

Friday – Revealed to All!

Christmas is packed away once again—the tree and ornaments, the wrappings and ribbons, and the Nativity set. But let's do one more review of the characters in it: Mary and Joseph—good Jews, solid citizens; the shepherds—maybe Jews, but who knows? Lower end of the socio-economic scale, probably smelly; the Wise Men—foreigners, the Ph.D. intelligentsia of their day, rich enough to bring costly gifts. Joseph had the resources for an inn, but there was no room. The stable becomes part of the message—Jesus came for us all—the poor and down-trodden, the solid middle class, the wealthy and educated. And don't you think that the Magi were Gentiles? No questions about ethnicity were asked as they rode their camels into Bethlehem, following that mysterious star. Their gifts were received with love and their worship accepted with gratitude. The message must not be packed away. It is a message we must live before the world: Jesus came for us all. *Because of Christ Jesus and our faith in him, we can now come fearlessly into God's presence, assured of his glad welcome.* As God has welcomed us, let us welcome others, heedless of anything other than that they, like us, have been made in the image of God.

Saturday – Telling The Story

“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 1:9) Well, maybe! The story of Paul and his dramatic conversion from a persecutor of Christ to faith seemed new and unbelievable. He wrote himself, *“Just think! Though I did nothing to deserve it, and though I am the least deserving Christian there is, I was chosen for this special joy of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. I was chosen to explain to everyone this plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning.” (Ephesians 3)* Now, how about this for something today that seems new and unbelievable: *A Bible giveaway program sparked by Kanye West's new album has surpassed expectations. A spokesperson for the American Bible Society told Christian Headlines Friday that more than 10,000 free Bibles have been given away as part of a “Bibles for Kanye Fans” giveaway that launched after Kanye released his album, Jesus Is King. Originally, the goal was to ship out 1,000 Bibles.* In the sense that God has been reaching to His people ever since Genesis, this may not be new; but it is wonderful. Think about it—God has commissioned each of us to tell the story of His love. Age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status—doesn't matter! Your story told with your talents makes a difference. There's not another story quite like it. Make 2020 the year you tell it.

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This week's *Bring it Home* devotions were written by Eva Knight.
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Devotions for
the week of
January 5, 2020

What Now?

1. Let Jesus reveal Himself to you in this new year – through His Word, in worship, and as you follow Him.
2. Pray and ask the Lord how He can use you to be His Light, His star for others to see, to ask, and to come to know Him through you

Monday – Darkness and Light

Have you heard the saying, “It’s always darkest before the dawn”? Read Isaiah 60:1-3. *“Darkness as black as night will cover all the nations of the earth.”* Isaiah wrote these words about 2700 years ago. What has changed? Rogue nations threaten nuclear annihilation. Genocide, slavery, and pestilence stalk the planet. For all of our economic success, our nation is deeply divided. Dare we even think about our personal struggles? Finances, relationships, health? Yet, today is Epiphany. The star has led the Wise Men to Bethlehem. The darkness gives way—the glory the Lord shines over the scene. An epiphany by definition is a sudden revelation or insight. Think about it—still today the light of God’s glory dawns over the horizon to illumine our paths. *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, Thou art with me.”* (Psalm 23) As we walk in God’s light, nothing is out of control! He is with us. His promises are sure. On this day of Epiphany, ask God to shine His glorious light into the dark places in your life and show you the way forward. Say with Isaiah, slightly paraphrased, *“Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon me.”* Thank you, Lord Jesus.

Tuesday – Slave or Free?

Isaiah warned them and warned them—the people of Israel. The first 39 chapters of the book of Isaiah tell them—“People of Israel, you are on the wrong path. A mere outward show of godliness is not enough. There is judgment for sin. Repent!” They didn’t. What Isaiah prophesied happened—captivity. The last 27 chapters of Isaiah offer hope: *“Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing to Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”* (Isaiah 51:6) The release Isaiah prophesied happened after 70 years of exile. God’s prophets must be 100% correct. Isaiah was. He foretold that the Messiah would be both the suffering servant and the sovereign Lord. Isaiah’s details were correct—*“From Sheba they will bring gold and incense for the worship of the Lord.”* Yes, the Magi of Epiphany brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the babe, our Lord Jesus. In the New Testament, Matthew, like Isaiah, warns us: *“Don’t look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easy-going formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don’t fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention.”* (Matthew 7:13-14, The Message) Be warned—sin is captivity. Be attentive—*“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”* (1 Peter 5:8) Be joyful—to be set free by Christ is to be free indeed. Today ask yourself, am I living in that freedom or am I allowing the enemy to influence me in ways that are further enslaving me? Embrace and believe the truth of the Gospel and its freedom that is for you.

Wednesday – Following the Star

A recent Facebook meme caught my attention. A Christmas star shone against a deep blue background. Brilliant white words proclaimed, “The original GPS.” Subtle black silhouettes of three wise men on camels verified the Wise Men following it. We know GPS as “Global Positioning System.” What would the letters have meant to them? Guiding Pulsating Star? The more I thought about “GPS”, the more daring the journey of the Wise Men became. Imagine the din dissuading the trek—“You’re going to follow a star across the waterless desert? You think there’s a new king of the Jews? Why do you care, and how do you know that star won’t fizzle? Then where will you be?” We do not know much about the Magi, not even how many there were or from what lands they came. What we do know is that they recognized Jesus as the newborn king of the Jews and trusted that His star would guide them. When they found Him, they were filled with joy, gave Him their treasures, and worshipped Him. The story is old, but there is an analogy that is forever new. It is said that there is a God-shaped hole in our hearts. We try to fill it with things of earth, but the hole simply swallows them. Christ alone can fill the hole. To find him, follow His star to Bethlehem. *“...seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”* (Matthew 7:7) Wise men still seek Him. Wise women, too. And they find Him.

Thursday – The Bad Guy

One of my childhood joys was getting out the Nativity. The stable had a music box that tinkled, “Silent Night,” and sheltered Mary, Joseph, and Little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay. There were shepherds and sheep to arrange, and, of course, the Wise Men resplendent in crowns and holding gifts in their plaster-of-paris hands. Putting out my grown-up Nativity still fills me with awe. Each figure has a story that speaks to the miracle of Jesus’ birth. Yet, this year and in the light of Matthew 2:1-12, it struck me that Nativities are missing a character—the bad guy, Herod. Do I really want him? No, but he is an important part of the story. He is jealous and conniving. Does he have a real interest in worshipping Jesus? No, Herod’s interest is in killing him. Herod is ruthless and, when outwitted by the Wise Men, orders the slaughter of innocent little boys. Herod is evil. We struggle with questions about how our loving God allows heinous crimes, but there is also hope in the story: God gives warnings. God warned the Wise Men not to return to Herod. They listened and returned home by another route. As we read on in Matthew, God sends an angel to warn Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt with Mary and Jesus. They went. Herod is a reminder to us that evil is ever present, but so is God’s Holy Spirit. *“My dear friends, don’t believe everything you hear. Carefully weigh and examine what people tell you. Not everyone who talks about God comes from God.”* (1 John 4:1, The Message) Pray for our Savior’s help to discern good from evil in this world and to walk in the true light of Christ.