

MIDWEST

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From the Editor

LACRESHA'S CHRISTMAS

"Torrance, what did you get for Christmas?"

The question rang out in the half -empty basement sanctuary. The year was 1996 and I was pastoring Laurel Homes Mission, one of God's Bible School's inner-city ministries. My question was aimed at a boy about six years of age who a regular attendee at our Good News Club. We ran about thirty children every Sunday night in our program and Torrance and his sister were two that we could always count on. Torrance hesitated a moment at the question and dropped his eyes. A dark shadow crossed his face and I barely heard his mumbled reply. "Santa Claus didn't come to our house this year," he said. His bottom lip quivered, and I wondered if he was going to cry. Looking questioningly at his seven-year-old sister, I witnessed LaCresha dropping her eyes as well. "Torrance is right," she whispered. "Santa Claus didn't come to our house this year."

My heart ached as I watched the pain on their faces. I well knew the poverty of these families, but surely a church or government program had provided a toy or trinket to make the season special. Other kids were displaying their Christmas treasures, yet here were two forlorn children suffering the trauma of Santa Claus forgetting about them. I decided then and there that something had to be done. Our policy in the ministry was not to do for one what we could not do for all, but this was definitely an exception. After praying about the matter, my wife and I felt we were justified in our decision. That week we made a special trip to Walmart to purchase some gifts. How excited we were to bring
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Mission Statement: The mission of the MPN is three- fold: 1.) We desire to glorify God and facilitate the worship of His person. 2.) We seek to promote the Gospel of Christ with its beautiful message of heart holiness. 3.) We seek to be an encouragement to our readers spiritually, as well as an informative source of information to those who relate to, or are interested in, our Conference.

Cover Photo: The cover photo was taken by Michael Fuller. Mike lives in Duanesburg, NY and attends the Middleburg, NYPHC. His photography has been featured in Ranger Rick, National Wildlife, Audubon Magazine, and other notable publications. He enjoys traveling the USA and Canada with his camera, cross country skiing, flying his powered - parachute, and other outdoor activities. We will be featuring Mike's photos of God's amazing world in upcoming issues of the MPN.

THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Rev. Don Nichols

Conference President



Christmas! The word that brings joy to the heart of every child and the young in heart. We are reminded of that sacred scene as a host of angels lit the night sky near Bethlehem, calling to some shepherds, “Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord.” Certainly, we know that the reason for joy in the hearts of the shepherds was because they had been miraculously apprised of the coming of Messiah. It had to be a mind-boggling sight! And that was the monumental event every devout Jew had been awaiting. Whatever their preconceived ideas of the Messiah were, most likely they thought they might not have to continue as shepherds. That Messiah would usher in some grand utopia. But can you imagine the joy as they found the Christ child and worshiped Him?

Your children most likely perk up when the word Christmas is mentioned because of the tradition of gift-giving and receiving. All of that is fun and meaningful in the context of family. But all of us need to remind ourselves of why we celebrate Christmas. Messiah was born. Just like many sacrificial lambs on the Judean hillsides, but this Lamb would be once offered for every man as the Perfect Sacrifice for sin. That is the aspect of Christmas that should bring joy to the heart of every man, woman, boy, and girl. From our home to yours, Ruth and I want to wish all of you a blessed and Merry Christmas!

Rev. Don and Ruth Nichols pastor the Pilgrim Holiness Church in Lima, OH. They also serve as the Conference President of the Midwest Pilgrim Holiness Conference.

“Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord.”

Luke 2:10-11

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Photos: Natalie Thompson

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...Yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Matt 6:26



PHC CHRISTMAS SUPPER

Friday, December 4th, 7:00 P.M.
Noblesville PHC Family Life Center



• Congratulations to Rev. Don and Fayerene Walden on 57 years of marriage.

• Congratulations to Rev. David and Martha West for 20 years of service to the Boone, MI PHC. Best wishes for this next chapter in their lives.



• Congratulations to Jeremy Hopkins on receiving his Master of Education degree from Bob Jones University. Jeremy is currently teaching at Union Bible Academy but has accepted a call to Honduras as a missionary under HIM and is doing deputation work. If you would like to contact him for a service, you may reach him at (217) 549-3204.

• Congratulations to Clayton Plemmons on receiving the Timothy Dotson Memorial Scholarship from Union Bible College. We are praying for you as you prepare for ministry.



ONION CASSEROLE



* $\frac{3}{4}$ pound pearl onions * 4 celery ribs, chopped * 5 green onions, chopped * 2 garlic cloves, minced * 6 T butter * $\frac{1}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour * $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt * $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp pepper * 3- $\frac{1}{2}$ cups half-and-half cream * $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp hot pepper sauce * 1- $\frac{1}{2}$ cups shredded Parmesan cheese * $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp paprika (Prep Time: 30 minutes - Cook Time: 20 min - Serves 10)

In a Dutch oven, bring 6 cups of water to a boil. Add pearl onions; boil for 3 minutes. Drain and rinse in cold water; peel and set aside. In a large saucepan, sauté the celery, green onions, and garlic in butter until tender. Stir in the flour, salt, and pepper until blended; gradually add cream and hot pepper sauce. Bring to a boil; cook and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened. Stir in pearl onions and cheese. Transfer to a greased 8-in. square baking dish; sprinkle with paprika. Bake, uncovered, at 350° for 20-25 minutes or until bubbly.

~Kim Forsee



Front Porch Ministry in JEFFERSONVILLE

By Rev. Connie Hull

It was a week or two before Easter and churches everywhere were shutting down. I was staying with some very dear friends at their farm home. The longing for church and all my misplaced comforts were leaving me restless and at a loss. It seemed the Lord suggested to me, "Have a sunrise service on the Jones front porch. It faces the east and it would be perfect to see the sunrise." I mentioned it to Sis. Jones and she was all for it. I had never been to a sunrise service before so it would be new to me. The neighbor lady had come down and I mentioned that we had thought about having a sunrise service and she asked me what that was. I tried to tell her as much as I could. She told me they might come. Seriously, my faith was small, but if it was only two, Sis. Jones and I, that was okay.

7:00 A.M. came with rain in the forecast, but we were blessed with not only a beautiful sunrise but also six other neighbors who came to join us as well. We were elated. We sang a couple of songs, had prayer, and I preached a short message. The next week one neighbor lady asked, "Can we do this again?" "Oh, yes" I told her. Now I am completely out of my comfort zone, but excited. The next Sunday more people came. We had four more than we had the week before. A farmer who seldom goes to church came in his pick-up plus some others. Those coming started inviting others. Some people now listen in on the telephone to the service.

Since Easter we have had folk who neither look, act, or dress old-fashioned but are so attentive to the messages God lays on my heart. We have also had some of Sis. Jones family join us plus other neighbors who just wanted to be in church (their church was closed because of Covid-19) and others were curious as to what was going on. They arrive in Gators, gold carts, pick-ups, and cars. One woman owned a tavern for twelve years and does not go at all to church and the others only occasionally. Our church is small and yet God has helped us pay the bills and keep the doors open. When those doors closed temporarily because of Covid-19 God opened another for us.

We have not taken a single offering in this porch ministry, but the people have taken it upon themselves to take one up each service. They have given most generously. This money has gone to our church and been such a blessing. Each week we wake up on Sunday morning to see what surprise God has for us that day. The enemy has fought strongly. During this time my house was broken into and ransacked, and some things stolen including my important personal documents and the church debit card. About \$1400 was taken out of the church's bank account but most of the money has been recovered. You see this ministry is a "God thing" and the devil is trying to discourage and stop this ministry anyway he can. The Lord told me before this happened that He had special plans for Jefferson Christian Church, and He has proven it true. What a might God we serve. To God be the glory and let no man touch that glory.

What will we do when cold weather sets in? I do not know. Will those people enter the church sanctuary? Only God knows. Our job for now is to sow the seed and do some watering here on the front porch of the old farm home. Our job is to be willing, obedient vessels and His job is to convict men of sin and woo them in with His weapons of love and mercy.

Yesterday another lady came, whom the farmer had invited, that had just lost her daughter to cancer. She told me she would be back next week with her husband. We live in a hurting world. May we do our best to reach out to those around us while the door is still open. It could shut on us one of these days. Let us seize the moment while we can. God has given me a different kind of ministry from what I've been used to but God knows what I, and the people I am ministering to, need. If you think about it, pray that God grants us wisdom and divine direction in these God-given services.

Rev. Connie Hull pastors the Pilgrim Holiness Church in Jeffersonville, IN.



The AMAZING GOSPEL of Christmas

We dress them up in clean robes and nice sandals. The boys look sharp in our Christmas program. But our nativity scene would be more realistic if we left the robes unlaundered, wore sandals with worn soles, and used shepherds who were half-addled from spending their days in the hot sun.

In the first century, shepherds were nobodies. They had no social status. Matthew tells about the Magi. That is more impressive: a group of wise men bringing gold to a new king. But shepherds?

Why does Luke focus on the testimony of shepherds? The word of a shepherd was not even accepted in Jewish courts; everyone knew that shepherds were low-class and unreliable. Imagine a group of wild-eyed, homeless men bursting into your house saying, "Follow us! We just saw some angels who told us that a new king was born in Orlando. Let's go see him!" I wouldn't follow them! Would you?

But Luke tells us that the angels' first message was to a group of shepherds. The angel says, "Don't be afraid! I have good news for you. A baby is born who will bring joy to all people." The shepherds rush to Bethlehem to find the baby and then tell everyone what happened. "And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them." People surely asked, "Why would angels give such important news to shepherds?"

Why shepherds? Luke wants us to understand that God cares about everyone, even nobodies. That is the amazing gospel of Luke. Luke loves to show that people were "amazed" at Jesus. And the amazement starts here at the birth - with a group of shepherds.

Pharisees aren't amazed by Jesus; they are annoyed by him. The bigwigs in Jerusalem don't come to bow to Jesus; they try to silence him. But the shepherds - the nobodies - are changed by Jesus.

This pattern will continue throughout Jesus' ministry. Zacchaeus is a tax collector, a nobody. He has to climb a tree to see Jesus because no one at the front of the crowd will make room for a despised tax collector. Jesus sees him and says, "Come down. We're having lunch together!"

And then there are the lepers.... A leper is a nobody. Everyone is afraid of lepers. They run when a leper walks down the street, shouting, "Unclean!" Jesus heals lepers, but he does something completely unexpected: he touches them. Jesus did not have to touch them to bring healing; he could heal with the power of his



word. But Jesus knew that lepers needed a touch to confirm their worth. Since contracting this terrible disease, a leper would have never felt a human touch. A nobody needed to know that someone saw more than their disease.

All through Luke, the gospel is given to nobodies: shepherds, lepers, tax collectors. When I read about the shepherds, I remember John Newton, an 18th century slave trader who was transformed by God's amazing grace.

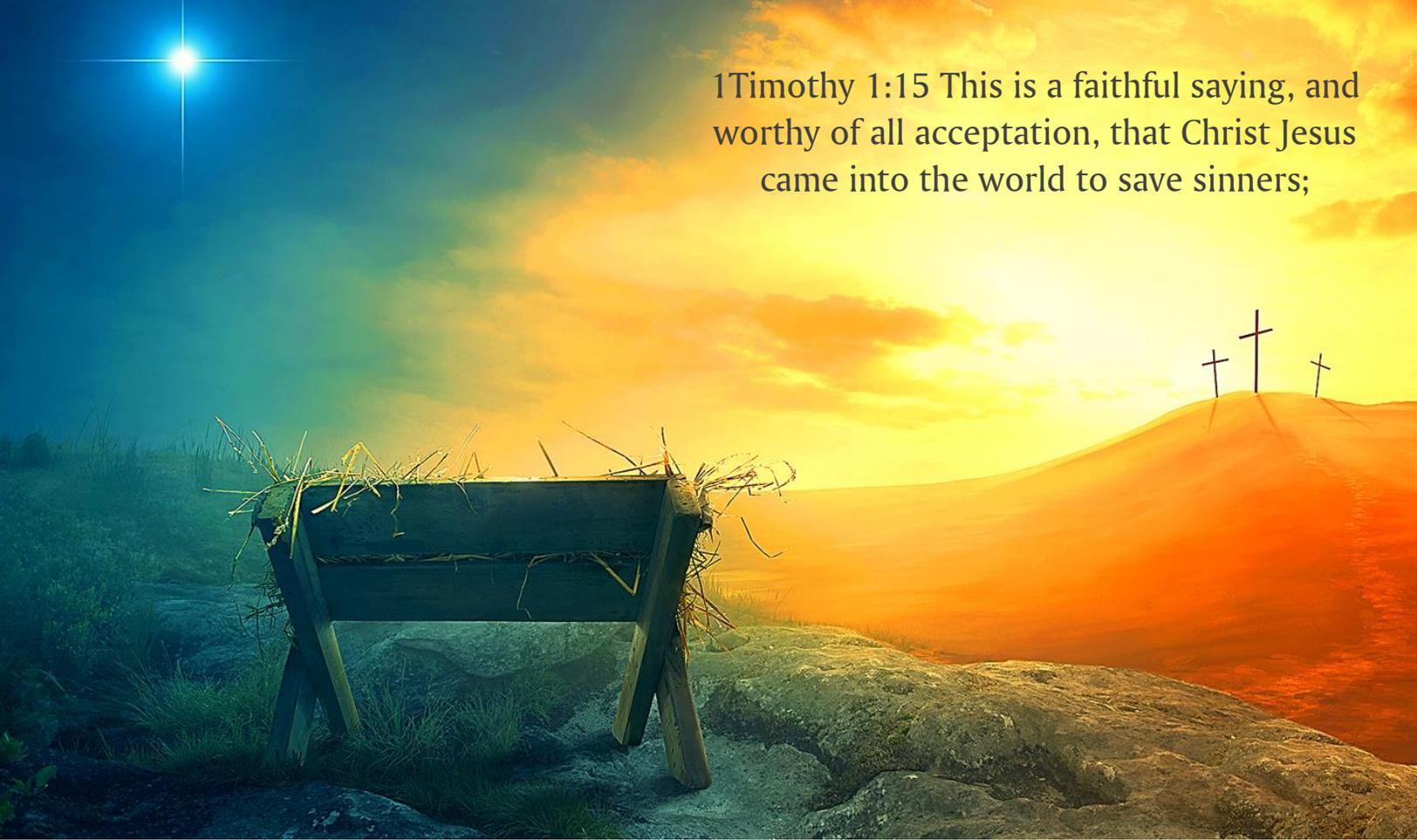
The captain of a slave ship is even lower than a shepherd. Newton was a wicked man who was proud of his wickedness. He later wrote, "I not only sinned myself, but I made it my study to tempt and seduce others to sin." But the gospel is for everyone, even a profane slave trader. John Newton was converted and became a preacher of the gospel. As he pondered God's mercy, Newton sang:

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see."

That is the amazing gospel of Christmas. God seeks people who are lost. The gospel is not just for "good people"; the gospel is for everyone. Whosoever believes on Him will have eternal life. Whosoever: that's everyone! Shepherds, tax collectors, lepers, John Newton ... and me.

Dr. McElwain is a licensed PHC minister and lives in Florida with his family. He is a professor at Hobe Sound Bible College.

1 Timothy 1:15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;



HE GAVE HIS LIFE
He DIED for me!

The night the Titanic sank in 1912 on April 14th, 1,528 people went into the frigid waters. John Harper, after putting his only daughter on a lifeboat, was seen swimming frantically to people in the water leading them to Jesus before the hypothermia became fatal. Rev. Harper swam up to one young man who had climbed up on a piece of debris. Rev. Harper asked him between breaths, "Are you saved?" The young man replied that he was not.

Harper then tried to lead him to Christ only to have the young man who was near shock, reply "no". John Harper then took off his life jacket and threw it to the man and said "Here then, you need this more than I do"... and swam away to other people. A few minutes later Harper swam back to the young man and succeeded in leading him to salvation. Of the 1,528 people that went into the water that night, six were rescued by the lifeboats; One of them was this young man on the debris. Four years later, at a survivors meeting, this young man stood up and in tears recounted how John Harper had led him to Christ. Rev. Harper had tried to swim back to help other people, yet because of the intense cold, had grown too weak to swim. His last words before going under in the frigid waters were "Believe on the name of the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." Does Hollywood remember this man? No. Oh well, no matter. This servant of God did what he had to do. While other people were trying to buy their way onto the lifeboats and were selfishly trying to save their own lives, John Harper gave up his life so that others could be saved.

This is exactly what Jesus Christ did for the world. Human beings were dying in sin, without God and without hope when the Son of God appeared to rescue them. Jesus Christ came into our world to die on the cross for our sins, and conquer death and the grave. He now lives in heaven offering salvation to all who will repent of their sins and believe on His name. He will one day come again in power and glory to judge the quick and the dead and take His children to be with Him in heaven. What a beautiful message! What amazing love! Merry Christmas.

~Selected





FEARLESS

By Stephanie Burly

It was January 2020. My social media feed was bursting with friends and influencers who had chosen their “Word of the Year.” As I pondered their choices, I couldn’t help but wonder what my word would be should I decide to choose one. Immediately, the Scripture came to my mind, “*Fear not*: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.” That was it! My word would be “*fearless*.” Such a brave word. And I was so “brave” that I chose not to tell anyone about my word.

“Fear not.” The phrase echoed over and over in my mind. I wanted it to permeate my heart and make it impossible for me to live in the constant cycles of both legitimate and irrational fear that often plagued me.

2019 had been a year. My husband was dealing with the reinjury of his back in late 2018, and it had taken a toll on him mentally and physically. Within the first week of the year, while doing a gesture of goodwill for a child in need, I ran over a spike and punctured a tire. We were in a bit of a hurry to take our college aged son to the airport and couldn’t get the tire fixed immediately, so we used our “back up” van for the ninety-mile trip. On our way home, we heard

a loud noise that ultimately ended up being the demise of the transmission. During the second month, while using our primary van because the secondary was in for transmission repairs, our son was driving after dark in a windstorm and ran into part of a tree that had come down on the road. Body damage was significant, and I was given a small rental car to use for a few weeks. It was during this time that we received a call from our local children’s services board asking if we would consider sheltering three children who had been neglected. That’s another story for another day, but God had been working in our hearts and our response was, “Yes, as soon as we can get one of the vehicles back in order to have transportation to accommodate a crowd!” Ultimately, both vehicles came back to us, but not too many days later, one of them lost the engine! Since we had just put a transmission in it, we felt that it would be prudent to replace the engine. Long story short, the company sent us a bad engine and it was a several months long process to straighten everything out. By this time, 2019 was more than halfway finished, we were full force into the throes of dealing with sheltering children who were in the “system.” This came with tremendous fulfillment, but also trial, uncertainty, and a level of endurance I had never needed.

As 2019 and our time as shelter parents ended, my struggle with fear was at an all-time high. Although our problems were minor

compared to those of so many others, it just seemed there was always something lurking around the corner. **“Fear not.”** The imperative was clear. And 2020 promised to be a fresh start. A new decade. It felt good.

Although our problems compared to those of so many others, it just seemed there was always something lurking around the corner.

Now we are entering the remaining days of 2020, and each of us has a unique story to tell. No matter your age, your race, or your gender, this year with all its twists and turns has affected you. The Covid-19 outbreak, late spring and summer riots, and a tumultuous political season have threatened to consume us with fear. I would love to tell you that having a “word” for 2020 helped me to face its uncertainties with complete calm and confidence. To do so would be dishonest. But I can tell you that the words announced to frightened shepherds by a heavenly angel and recorded in Luke 2:10-11 are for us today. **“Fear not:** for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” The angel did not just tell the shepherds not to fear, but he announced to them the reason they should not fear. A Savior is born, and He is Christ the Lord!

As we enter this most sacred season, can we agree together to clear our minds of earthly troubles that threaten our peace, and simply focus on the reality that Jesus has come? It was His humble entrance into a chaotic world that changed the course of history, and His presence in our lives promises to envelop us in His peace, regardless of our circumstances. ~SB

Struggle with feelings of overwhelming fear and anxiety? God’s Word is full of admonition and promises for conquering this most basic human emotion. Make the following Scriptures a part of your regular reading/memorization routine and find comfort in knowing that God is in control!

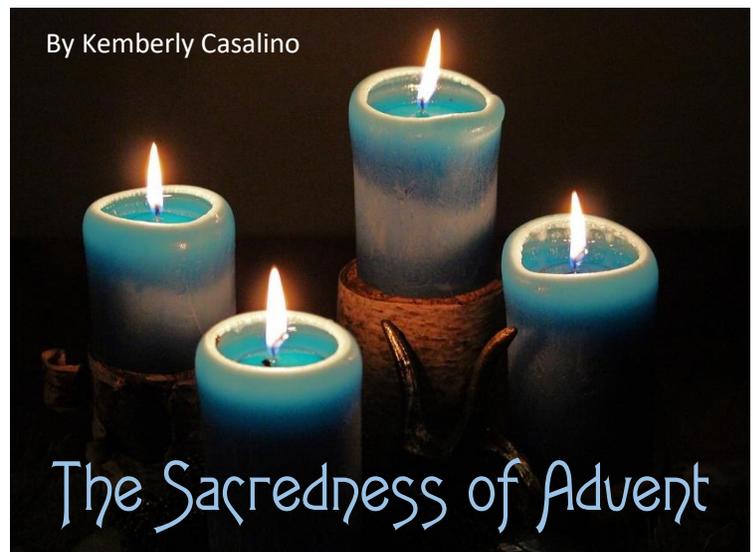
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| *Deuteronomy 3:22 | *Psalm 27:1 & 3 |
| *Psalm 46:1-3 | *Isaiah 35:4 |
| *Isaiah 41:10 & 13 | *Luke 14:27 |
| *Matthew 10:31 | *Luke 12:32 |
| *2 Timothy 1:7 | *Isaiah 42:13 |



Stephanie is married to Greg Burlly and has 4 children. They attend the Pilgrim Holiness Church in Lima, OH. Stephanie is currently in her 23rd year as a teacher at Pilgrim Christian School, and is in her first year as Principal.

Our lives are full of supposes. Suppose this should happen, or suppose that should happen; what could we do; how could we bear it? But, if we are living in the high tower of the dwelling place of God, all these supposes will drop out of our lives. We shall be quiet from the fear of evil, for no threatening’s of evil can penetrate the high tower of God. - **Hannah Whitall Smith**

By Kemberly Casalino



What is Advent? If you are anything like me, you may have heard the word here and there, especially during the Christmas season, but never understood what it meant. The word ‘Advent’ means coming. It is a time that we set aside to prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of the Christ: His first coming, as a small, helpless babe sent to a broken, shattered world to teach and to save; also, His second coming, as the Glorious Savior who will rescue us from our current broken world to live and reign with Him forever. Our family has decided the last couple of years to intentionally celebrate Advent, the four weeks leading up to Christmas Day, with scriptures, lighted candles, carols and hymns, responsive readings, recipes, and beautiful artwork and crafts. We enjoy taking this break from our regular routine to practice slowing down, saying no to unnecessary distractions, and focusing on what this beautiful season truly celebrates. It can be easy in this busy, fast-paced world we live in to give in to the craze of shopping, parties, activities, and stress, and to forget the whole purpose behind Christmas. But as December begins and the holidays are upon us, let us slow down, ask God to help us to remember and appreciate His wonderful sacrifice, and allow ourselves to be immersed in the sacredness of His coming.

‘O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel’

Kemberly Casalino lives in Trafalgar with her husband Andrew. They have 5 children and attend the PHC in Franklin. She enjoys cooking, reading, and holistic health. She also homeschools and sings in church with her family.



Santino Luca Casalino

LACRESHA'S CHRISTMAS: From Page 2

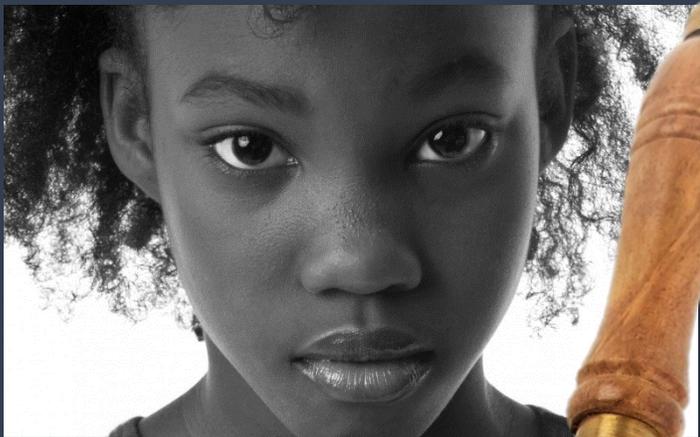
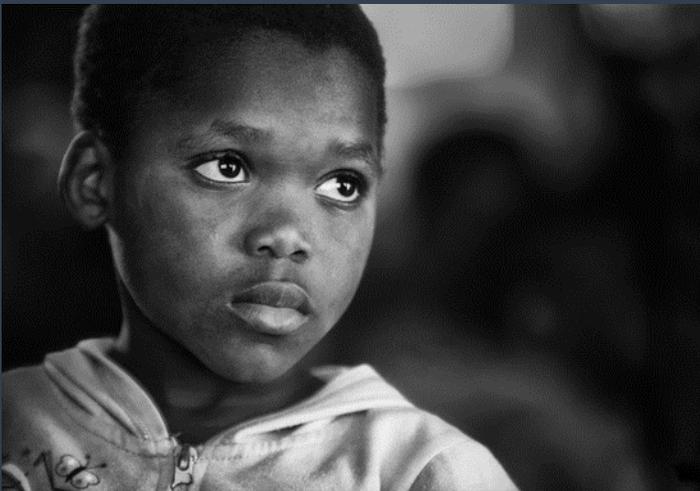
some Christmas cheer into these children's lives. We could hardly wait to make our selections.

For Torrance, we instinctively headed for the sporting goods department. Having loved sports in my own childhood, I was certain Torrance would be thrilled with his very own basketball. The basketball court outside his building would provide he and his buddies with many hours of pleasure. I selected the best one I could afford on our starving college student budget, then it was off to the girl's section for my wife's selection. My wife had felt that a baby doll would be appropriate for LaCresha, but which doll to choose? There were literally dozens of dolls of all shapes and sizes. There were dolls with accessories and dolls without accessories. There were dolls with different colors of hair and dolls with different colors of skin. There were dolls that needed their diapers changed. I will never forget my wife's action at that point. Overwhelmed, she bowed her head and sought for God's help. "Father, we want to bring some happiness into this little girl's life, but we don't know which doll to choose. Could you lead us to the right one? In Jesus name, Amen." Almost immediately she reached out and selected a doll whose name I could not even pronounce. A selection of candy for a stocking and some soda pop rounded out our purchases.

At home we wrapped our gifts and the countdown to Sunday began. We were like kids ourselves as we impatiently wished the time away. It seemed that the week would never end. How could the clock move so slowly?

I wish you could have been there to witness our Christmas party. After closing out our children's service and shooing the rest of the kids to their homes, we locked the door and took Torrance and LaCresha into the back room. Our mission team gathered around them for their belated Christmas celebration. They were a little confused about why they were being held behind the other children, but it did not take long for them to understand what was happening. Torrance received his basketball as only a boy could, but it was LaCresha's response that will forever stand out in our minds. After opening the candy and soda with her brother, she tore off the shiny paper from her present and lifted her doll from the package. Her eyes widened in astonishment as she realized what she was receiving. She stared in awe for a long moment. "Baby Maisha," (May-sha) she breathed. "This is what I asked for Christmas!" She even pronounced the name perfectly.

What an awesome God we serve. He knew the wish list of one little child among millions and cared enough to give her the desire of her heart. He also cared enough to answer my wife's prayer and lead her instantly to one baby doll out of hundreds of potential presents. Such a magnanimous gesture on His part should assure all of us of His love and concern. If God cares about a Christmas present, He also cares about our physical and spiritual needs. We can cast all our cares upon Him knowing that He careth for us. 1 Peter 5:7. We can also reach out in confidence to others knowing that God wants to give them the ultimate Christmas gift of His Son. ~Editor



A hand bell like the one pictured was used to call the children to Good News Club. The photos of the children are not actual photos of Torrance and LaCresha but children who look very much like them.





The holidays are here and with them the temptation to throw healthy eating habits to the wind. However, before you dive into those Christmas dainties, you may want to consider a few facts about sugar intake.

*Excess sugar consumption has been linked to cancer production, toxic liver effects, heart disease, aging, deficiencies in memory and cognitive processing, arthritis, acne, depression, obesity, thrush/yeast infections and many other diseases.

*A 2013 study found that at least 180,000 deaths worldwide are linked to sweetened-beverage consumption. The U.S. alone accounted for 25,000 deaths in 2010.

*One can of soda pop has 10 teaspoons of sugar and is more than the daily allowance. This is equivalent to two frosted Pop Tarts and a Twinkie combined, and just one a day is enough to boost your odds of heart disease by one third.

*Heinz ketchup contains 1 teaspoon of sugar in each 1 tablespoon serving. A 32 oz. Gatorade bottle has 36 grams of sugar, which is like eating 5 Reese's Peanut Butter Cups.

*A Grande Starbucks Iced Flavored drink has about 28 grams of sugar, which is the same amount of sugar in 2.5 Krispy Kreme donuts. A 15.2 oz. bottle of Minute Maid 100% Apple Juice contains 49 grams of sugar. This is about the same amount of sugar in 10 Oreos.

*Americans consume most sugar (33%) through regular soft drinks, followed by sugars and candy (16.1%); cakes, cookies, and pies (12.9%); fruit drinks (9.7%); dairy desserts and milk (8.6%); and other grains (5.8%).

*The American Heart Association recommends that adult women eat no more than 24 grams, or 6 teaspoons, of added sugar (beyond naturally occurring sugar) and men no more than 36 grams, or 9 teaspoons, per day. The current average is over 30 teaspoons of sugar per day.

THERE ARE SOME PRAYERS THAT JUST AREN'T GOING TO BE ANSWERED. #JUST SAY'IN #HAVE SOME DISCIPLINE #DON'T WASTE YOUR BREATH

Sweet Temptations

A Minute Devotional on Healthy Eating

1 Corinthians 10:31: Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

Our diet should be part of our consecration vow to God. Christians cannot be hard on cigarette smokers and tipplers unless we exercise some discipline regarding what we put in our bodies. God is not any more displeased with someone shortening their life span through smoking and drinking than through wanton indulgence and unhealthy food choices. It is His desire that we all live long, healthy, and productive lives for His glory. May He grant us wisdom and will power this Christmas and throughout the new year.

THE FOOD FANATICS FUTILITY PRAYER

Dear God, for this food I am about to partake, I pray my conscience will not awake. May I munch in peaceful bliss, may these groceries not be missed. Sanctify these Fruity Rounds, may they add no extra pounds. Let them not go to my hips, or to those chins beneath my lips. Please brace up my sagging middle, nor add to parts that once were little. May this jug of Mountain Dew give my skin a healthy hue. Turn this food that I like best, into vegetable juice as it digests. Pizza, French fries, chicken legs, burgers, ice cream, deviled eggs. Let me eat what 'ere I please, let it ward off bad disease. For Thy favor I appeal, as I dive into this meal. Then as I gorge without a worry, I know that You'll receive the glory! Amen.



2021

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By Nancy Grissom

It's here... a brand-new year - it's here... did you notice? Isaiah tells us that God is wanting to do a new thing --- if we are diligently paying attention. "Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it?" Are you listening, do you know it? God desires for us to sow forth fresh seeds of righteousness into this year.

But how do we choose the types of seed we intend to plant? We do it by studying what God has written to us. His Word is ours to believe and "his eyes are running to and fro throughout the whole earth". He's waiting "to show himself strong in behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward him". We must be listening intently, and with the desired harvest in view. He promises that when we acknowledge him, He will direct our ways. And as the seasons come and go, we will see a common thread emerge that affirms we are making right choices. We will plan wisely and select with purpose.

Where will we sow our seeds of righteousness? We must not sow on the wayside – it will be snatched by the wicked one. We must not sow upon a stony place – the roots will not flourish. We must not sow among thorns – the plants will be choked out. We must not sow sparingly – it will produce a sparse yield. We must not sow the wind – we will reap a whirlwind.

We must sow the seeds of Truth in rich fertile soil. Soil that has been reviewed, tilled up, refreshed. It will make all the difference in the returns.

How do we tend our seedlings? Intentionally, by choosing to speak life and not death over the seeds we have planted. God said "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life"! And we know that according to Prov. 18:21, "death and life are in the power of the tongue". Your tongue and mine. All of our words are either blessing or cursing, we choose.

Does God promise a bountiful crop? Yes, but with conditions. It will not produce automatically. "If thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments... all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee... And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God," Deut. 28:1,2,13. We must observe His commandments and then in obedience do what He bids.

Plan, plant, tend, and God will "crown the year with his goodness;" Ps. 65:11. What a promise! Dare to believe that what God has written down is what He really intended for us to claim. Zechariah prophesied that "the seed shall be prosperous, the vine shall give its fruit, the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew— I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these". God desires to do a new thing. He wants to provide us with a fresh perspective, so we can reap a harvest of righteousness.

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