

Willerup "Spiritually Close" 2020 Advent Devotions – Week Three

Page 1 – Scripture,
2 – Judy Vasby
3 – Judith Smrcka
4-5 – Shelly Fosdal
5 – Lee & Lori Leverton
6 – The First Noel



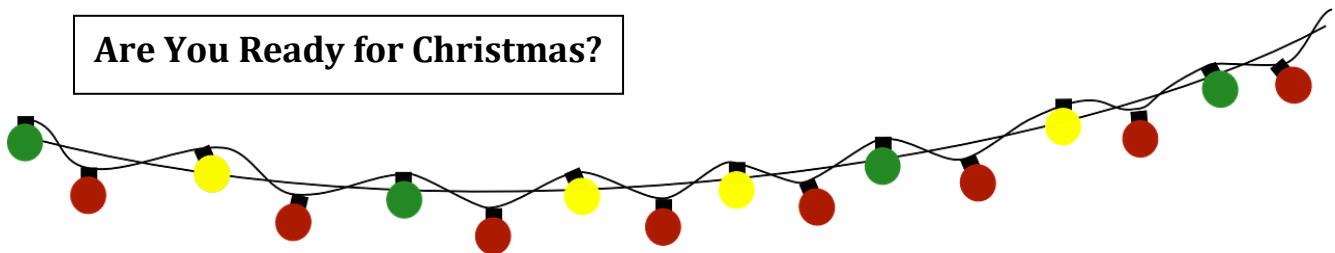
Are You Ready for Christmas?

Luke 2: 15-20 ¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” ¹⁶So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Matthew 2: 1-2, 8-11. ¹After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi (Wise Men) from the east came to Jerusalem ²and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

.... ⁸ King Herod sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” ⁹After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

Are You Ready for Christmas?



This month I have enjoyed taking walks in my neighborhood after dark. There are lights everywhere, more than at any other Christmas I remember. "Why is that?" I wondered. Then I decided that it probably has to do with Covid-19 shutting down so many of our usual activities. People have been more confined at home than before, which has given them time to put up outdoor decorations.

Another reason might be that all the lights are a visual silent protest against the darkness-not just the darkness that comes with the approach of the longest night of the year, but a protest against the darkness that the pandemic has placed over our lives. It is as though people are showing Covid-19 that it can't keep "us" down.

Today, our season of dark night has similarities to what the Jews in Jesus' time were experiencing. They were ruled by Rome and were suffering. They wondered if God even knew about them anymore - or cared. They didn't have any "protest" light left in them.

But then, "*those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.*" (*Isaiah 9:2b*). Just at the darkest hour, God turned on His light. His glory appeared with the angels, and it both surprised and terrified the shepherds. This was light like they had never known- not of man's making, but of God's.

And then, a bright Star appeared in the heavens, and it guided people to Jesus. Not all people – Herod didn't notice. But it was seen by people near and far -shepherds and Wisemen to name some- who were ready to find the promised Messiah.

Do you have "light" vision? Are you ready to seek the Messiah?

Let's see what others have to share that will help us get ready for Christmas ...

Contributed by Judy Vasby

Season of Light

Advent, being the season of light, brings to mind the effect of God's light upon my life as a Christian believer.

I was about 14 years old attending Bible Camp at Onaway Island on the Chain of Lakes at Waupaca, WI. It was evening, the night air was still, the water like glass. We were all gathered on the long pier that night, holding lighted candles. We placed them on waxed plates strung together and fastened to the end of a raft down on the water. The raft held a large crude cross. As the raft was towed out toward the lake, the dark was penetrated by these beautiful, floating streams of light which illuminated the cross. "Living For Jesus" we sang, as the raft slowly moved out toward open water.

*O Jesus Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee,
For Thou in Thy atonement, didst give Thyself for me,
I own no other Master, my heart shall be Thy throne,
My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ for Thee alone.*

I can still visualize that scene as if it were yesterday. I knew Jesus died for the sins of the world, but it was at this time that I realized He died for me personally, and that made me very special to Him and required my faithfulness to Him, also.

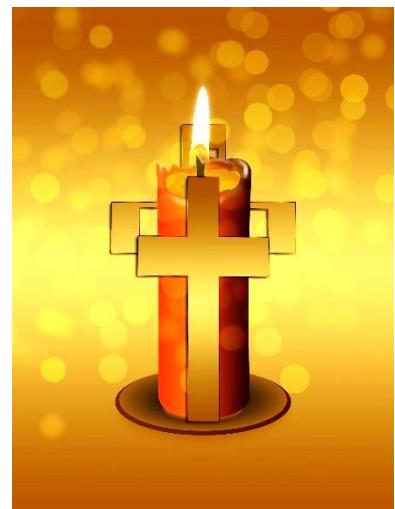
My other recollection was about 14 years ago as I was lying on a hospital bed. I felt discouraged, lonely, and was experiencing much pain. It was in the dead of winter, the day gray and overcast. As I was praying for strength and endurance to get through this difficult time, the sun suddenly broke through and flooded my bed with His Heavenly sunshine. I felt the warmth of God's love surrounding me and cradling me as if I were in His arms. I knew I was going to "make it."

I am so very thankful to God for His gracious plan of bringing light to the world through Jesus. This season of Advent let us all pray that God, through His Holy Spirit, open our hearts to receive His light, and that we live our lives accordingly in reflecting His light as He intended and instructed us to do.

If we do not pass it on, we are a mere generation away of His light being extinguished.

May God be with us all in this Advent season of light.

Contributed by Judith Smrcka



AMAZED

Encyclopedias - International Standard Bible Encyclopedia - Amazed

A term which illustrates the difficulty of expressing in one English word the wide range of startled emotion, wonder, astonishment, awe, covered, in the Old Testament, by four Hebrew words and in the New Testament by as many Greek words. Its Scripture originals range in meaning from amazement accompanied with terror and trembling to an astonishment full of perplexity, wonder, awe and joyous surprise.

When I was fifteen years old, I heard for the first time who Christ really was and what He did for me. My reaction mirrors the last sentence of the above definition to a tee. This was just the beginning of my amazing journey as a child of the King. The scriptures used in this Advent devotional reminded me of my first year as a true believer in Christ Jesus, my Lord and Savior.

Three things similarly astonished me in my own experience about these Bible passages: 1) the societal contrast between the lowly shepherds and the highly regarded wise men; 2) the varying reactions of the shepherds and the wise men; and 3) Mary's quiet inner behavior.

- 1) In biblical times, *shepherds* were considered a notch above beggars. The sheep they tended outside the city walls were often used for temple sacrifice. The fact that Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd and we are His sheep somehow comforts me still. His sacrifice was in my place.



Created by Andrew Doane
from Noah Project

The *wise men* from afar were considered important and essential to the rulers during biblical times. Often, they would be court advisors like Joseph and Samuel in the Old Testament. Their knowledge of the prophecies in Scripture directed them on this journey. But the process led them to not just discover and bring kingly gifts to a prophesied savior, but true worship. Jesus sought me and protected me until the time was right for me to be born again.

- 2) The *shepherds* had very little to give but gave from their heart by sharing the "good news". I too wanted to shout the "good news" to all I knew, even those I didn't know! The fervor and joy were so natural and so unlike me, a gift I wanted so much for others.

The status of the *wise men* and their gifts was meaningless without their devotion and belief that before them lying in a manger was the fulfillment of the promised Messiah.

My first Christmas was no longer about what I had thought would make it merry and bright. Instead, my mind, my heart and my very soul were filled with astonishment, wonder, awe and joyous surprise. The free gift of God's love to me was so all encompassing that the only gift I wanted was to worship my Savior.

- 3) *Mary's* quiet inner behavior mentioned in Luke 2:19 has always puzzled me, though I never went in depth to understand it's meaning before now. Maybe because I am no longer a child but a mother and grandmother, I see things differently. Mary had been chosen by God, and an angel sent to her, she knew of her cousin Elizabeth's amazing circumstances of John's birth. She treasured these moments with understanding from above that I believed continued throughout Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Life has shown me over these many years that my Lord and Savior loves me and NEVER asks of me anything that He will not give me the strength to handle. The constant assurance, even when I don't feel it, is the failproof everlasting



arms of Jesus patiently waiting to envelope me with His mercy and grace. Like Mary, I treasure these things and endeavor to ponder on them every day.

NOEL:

Latin: to be born, a carol, hymn or psalm

Thank you, Jesus, for coming as a babe that by your perfect life and sacrifice we as believers can be born again from above. May we always be amazed and worship you.

Contributed by Shelly Fosdal



LOVE

Getting ready for Christmas, with all the hustle and bustle!! Christmas

Trees!! Cookies!! Music!! Presents!! Snowmen!! Decorations!! Candy Canes!! Lights!! Food!! Christmas Cards!! Movies!! And of course, SANTA!!



But even this exhausting laundry list fails to include the REAL meaning of Christmas. Christ was born to bring love to all!! Love creates Christ-like relationships. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love never gives up. Love never loses faith. Love is always hopeful.

What relationships in your life need the light of Christ's love? What mending needs to be done? Who needs to be forgiven?

Christmas isn't one day a year. Christ is here now and in your hearts forever!!!

We may ask ourselves, how do we spread love without spreading the virus??? A challenge is upon us all!!! Why not this be the year where inner peace and Christ's love surround you on your everlasting journey!!!

May much love and peace be with you all on this special Christmas this year!!! Merry CHRISTmas!!

Contributed by Lee and Lori Leverton

The 3 wisemen- Grant Leverton,
Dillon Hughes, Austin Hughes.
Mary- Lori Leverton
Joseph- Lee Leverton
Donkey- Woody



Reenactment at Leverton Stables
(Lee's mother's farm)

The First Noel

- 1- The first Noel the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Noel, Noel, Noel, born is the King of Israel.

- 2- They looked up and saw a star
shining in the east, beyond them far;
And to the earth it gave great light,
and so it continued both day and night.
Noel, Noel, Noel, born is the King of Israel.

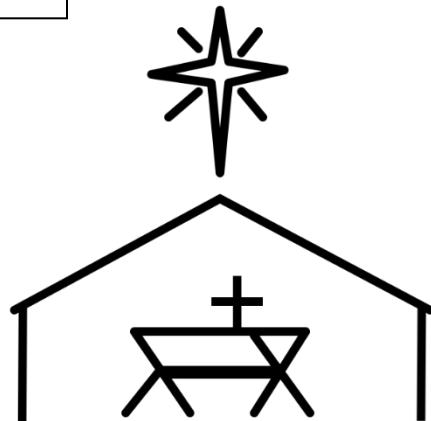
- 3- And by the light of that same star
three Wise Men came from country far;
To seek for a king was their intent,
and to follow the star wherever it went.
Noel, Noel, Noel, born is the King of Israel.

- 4- Then entered in those Wise Men three,
full reverently upon the knee,
And offered there, in his presence,
their gold and myrrh and frankincense.
Noel, Noel, Noel, born is the King of Israel



Photo – Becky Grasso

Wise Men Still Seek Him . . .



Created by Richard C. Vervoorn
from Noun Project