*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 16 - 21

*Joy*

**Monday, December 16 Isaiah 12:1-6**

*“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation”*

 This beautiful two-part hymn concludes this section of Isaiah (chapters 7 through 12) in which the prophet has challenged King Ahaz to trust in God. When Ahaz rejected God’s protection, Isaiah announced that what Ahaz had trusted in place of God – the nation of Assyria – would turn on Israel and destroy it.

 But, demonstrating how genuinely faithful God is to his people, the prophet then declared that God would give light in place of Israel’s self-induced darkness – light in the form of a descendant of David who would be Immanuel, “God with us.” Furthermore, once Israel faced the fact that it was God who controlled her destiny and not Assyria, God would demonstrate that truth by destroying arrogant Assyria and bringing about a messianic kingdom of peace not only with his own people but also with representatives of all the Gentile nations. “In that day” all God’s children will sing the hymn of Isaiah 12, joyfully proclaiming that God’s salvation is for us as we draw its water from his well.

*You give me joy, Lord God, for you have saved me from my sin. Amen.*

**Tuesday, December 17 Psalm 66:1-7**

*“Shout joyful praises to God”*

 This is a psalm of joyful thanksgiving for God’s loving mercy. It declares that God is in the midst of his people like a watchman on the watch-tower, not only observing all that is taking place within the city of God, but keeping a keen eye on the enemies surrounding the city, lest the rebellious should exalt themselves (verse 7).

 Of this protecting care an instance never to be forgotten was the scene at the Red Sea, when the sea was turned into dry land and God’s people, who had been in mortal terror of the Egyptian army, had their fears turned into rejoicings. Another was the passage of the people across the Jordan River, when they entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua.

 Against the backdrop of this biblical affirmation of God’s deeds on behalf of Israel, we lift our own joyful praise for all that God is doing for us today. When we gather to worship with the people of God, we sing his praises. When we pray to him in the quiet place of our personal devotion, we thank him for his many blessings.

*With joy I praise you, Lord, for the blessing of your protection. Amen.*

**Wednesday, December 18 Luke 2:8-12**

*“Good news of great joy”*

 Jesus’ birth is announced to the shepherds by a host of angels. Creation has no more mysterious and exalted beings than angels who represent the testimony of the heavens to what God is doing. Moreover, there are no more “normal Joes” in ancient culture than shepherds. They represent the lowly and humble who responds to God’s message. Thus, heaven meets and greets the average person through the angelic announcement to these pastoral figures. Jesus’ birth is more than a family affair. The announcement of “good news of great joy that will be for all the people” indicates that God desires to speak to every person about the coming of Jesus, since all humanity is impacted by his coming.

 After calming the shepherds’ fears, the angel declares what God is doing. Humanity has nothing to fear when God moves in grace. The text refers to the announcement as “good news,” using the verbal form of the word from which we get the term *gospel.* This is why all people can be filled with joy. Jesus may be lying in an animal trough, but heaven is present at his birth.

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

December 16 - 21

*Joy*

**Thursday, December 19 1 Thessalonians 1:1-6**

*“You received the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit”*

 The Thessalonian Christians’ reception of the Good News of Jesus Christ resulted in a blend of suffering and joy. Had the Gospel just been a source of blessing and gain, their response might well have been attributed to selfish motives. But when they voluntarily took on the opposition of those who denied Christ, they showed their willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of Christ. For Paul and for them, obedience to God was always costly and frequently resulted in suffering. But again and again they witnessed to the joy that the Holy Spirit gives in the midst of suffering.

 Perhaps one of the most completely concealed truths of our modern world is that suffering and joy go together. Life without problems and suffering is a fantasy. If we live as followers of Jesus in the midst of a fallen world, a world at war with God and itself, we will suffer. But suffering will not break us or lessen our confidence in God. On the contrary, suffering for what we know to be true in Jesus Christ will only draw us closer to God.

*Give me joy, Holy Spirit, when the world opposes the faith I have in Jesus. Amen.*

**Friday, December 20 Nehemiah 8:5-12**

*“They celebrated with great joy, for they now understood the word of the Lord”*

 When Ezra unrolled the scroll to read the word of God, all the people stood in reverence. Their twofold “amen” expresses agreement with the blessing of the Lord and their acceptance of the law. Thirteen Levites then moved through the crowd, interpreting and applying the law of God, and for the first time the people truly understood it. Reflecting their guilt for having failed to observe the law they now understood, the people began to mourn and cry. Ezra urged them not to express their dismay at having failed to follow God’s commands, but instead to celebrate what they had learned about God by eating choice foods and drinking sweet drinks.

 There was to be no bitterness on this day! They were even to send portions of food and drink to those who had not had the opportunity, or the means, to celebrate their newfound understanding. For, while there was righteous sorrow due to having disobeyed God, there was a greater reality to be celebrated: the joy of understanding what God desired of them so that, from this time forth, they could live in obedience to God.

*You reveal your Word to me, Lord, that I may joyfully understand and live it. Amen.*

**Saturday, December 21 John 15:9-12**

*“My joy in you, that your joy may be complete”*

 The union between Jesus and his disciples is not an external arrangement, but an internal, personal relationship which Jesus defines as a “triad of love.” The Son loves these disciples as the Father loves the Son, and they are to love one another as the Son loves them. This love for one another is not a vague, sentimental feeling that comes and goes, but a tough reality that is always revealed in obedience. The Son is perfectly obedient to the Father, and the disciples can only live in the love of Jesus if they keep his commandments. Love and obedience are two sides of the same reality.

 This does not mean these disciples are called to a grim, cheerless existence. On the contrary, if they live in the love of Jesus by obeying his commands, they will remain in his joy. Jesus’ joy will be in them constantly, not sporadically. G. K. Chesterton called this joy “the gigantic secret of the Christian.” And when Malcolm Muggeridge, man of the world, first encountered Mother Teresa in Calcutta, he could not explain the “luminous quality” he saw in this little, plain woman. Eventually it was that joy which drew him to Christ, who always shares his joy with those who obey him.

*I thank you, Jesus, for the gift of your joy growing out of my relationship with you. Amen.*