is the last hymn my dad and I sang together before his death several months later. Most often when Silent Night is sung in church, the lights are dimmed and candles lit. An atmosphere of silent reverence and mystery is created with the familiar words about tenderness, angelic choirs, and heavenly peace surrounding Jesus’ birth. But, let’s get real – this was not a “silent” night! A baby was born... there was crying, cows mooing, sheep bleating, itchy straw, wet & soiled diapers, and a lodging place (an inn or house) filled with harried travelers, tired relatives, complaining siblings, and not-so-quiet children. God still showed up. How has God shown up in your life today?

Your friend,
Linda

P.S. Dear Lord, Help us to not stay silent, but bring the good news of the Christ child to our noisy, busy, and sometimes smelly world. Amen.

December 19 – Preparations

Therefore, once you have your minds ready for action and you are thinking clearly, place your hope completely on the grace that will be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 Peter 1:13

Dear One Who is Making All the Preparations:

When I was growing up there were no Christmas decorations in our house during December. Everything in my northern Vermont home looked as it always did, even as snow was falling and the store windows were blinking and beckoning with Christmas cheer. But, behind the scenes, my mother was gathering her silver ornaments and strings of blue lights, making sure all the bulbs were working. She was unpacking the large handmade crèche and its Italian papier-mâché figurines that told us the story of Mary and Joseph and Jesus in Bethlehem without having to say a word. On Christmas Eve, while we were in school for one last morning, she set it all up, and we returned to a home that was prepared for Jesus. Our job was to give her our best behavior and let her set the scene for Jesus' arrival. What is your favorite part of preparing for Christmas?

Love in this waiting season,
A Vermonter, Matt

P.S. Dear Jesus, with love we wait for you. Amen.

December 20 – Gift Giving

...if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. - Romans 12:8

To Whom It May Concern,

I have been working hard on my Christmas list and it is GOOD! I think you would be impressed. So, it was weird that in Sunday School we read in the Bible about gift-giving, but it is God giving us the gifts! *How cool is that?!* Romans 8:12 reminds us that we should use our gifts. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously ... And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

This got me thinking I should be giving some special gifts this year! So, I made a list.

Grandma: Applesauce (She always tells me that I'm full of "beans and applesauce" and then she gives me a hug and tells me how much she loves me. Idk what that means but I know I love her, and I want her to be full too. I am not so fond of beans ... but applesauce is GOOD!)

Grandpa: 100 pairs of glasses (Every time he comes to our house he says, "Now where did I put my dog-gone glasses?!" This way there will be glasses all over the place, so he can just pick one up!)

Dad: A BIG salsa bib (Every time my dad eats chips and salsa he drips on his shirt and mom rolls her eyes and talks about laundry so I think this will help a lot.)

Big bro Zac: A big box with a big lock on it (It is just not realistic for me to stay out of his room all the time ... it is just not possible! This way he can lock up special, private stuff when he is not home and then it won't be such a big deal. That is a good one, right?!)

Mom: I haven't figured this one out yet cuz my Mom is the sweetest person I have ever met EVER! Maybe it should just be candy!

What gifts do you still have to get for the people on your list?

Have a good day,
Janette

P.S. Dear God, I know you are the best at gift-giving. Thanks for giving me the gifts you did. Please help me to use the gifts you have given me the best way I can; by loving others like you do! Amen.

December 21 – Festive

“For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.” - Luke 1: 44

Greetings Friend!

My young adult son has always loved every holiday and he can't wait to decorate the house to fit each season. Now in college, he even coordinates visits home to ensure the house gets properly decorated. He is studying abroad this semester and won't be home until mid-December, and his parting words to his father and me were "Do not decorate for Christmas without me!" He understands that being festive is not just the decorations being up – it is being included and together and sharing the joy. When we decorate for holidays or for any special occasion, we are inviting other people into our joy. Feeling festive is so much more than simply being in the mood for a party, it is an invitation to connect with people around us, to reach out with compassion, and care to share the gifts of this season-the love and grace of Jesus. So, we will not decorate without him! What is your favorite Christmas decoration in your home?

Feeling Festive,
Your friend, Brigitte

P.S. May your Advent be festive in the joy of the Lord! Amen.

December 22 – Peace

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

To my friend Charlie,

Anxious- just saying the word “anxious” makes me feel that something may happen, and it may be something good, or something bad. Not knowing, makes me feel more anxious! Anxious! What a terrible word! I do not even like how it is spelled or the sound of it! Sunday nights, seem to be when that anxious feeling sets in, just when I am about to sleep. My mind swirls with thoughts one after the other....What am I forgetting? What will happen tomorrow? A snow storm? A surprise test or visit from a friend? Anxious- oh ANXIOUSNESS please do not come...I pray, I pray, I pray.... then, calm comes over me. I remember a word more powerful, PEACE. Peace! So thankful for peace. I read in my Bible, Philippians 4:7 “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Peace, that is right, my heart and mind is guarded in a way that I could never understand. A calm comes over me, I can breathe. The peace of God is with me, and I give thanks to God. Not knowing what tomorrow may bring may make me feel anxious and nervous to know I am headed into things I have no control over. But God is greater and I pray that God will give me peace, which does surpass all understanding. How do you understand God’s peace in your life?

In peace, God is good, God is great!
Your friend, Pax (aka Amanda)

P.S. Dear Jesus, guard my heart and give me your peace, I pray. Amen.

December 23- Family

I thank my God every time I remember you. Philippians 1:3

Hello Joy-Filled Family!

One of the best things about a family is remembering together: good times, sad times, funny times, and challenging times. Shared experiences bring us together, and returning to them brings us together again. When I was 13, my family lived at a Bible camp in the forested mountains of California. As fall started turning to winter, strange things started happening at our house: the cat's food disappeared every night, a wrapped box of candy got chewed up, and we heard strange scratching and sliding noises in the ceilings of our house. I vividly remember lying in bed wondering what on earth had invaded our home. We did not have to wait long to find out. On Christmas Eve morning, a skunk poked its nose out of the burner of our stove. Because of that, we ended up eating Christmas Eve dinner at Burger King (the only place open in our small town). Thankfully, we trapped the skunk on Christmas morning, only to have it escape a few hours later. Then, a few days later, my mom woke me up by asking, "Are you OK? The skunk just sprayed." Our house stunk, our clothes stunk, and we stunk -- and my grandparents were arriving that afternoon for a week-long visit. Thankfully, we had another place to live at the camp while we de-skunked our house. This is definitely a story that has brought my family together. My mom, dad, brother, and I have retold the story of our Christmas with the skunks over and over again, reminding ourselves of the challenges and funny moments. In fact, every time we smell a skunk -- at any time of the year -- we say, "Merry Christmas!" What is your funniest Christmas story ever?

From Joy!

P.S. Lord, thank you for families to help us through life. May we enjoy our times together -- and also enjoy our memories with them. Amen.

December 24 - Manger

And she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. - Luke 2:7

Haaaaay there!

What is a manger, really? We think of it as the cradle, the bed of the baby Jesus. But really it is a box to hold food, like hay, for farm animals. So when the animals in the stable where Jesus was born saw him in their food box, they must have been amazed! And we are still amazed that the baby who came to save the world, slept his first sleeps in a box of hay. His beginning was humble, like us. Hallelujah! He is one of us!

Thanks be to God for that!

Susan

P.S. Dear Baby Jesus, thank you for my bed and a warm place to sleep tonight. Amen.

December 25 – Good News

“The Good News of Jesus Christ begins here...” - Mark 1:1

Dear Loved One,

Well, I have good news and bad news.

And if you were sitting in front of me, I'd ask which you'd like to hear first. Since you are not, I will decide for you: The Good News is ... Jesus Christ.

The World already had enough bad news.

Into that abyss - very much like the world we live in today – the Gospel of Mark presents Jesus as a Super Hero. He used action verbs to describe who Jesus was and action verbs to show what he was accomplishing.

God is still involved in our lives. That, my friend, is good news indeed. I know I told you at the beginning of my letter that I had good news AND bad news.

The thing is, with Jesus Christ there is no bad news.

It's all good. Jesus is here!

Rejoicing in the Good News of Jesus,
Jennifer

P.S. May this Good News be the best news you hear in the year to come. Amen.

December 26 – Law

*For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment,
"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." - Galatians 5:14*

Hi Neighbor,

So glad to have you in my neighborhood - this great earth God created! As I prepare for Christmas, I love being in a neighborhood. Neighbors on our block help each other string Christmas lights. As a kid, we had Christmas cookie exchanges at the farm houses in our neighborhood. Every year, we go caroling with my kids at our neighborhood nursing home. Christmas is a great time to show love to our neighbors. I think about all the things that we have to do "the law" and how that can seem overwhelming. But we need to be reminded that just showing love to our neighbors fulfills the law. How did you love your neighbor today?

See you around the 'hood,
From your neighbor – Rachel

P.S. Let's pray together that God would help us love our neighbors as ourselves. Amen.

December 27 – Goodwill

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward humanity." - Luke 2:14

Dear all y'all,

I used to think the word "Goodwill" was only the name of a store. You know, some place to discard old things that remained in your closet for who knows how long? Hopefully you view it more than that. It is something that can provide essentials and goodness into the lives of those within your community. One year, I found that my goodwill assignment was to send letters to those whom I was thankful for each day for 40 days. This was a huge undertaking as I realized how much writing I was dedicating myself to. Mostly I was used to just writing small Facebook comments or posts to others with little time or effort. However, it made me realize that goodwill is to be shared and not kept behind a computer screen. Goodwill is to be shared more than messages in your IG story (Instagram), Twitter hashtags, or through Snapchat filters. God calls us out to be in goodwill with others and to spread the news far and wide. How will you spread Goodwill tonight?

From,

A fellow saved sinner, Rachel

P.S. God, help us to see the goodwill we can share to others is something we cannot keep contained. Help us share this joy with others and realize it is truly for all y'all! Amen.

December 28 – Instructions

*“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.” - Psalm 32:8*

Dear Child of God,

Have you ever played with Legos? I am always drawn to their big boxes at the store, covered in pictures of amazing things to build. They look so cool! But every time I open the box, and see the hundreds and hundreds of pieces, I start to get discouraged and frustrated. “I am not very good at building,” I think to myself. “This is going to take forever!” Thankfully, the sets come with detailed instructions— or else the pieces would never turn into the amazing creation they were meant to be! Sometimes things happen in our lives that make us discouraged and frustrated. They seem impossible to figure out, like a giant box of unbuilt Legos. But in those moments, God is with us! Through the Bible, worship, prayer, and people in our lives, God is giving us the instruction we need to live and love and become who we were created to be. If you ever have a problem or question, God is there to help you figure it out. How might God help you?

In Jesus’ name,
A friend named Kristina

P.S. May God be your source of instruction throughout your life! Amen.

December 29 - Light

"For you are all children of LIGHT and of the day. We don't belong to darkness and night."

1 Thessalonians 5:5

Dear Sleepyhead:

Being an early riser allows me to experience the sun rise. I love the peace and quiet of the new day as well as the changes that the oncoming light bring. I enjoy the sounds of the world seeming to wake up to the challenges of the new day. Just now, for instance, the garbage trucks are beginning to run their routes on my street! Who needs an alarm clock when the garbage trucks hit the neighborhood with the various banging and clatter that yell "WAKE UP"!

1 Thessalonians 5:5 says: "For you are all children of LIGHT and of the day. We do not belong to darkness and night." Often when the Bible speaks of LIGHT and dark it draws a line between that which is out in the open and that which is hidden: Between good and bad. Children of the LIGHT and of the day are honest, truthful trustworthy and authentic. The passage goes on to encourage us to be "clear headed" people. My prayer for all is that we will be clear headed as God intends; to live as children of LIGHT and of the day; having nothing to do with darkness and night. What do you like about the morning?

From the dawn of a new day,
Don

P.S. Give thanks today for we are children of the light! Amen.

December 30 – Fireplace

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. - Psalm 23:6

Hello friend!

I grew up in the northern plains of the US, which means I got to experience all four seasons. I loved summer because it meant swimming at the lake and days filled with neighborhood friends. Spring meant the beauty of budding trees and green grass bursting out of the thawing ground. I loved fall because of the remarkable changing colors and the crisp cool air. I wish I could say I loved winter because I liked to play in the snow, but I cannot because I did not. But my friends did and so I joined them. I would do my best to tolerate the cold, trying to have a good time, all the while asking, "Can we go inside now?" The best winter "going inside" experience was at my best friend's house because she had a fireplace. We would take off our wet and cold gear, grab a blanket, and gather around her fireplace. It was oh-so-cozy and warm. Sometimes her mom would even make hot chocolate with marshmallows on top! When I read the Bible verse above, I always imagine that God's house has a cozy fireplace, and that God too, will welcome us in and maybe even have hot chocolate with marshmallows! How does a warm fire make you feel?

Peace from the Yule log,
Amy

P.S. May you feel the cozy warmth of God's love now and into forever.
Amen.

December 31 – New Year

At that moment [Anna] came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. -

Luke 2:38

Dear New Year's Eve,

Whether or not, you like to celebrate New Year's Eve, the New Year still comes tomorrow. It will be the year 2020 in less than 24 hours. Anna the prophetess began the New Year meeting Baby Jesus in the temple. She rushed to hold and snuggle him, and to praise God that Baby Jesus has indeed arrived. She knew he would bring love to a world in need. So enjoy celebrating the last night of 2019 together. But when you wake up, and it is the first day of 2020, let your feet hit the floor praising Jesus. Because Jesus is the one that makes us new not just every year, but every day! How can you praise God this New Year's Eve?

Happy New Year,
Heather

P.S. Dear God, be with us in this New Year. Amen.

January 1 - Star

"When Jesus was born, some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the baby who was born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.'"

Matthew 2:1b-2

Dear Toby,

I am sorry to say it is not often that I notice stars where I live in the city. Street lights illumine the night sky, and a canopy of trees impedes my view, quite unlike where you live. But the other night as I traipsed to the alley with a bag of garbage, I stopped in my tracks when I saw Orion. Bright and clear, brilliant and expansive, my old friend appeared after a long absence. I took comfort in knowing that as the air grows colder, my favorite constellation will be there when I turn my gaze to the sky. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that on an ordinary night when they were doing what they ordinarily do, some scholars from the east noticed an unusual phenomenon. They were filled with awe, and their curiosity led them to embark on a journey, leaving for a while their everyday tasks behind. My prayer for you, dear friend, is that your ordinary day will include a little bit of wonder, and your curiosity will lead you to explore a mystery. When I look to the sky, I will think of you and the vast horizon where you live. Remember, dear friend, God is near.

Kris

P.S. Dear God, lead us and guide us with your shining light. Amen.

January 2 - Bow

"I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and Earth."

Genesis 9:13

Dear Reader:

Are you a hunter? Have you ever used a bow and arrow in your quest to capture an animal? You must pull back carefully on the bow to release the arrow. Shooting a bow and arrow calls for precision. God precisely places a different kind of bow in the sky. God places a rainbow in the sky; a reminder that God will never leave us or forsake us. May your prayer be one of precision as you see the bow placed in the sky and are reminded that God will never leave you or forsake you. When was the last time you saw God's promised rainbow in the sky?

See you somewhere over the rainbow!

Tara

P.S. From shooting stars to beautiful rainbows, we love your promises, O God. Amen.

January 3 – Animals

“Who teach us more than the beasts of the earth, and make us wiser than the fowls of the heaven?” - Job 35:11

Namaste,

I remember how excited I was to live in my first apartment on my own. I felt freeing to make my own decisions, decorate how I wanted, and set my own schedule. As Christmas approached, I realized that for the first time ever, except for my beloved cat Rebel Yell, I would be alone on Christmas. Instead of my normal enthusiasm for Christmas, I found I was just sad. However, I set about going through the motions. On Christmas Eve, I bought a tree and set it up. I felt sorry for myself because I owned no ornaments, and I had no one but Reb to be with me. So, with Reb looking on I set about baking 100 gingerbread cookies with paperclips carefully embedded to tie them with ribbon to the tree. I lived in Memphis at the time and with that oven roaring hot in my tiny duplex, it was just too sweltering hot. As I began tying cookies to the tree, I opened the door to let in some cooler air and there she was. Miss Walley, the neighborhood cat that no one claimed. Miss Walley was the scraggiest cat you would ever hope to meet with long black and white matted hair. She marched right in, surveyed the tree, sniffed carefully around, reached up, snatched a cookie and ran as fast as she could out the door. My sadness turned to delight, and I laughed as I picked up Reb and asked if he too wanted a cookie. Being a more dignified gent, he let me know absolutely not. For the rest of the holiday season that year (until I took my tree down at Epiphany) Miss Walley would show up at my door as soon as I opened it each evening and snatch a cookie. Eventually she figured out that Reb and I did not mind so instead of running away, she would sit on my front porch swing like a queen on her throne devouring her cookie. This cat that no one wanted, who no one cared for, gave me the gift of appreciating what I have rather than worrying about what I did not. I had 2 kitty friends to share my holiday and one was a mischievous cookie thief.

Do you have an animal teacher in your life?

All the best,
A friend, Sherry

P.S. Dear God, thank you for animals who make the holidays bright!
Amen.

January 4 - Guest

"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads. Go out to the country lanes. Make the people come in. I want my house to be full.'" - Luke 14:23

Ya know,

My husband and I got married in early February - In Michigan. We were blessed to celebrate on a day when the whole world seemed to be covered in sparkling white wonder! Looking out the windows was absolutely beautiful, but it also created some problems. There were many who were unable to attend, cancelling at the last minute, fearing they would make the trip and then be snowed in for the weekend. It was a legitimate reason, but still slightly disappointing to see 5 empty tables that had been intended for guests to celebrate with us. This left us with left-over food. It was more than any of our family felt they could freeze or eat in a reasonable time. So what did we do? We shared: Leftovers were delivered to an inpatient rehab program for teens and young adults. Members of the wedding party called and dropped it all off on that snowy Saturday afternoon. Patients who often settled for institutional food were treated to a catered meal, complete with banana cake with white chocolate buttercream icing. The guest list was expanded to include those we never would have imagined. How do you share the food that you have with others?

Michelle

P.S. Help us, dear God, to share our food with others and help them to feel like guests at the table. Amen.

January 5 - Crèche

So the shepherds hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. - Luke 2:16

Hello Friends,

Crèche is such a funny word, and we do not use it a lot anymore. Crèche means the part in the Christmas story with Mary and Joseph and Jesus along with the shepherds, animals, and angels - all gather to create a scene. When I think about this story I remember a crèche my mother had. It was made out of wooden pieces that fit together like a puzzle, and I would play with it for hours. It was special to me because it was part of Christmas, but it was also special because my grandpa had made it. Now, when I think about that crèche I am reminded of my family as well as the family of God. We all get to celebrate being a part of God's family during Christmas too! What is your favorite part of the Christmas story crèche? Baby Jesus? The animals? The star? The wise-men?

Blessings,

A Family Member named Lydia

P.S. Dear God, thank you for making all of us a part of your family.
Amen.

January 6 – Frankincense

And going into the house, they (wise men from the east) saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. - Matthew 2:11

Dear Friends,

If you and I were picking out a present for a baby or toddler, we might pick a toy or a soft blanket or maybe even diapers. Something the baby could snuggle or use. What gift would you bring to a baby? To Jesus? The wise men had travelled a long, long way. They brought some very special gifts for the new king. Gold, myrrh, and tree sap. What!?! The wise men brought the stuff that oozes out of trees? Well, out of very special trees. Yes! Frankincense is smelly pieces of tree sap. It was very expensive— maybe worth more than its weight in gold! Frankincense smells lemony and woodsy. It was burned to worship God. Imagine a peaceful smell or something that reminds you of God's love. The wise men brought their treasure to Jesus. What is the best present you have ever received?

From,
Carole

P.S. May you know the greatest treasure of all--Jesus and his love for you. Amen.

Many thanks to the hearts and hands that contributed to this family devotional:

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