

THE DAILY WALK



*Trinity Presbyterian Church
Berwyn, PA
December 24, 2007 – January 27, 2008*

December 2007 -- January 2008

Dear Daily Walkers,

Given the busy-ness of the season, this edition of The Daily Walk will "recycle" some reflections from prior years.

Edward Hays is a Roman Catholic priest who has run a spiritual retreat center in Kansas. His poems reflect both a classical faith and contemporary concerns. I share with you a psalm from Hays for this season:

O blessed One, it is said that Christmas is for children.

Indeed, I agree:

it's only a feast for the young of heart,
a feast for finding beneath the tree
gifts to surprise and delight the eternal child.

Peel back the scabs of cynicism from my eyes
so that this calloused and aging child,
may see the holiness blazing at the tip of every branch,
may see every tree as a Christmas tree.

Let me not be ashamed to dance with delight
at hidden gifts wrapped in shimmering paper
with bows of rainbow-colored ribbon.

But also grant me the youthful and wide-eyed wonder
to recognize, and even to expect,
life-giving miracles on every street corner,
miracles of kindness and generosity and care.

Gift my all-too-calculating heart
with the excitement of anticipation
to truly receive the gifts of life,
the capacity to feast and rejoice.

Give birth within me to a spaciousness of heart
that can celebrate this feast
of the birth of Christ, the Child,
as a child.

In Christ,
Jay Wilkins

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
December 24— December 30, 2007

As the events of the Christmas season swirl around us, we are asked to look ahead beyond the glory of Christ's birth to the meaning of God's gift to the world. By weeks' end our readings will give us a glimpse of the world into which Jesus was born and, as the Holy Family flees to Egypt, we see Jesus as a refugee. Today's world is well aware of the conditions of the Palestinian refugees and we now hear of the struggles of those returning to Iraq. It is through Christ's life and ministry that God touches humanity with steadfast love, compassion and promise of salvation to all who try to live as God's people.

MONDAY, December 24: Isaiah 63:7-9

The prophet speaks to the exiles who have returned home. The joy of their release is gone and is replaced with bitterness, rivalries and cryptic. Once again, to the people of Israel the sense of God's presence was gone. In these verses, Isaiah calls to the people to remember the steadfast love and faithfulness of their God, and to recall the covenant relationship that exists with their Savior

TUESDAY, December 25: Psalm 148

A song of praise to the Creator invites the heavens and the earth and all who live therein to praise the Lord. I cannot imagine a more fitting time to praise and give thanks to the One who gave us His son and brought light into a world of darkness. This song reflects the joy of all who know God. May the message of peace, joy and hope find its place in your hearts.

WEDNESDAY, December 26: Hebrews 2:10-18

The writer to the Hebrews uses one of Jesus' great titles when he calls him the pioneer of salvation. He is a founder, an originator - - or in the sense of source or origin, the person who begins something so that others may enter. As Barclay states "one who blazes the trail for others to follow." Jesus was the pioneer who blazed the trail to God 'for us to follow.

THURSDAY, December 27: Hebrews 2:10-18

The book of Hebrews was written to a community of Jewish Christians. These readers had endured suffering, public abuse, persecution and confiscation of property. No one had been killed, but that was a distinct possibility. Jesus, made perfect through

suffering, became a model, the pioneer who having already suffered was qualified to be the leader of man's salvation.

FRIDAY, December 28: Matthew 2:13-23

We are well aware of the plight of the refugee in today's world. The Palestinian refugees are now joined by Afghans and Iraqis. In this third part of Matthew's narrative, we learn of the reality of the world into which Jesus was born. Soon after the birth of Jesus, the Holy Family left their homeland to seek refuge in Egypt. In the ancient world people believed that God sent messages to men in their dreams. In this way Joseph was warned to leave Bethlehem and escape Herod's terror. They lived in exile until Joseph again was told it was safe to return and they came to Nazareth. From the very beginning His life was not sheltered or protected but was subjected to the sufferings and despair of mankind.

SATURDAY, December 29: Matthew 21:3-23

Matthew felt that the best way to convince the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah was to prove the fulfillment of the prophecies found in the Old Testament. It was also a way to identify Jesus with the people of God. Throughout the story of the flight to Egypt we are aware of God acting and Joseph and Mary obeying. In all of this, the infant Jesus is passive. "He need do nothing but learn about the world into which he was born. A world God loves and for which He will one day give up His life"

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

December 31, 2001 — January 6, 2008

Arise, shine! The name Jesus, the Greek form of the Hebrew Joshua, was a popular name for boys in first-century Palestine. Hundreds of young boys answered to it. No doubt their parents had hopes of what their life journeys would bring, dreams that they would be a blessing to others. In the life of the particular child Jesus whom, we name Christ, we see dreams and journeys that make his name known far beyond his homeland. The beginning of that journey to the peoples of the world is celebrated in the feast of the Epiphany.

MONDAY, December 31: Isaiah 60:1 - 6

During the Exile in Babylon, Jews found themselves a minority in the midst of Gentiles. Out of that period developed a variety of attitudes about the role of the nation of Israel in relation to the nations of Gentiles. Some, like the exilic prophet second Isaiah, saw Israel as the “servant of God” which when restored would be a “light to the nations”.

After the exile people returning home to Palestine found the land hard, the economy poor, and the morale low. To them the post-exilic prophet third Isaiah spoke words of encouragement: “Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of God has risen upon you” (60:1).

TUESDAY, January 1: Isaiah 60: 1 - 6

Going home. Those who were rebuilding Jerusalem were strengthened by these words reminding them of their vocation as a nation. Israel was to reflect the glory of God so that scattered exiles would return home and Gentile nations would come to “the brightness of your dawn” (vs. 3). Nations would come to Jerusalem in adoration and bring tribute such as gold and frankincense (vs. 6) for the worship of God.

This passage strengthened later Jewish expectation that the Gentiles would make a pilgrimage to God at the end of time. For Christians, Gentiles coming to faith in Christ was a sign of God’s new age emerging.

WEDNESDAY, January 2: Psalm 72

This royal psalm asked God to give the king God’s attributes of justice and righteousness so that the land would know prosperity and the people peace. Such a king would have everlasting and universal dominion over Israel and all the nations of the earth. “The kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute,” the psalmist says because he is a king who delivers the needy and helps the helpless (vs. 12).

THURSDAY, January 3: Ephesians 3:1 - 12

The conversion of Gentiles was not a priority of biblical Jewish faith. In the first century that attitude began to change. Some Jews maintained that Gentiles outside of Palestine should be allowed to worship their own gods; others favored accepting converts into the community provided they followed the Law.

In today's reading we see a first-century Christian perspective on this matter in a letter written to Gentile followers of Christ. The author states that the inclusion of Gentiles in God's people is not a new idea but rather has been God's plan from the beginning. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ, Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body and sharers in the promise of Christ. With the inclusion of Jew and Gentile the church shows "the wisdom of God in its rich diversity" (vs. 10).

FRIDAY, January 4: Matthew 2:1 - 12

Through the story of the Magi we see the walls dividing races and cultures breaking down. The word magi can be translated as wise men or astrologers and indicates those from the priestly class of Persia or Babylon who are wise in the ways of stars and dreams. They are spiritual leaders from another faith adventure who see a sign in the heavens and seek to know its meaning.

Their wisdom, however, can take them only so far. In Jerusalem they seek knowledge from the wise ones of that country — the scribes and priests. They are directed to Bethlehem by those wise in the interpretation of scripture. Once they find the child and offer tribute reminiscent of Isaiah 60 and Psalm 72 they heed the warning in their dreams to escape Palestine. The Magi's obedience is to the wisdom they know and to the wisdom they receive from God through scripture and through dreams.

SATURDAY, January 5: Matthew 2:1 - 12

The feast of Epiphany is a celebration of God's inclusive love for all the world as revealed in Jesus Christ. The continuing revelation of God's rich and cosmic diversity depends in part on the church manifesting in local settings the diversity of God's people and God's wisdom. Celebrate the end of the 12 days of Christmas – the light has come into the world!

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

January 7 — January 13, 2008

This week's readings show that the newness of God's activity in the world springs forth at God initiative and not according to our schedules or expectations. God did a new thing among the Jews -- God did a new thing in sending the Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism -- God did a new thing in the time of the early church. The readings show that God is continuing to act and create new things even today. Are we willing to see God's new creation and serve in new and unexpected ways?

MONDAY, January 7: Isaiah 42:1 - 9

This passage declares that the suffering servant will be recognized as God's servant and his mission to restore justice will be fulfilled. It is a message of comfort, reminding the people that God is acting in and through events affecting them and the nation. It describes God's servant as one "in whom my soul delights." Who is the "the servant of the Lord"? A review of commentaries on the book of Isaiah shows there are many ideas about the servant's identity. It is not clear whether the servant being described is an individual, such as a prophet, a group like the people of Israel, or a blend of both. However, it is the unexpected nature of the servant's character and task that is clear and what we should be concerned with.

TUESDAY, January 8: Isaiah 42: 1 - 9

The servant will reveal justice to the nations of the world. The servant will be gentle and not respond with vengeance and hatred. In the servant's faithfulness, even while suffering, something new emerges — the servant's allegiance to justice will itself bring forth justice. The God, who created all, called the Israelites to be in a special relationship with Him, not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of all humankind. The Israelites violated this relationship, suffered the wrath of God, but then received God's 'incredible love and compassion. God will restore Israel and it will be a blessing to all nations, despite itself.

It is God's voice we hear throughout this passage. He reminds us that He is still creating. Let us remember that, like Israel, we can be a blessing by being "servants of the Lord."

WEDNESDAY, January 9: Psalm 29

The experience of a powerful thunderstorm sweeping in from the Mediterranean, through the mountains of Lebanon and into the desert of Syria, is

described as an experience of God's power and glory. It is God, and not the Canaanite storm deities, who "sits enthroned above the flood" (v. 10). God is the power of the entire universe and it is that power which gives strength and peace to God's people.

THURSDAY, January 10: Acts 10: 34 - 43

Peter discusses the impartiality of God in a new way. The message God sent to the people of Israel through the ministry of Jesus is one of forgiveness, peace, and new life for all peoples regardless of race or ethnicity.

Jesus is God's gift to all people. Through Jesus the friendship which should always have existed between humanity and God, but which sin interrupted, is now there for all to embrace.

FRIDAY, January 11: Matthew 3: 13 - 17

Jesus' unique relationship with his heavenly Father was confirmed, not bestowed upon him, at his baptism. Jesus declares his baptism by John a proper way to fulfill all righteousness" (v. 15). Righteousness and fulfillment are key terms in Matthew and imply actively doing the revealed will of God. As Jesus began his public ministry, a three-year journey toward Jerusalem and a cross, it was absolutely critical that he receive the blessing from his heavenly Father. If Jesus, God's Son, needed affirmation, how much more do we need to feel accepted and approved of by our own parents, as well as by God?

SATURDAY, January 12: Matthew 3: 13 - 17

When Jesus emerged from his baptism the heavens opened, God's voice was heard, and the Spirit was given — signs that the new age Israel desired was at hand. The words spoken by the heavenly voice echo Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, thus naming Jesus as both son and servant. His baptism marks his relationship to God and his willingness to respond to God's call.

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

January 14 — January 20, 2002

Epiphany is the festival of the Incarnation which emphasizes the appearance of the long-awaited Savior and his manifestation to the world. Let us look for the themes of this festival in the passages this second week after Epiphany

MONDAY, January 14: Isaiah 49: 1 – 7

This passage was written during the Babylonian exile when the Northern Kingdom (Israel) was taken into captivity. The “servant” is discouraged and doubts “his” effectiveness yet maintains faith and hope in God. God gives a new vision and promises to “make you a light to the nations” (v. 6). The servant becomes the means by which all the earth will see who God really is. God’s faithfulness to a defeated Israel will show the glory and character of God. Jesus, the Chosen One, is the culmination of this vision in his role as the servant of God

TUESDAY, January 15: Psalm 40

This song praises God for deliverance from an experience of desolation. The experience is like that of the prophet in Isaiah 49. The importance of waiting for God to redeem the situation and to demonstrate God’s faithfulness is emphasized. Jesus manifested to the world this “new song” (v. 3) given by God.

WEDNESDAY, January 16: Psalm 40

The psalmist gives public acknowledgment for God’s faithfulness and salvation (v. 10). By telling others of “his” deliverance, the psalmist communicates the trustworthiness of God and hence helps others to trust in God. Vs. 13-17 is again another appeal for help against enemies and reappears later as Psalm 70. The unity of Psalm 40 can be seen if we think of the worshiper recalling with thanksgiving past deliverance as he/she prepares to seek God’s help in present need. What an important model for prayer. Jesus is our “help” and our “deliverer” (v. 17) As the Wise Men said: We have seen his star in the east and come to worship him.

THURSDAY, January 17: I Corinthians 1: 1 - 9

Paul reminds the readers that they are called by God to fellowship with one another and with Jesus Christ. Christ is at work in their midst to enrich them so that they in turn might give richer testimony to Christ. God is faithful and is to be trusted

to continue to reveal Jesus to the world and to manifest the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

FRIDAY, January 18: John 1: 29 - 34

This passage invites each of us to discover for ourselves who Jesus is. The title John the Baptist gives is Lamb of God. This is metaphorical language to refer to both God's servant from Isaiah and the Passover lamb killed to celebrate the Israelites redemption from slavery. When John says, "Behold the Lamb of God" the Greek word refers to the act of seeing, with an emphasis on the impression made on the mind of the observer. The nuance of meaning, therefore, is "let this man impress himself upon you!"

SATURDAY, January 19: John 1:35 - 42

The importance of this invitation to discover personally who Jesus is demonstrated by the repetition of the revelation, "Behold, the Lamb of God" (v. 36)! This same verb is used again in v. 39 when Jesus says to the disciples — "Come, and you will see" When disciples follow Jesus, they will come to behold that he is the Messiah, the Christ (v.41).

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

January 21—27, 2008

God's New Day: As the night fades and the first hints of dawn appear at the horizon, bird songs alert us to the start of a new day . . . God's new day. In the biblical passages that follow, we are called to wakefulness and purpose.

MONDAY, January 21: Isaiah 9:1 - 4

Hope has come to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, suffering under the yoke of the Assyrian emperor Tiglathpileser in 733 BC. According to Isaiah, these people who have walked in darkness and live in a land of shadows have seen a great light. They rejoice in the light now shining on them, and praise the Lord for breaking the yoke that burdened them. They are, in a sense, experiencing the first light of a new time in their existence, a gift from God. God's new day.

TUESDAY, January 22: Psalm 27: 1 – 9

To this psalmist, God is a shelter and stronghold whose love far exceeds that of any human relationship. He is secure in the feeling that God's deep and abiding care allows him to face up to trouble and look to a new day. God's new day. In the psalmist's prayer of praise to the Lord, he asserts his belief that God is his light and salvation. He fears no one, for God protects him from all danger. He is never afraid. He asks the Lord for one thing only, live in the Lord's house all his life. Faith such as his is an example of faith worth emulating . . . flat out trust and love, without reservation.

WEDNESDAY, January 23: 1 Corinthians 1: 10 – 18

Now here's somewhat of a switch on the Psalmist we read yesterday. Paul finds it necessary to do some flock tending, and fence mending. He is faced with church divisiveness in Corinth and must correct the situation through the wisdom of his words on paper. He starts by reasserting the source of his authority and reminds the Corinthians that they have been called into fellowship with one another. Specifically, he reminds them of his responsibility towards them. And, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, I appeal to all of you, my brothers, to agree in what you say, so there will be no divisions among you.

THURSDAY, January 24: 1 Corinthians 1: 10 – 18

Paul felt the Corinthian's sense of community had been splintered, and urged them to be united, with one thought and one purpose. He had received reports that there were quarrels among different factions, indicating there were disagreements and

divided thinking. Paul made the point that he was getting different stories from different people. One said “I follow Paul.” Another says “I follow Apollos.” Others followed Peter or Christ. Paul’s response on paper obviously couldn’t reveal his depth of feeling as he wrote, “Christ has been divided into groups. So how can the community around you see God’s work of reconciliation if Christ’s community is fractured?” What might Paul write to us today in this context? Chances are the same words would be sufficient.

FRIDAY, January 25 Matthew 4: 12 - 23

Jesus left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum, a town by Lake Galilee in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali. By this move, Jesus lends credence to Isaiah’s prediction, and begins his work in Galilee, land of the Gentiles. For the Gentiles who have lived in darkness will see a great light. And the light will shine on those who live in the dark land of death. And God’s new day will come. Matthew sees the fulfillment of Isaiah’s promise of a new day, God’s day for Galileans, through the arrival of Jesus. For those who had emerged from the darkness, Jesus began to teach this message: “Turn away from your sins, because the Kingdom of heaven is near.” He is in the territory long ago annexed by Assyria and from there he begins to proclaim that God’s realm is drawing near. It is time for people to reorient their lives and focus on the priorities and purposes of God

SATURDAY, January 26: Matthew 4: 12 - 23

Jesus went all over Galilee teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news about the Kingdom, and healing people who had all kinds of disease and sickness. One day as Jesus walked along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew who were fishermen. He invited them to join him saying, “Come with me and I will teach you to catch men.” They dropped their nets, and they followed him. Zebedee’s sons, John and James also left their boat and father, and went with Jesus. The calling of the disciples shows us what Jesus was trying to do. The disciples leave their old concerns, to walk with Jesus down a new road, to God’s new day.