

Advent Devotional December 3, 2024

Weekly theme: Hope

Scripture

Psalm 146

*1 Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD, O my soul!
2 I will praise the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.
3 Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
4 When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish.
5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD their God,
6 who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;
7 who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets the prisoners free;
8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.
9 The LORD watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
10 The LORD will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the LORD!*

Devotion

The Rev. Mary (Jo) Ramsey '99

Every December, our church's children present an ambitious Christmas pageant. Last year, we began our first practice by reading Luke's version of the Christmas story. Little Jack drew close, his eyes wide with anticipation, but as the teacher started to read, Jack frowned. He crossed his arms. He began to pout and flick a fuzz on the carpet.

"What's wrong?" I asked when the story ended.

"It's the same old story from last year!" Jack grumbled. "I already know that one!"

Everyone chuckled. "Yep," I said. "That's true. We tell the same old story every year--but in the pageant we try to tell it in a fresh, fun way."

It is the challenge and beauty of Christmas—that we tell the same old story every year: The Christ Child was born in a lowly stable surrounded by singing angels, sleepy shepherds, and kneeling kings. God’s love became flesh and dwelt among us. We know the story by heart.

How can something so familiar still overwhelm us with joy and fill us with hope? By connecting us with a Love that transcends time and place. Yes, Jesus entered human history at a specific moment and location, but the Spirit of Christmas itself is timeless.

Today’s reading features many time-related words, including lifelong, eternity, and generations. The psalmist sketches the long view of God’s amazing, ongoing activity in the world. Like Mary’s Magnificat, it celebrates God’s abundant, surprising mercy, reminding us that God has saved, is saving, and will save.

There is nothing old or stale about this Good News! God is always doing a new thing! In that is our hope! While every morning may be a little Easter, so every midnight can be a little Christmas. Poet Ann Weems put it this way:

The Christmas Spirit is that hope
which tenaciously clings to the hearts of the faithful
and announces in the face of any Herod, the world can produce
and all the inn doors slammed in our faces
and all the dark nights of our souls
that with God all things are possible,
that even now
unto us a Child is born!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are the Alpha and Omega. We praise You for Your saving acts throughout time and space. We give thanks for the “same old stories” which reveal who You are and whose we are. Bless us as we prepare our hearts for Christmas. May we cling to the promise and possibility of Christmas Hope! In Jesus’ name, Amen.