

*Heart, Soul, Mind*  
*Season of Advent 2009*

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**Thanks to each of you who contributed to our 2009 Advent Devotional Booklet. May it be a blessing to each person who reads it. A special thank you goes to Sayward Gregg who designed our cover. Merry Christmas and God bless each of you.**

# *Heart, Soul, Mind:*

## *Season of Advent 2009*

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Robin Lindsey

**Scripture Reading: Matthew 22:37**

*“He [Christ] said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’....”*

Kathy and I look forward to our first Advent-Christmas Season with you here at Dalton First United Methodist Church. The Advent-Christmas Season is our favorite for a multitude of reasons. Obviously the birth of our Lord dominates the time for us. In addition, it is a time of remembrance of our childhood and family. Also, we recollect the beautiful times with our own two sons growing up.

Unfortunately, we have also learned that our lifestyles today can rob us of the joy of Christmas. Busy schedules, struggling budgets, and unrealistic expectations are just a few of the items that can grab our joy. These lead stress, frustration and wanting to finish the schedule to dominate our lives. And when we get past Christmas, the bills come due.

Therefore, one of our goals at Dalton First UMC is to provide you with tools to have a spiritual, healthy, wholesome and joyful Advent-Christmas Season. I will be preaching on those themes during the season.

November 29	Exodus 7:13-14	Don't Let Scrooge Claim Your Heart	Advent One
December 6	Psalm 23:1-6	Nourish Your Soul and Survive Christmas	Advent Two
December 13	Philippians 4:4-8	Have the Mind of Christmas and Be Happy	Advent Three
December 20	LESSONS & CAROLS	LESSONS & CAROLS	Advent Four

As you enjoy these beautiful devotionals, written by your fellow Christians, may they inspire you to experience Christ and Joy during this holy season. God bless.

Tuesday, December 1, 2009

## *Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room*

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Steve Pound

### **Scripture Reading: 2 Chronicles 12:14**

*“And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.”*

### **Reflection:**

Relatively few people actually seek to do evil. Most do not wake up in the morning determining ways to transgress. Rather, they fall into sin because they have not prepared their hearts to seek the Lord. The word "prepare" conveys the idea of deliberate effort over a prolonged period of time. Of course, no one can accomplish preparing their heart on their own. It is not a matter of having the will power. God must be involved in preparing our hearts.

Only when we trust in the Lord and depend on Him can we find the strength to make our hearts ready to receive Him. God is continually pouring out His love, joy, peace, knowledge, and every other blessing. But, we can get to a point where we are not listening and feel like He has drifted away, when in fact it is us who have drifted.

Humility is an essential ingredient in the preparation of our hearts. We must understand that “our” accomplishments are not our own. Humbly remembering the good things He has done for you bring thankfulness.

Like all relationships, our relationship with God requires commitment from both sides. God is always waiting for us to respond to his infinite love. To fully receive his gifts, we must “let every heart, prepare him room.”

### **Prayer:**

Dear Loving God, thank you for all of your many blessings. Humbly, I ask you to prepare my heart for your greatest gift, Jesus Christ. Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.

### **Act in Faith:**

Turn your attention away, at least for a time, from the distractions that surround us during this season. Enter into God’s presence through prayer and meditation spending ten minutes thanking Him for His gift of Christmas.

Wednesday, December 2, 2009

## *Jesus- The Reason for the Season*

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Bennieta Chappell

**Scripture: Luke 2:11**

*“For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”*

**Reflection:**

Our family's first nativity scene was ordered from the Sears-Roebuck catalog more than fifty years ago. It arrived in the mail carefully packed. It has wooden stable and ceramic figures of Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, an angel, three kings, two shepherds, sheep, camels, a donkey and a manger. The stable fits nicely in the top of the box and underneath in another box the ceramic pieces are buried in a straw-like packaging. This box is always the first Christmas decoration to come out of the attic. Every year I find all of the people and animals, but have to search for Jesus. One year it dawned on me that this was a lesson for me to learn as I prepare for Christ's holy birth.

Sometimes in the busyness of baking, decorating, addressing Christmas greetings, buying and wrapping gifts, ringing the Salvation Army bell, rehearsing, packing and delivering White Christmas services and Santa we have to search to find Jesus--but He is there in our midst as we prepare and celebrate for His birth again. May all of us keep Christ in Christmas.

**Prayer:**

Dear Jesus, thank You for the love, excitement and joy that is ours in the Advent Season.

Thursday, December 3, 2009

## *Who Does Your Heart Beat For?*

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Jenifer Beard

### **Scripture Reading: Mark 12:30**

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength...”*

### **Reflection:**

As I was driving to Chattanooga a few days ago, I was listening to a Christian radio station. A song came on that was familiar to me, but I had never really paid much attention to what the words said. As I was listening, the chorus really stood out. *“It’s your life, what you gonna do? The world is watching you. Every day the choices you make say what you are and who your heart beats for. It’s an open door. It’s your life.”* At that point, I began to wonder if an outsider would know who my heart beats for. As a nurse, am I showing that at work to dying patients who may not know Christ? Am I showing that to my children? Am I showing that to Christ himself? I began to realize that if I am questioning it, then I must be skipping some beats somewhere.

### **Prayer:**

Dear Precious Lord, thank you for your constant, unfailing love. Help me to make good choices and to be an open door for the lost so that they may know that my heart beats for you. Please forgive me when my heart skips beats and redirect me back to you. Amen.

### **Act in Faith:**

Let us all check our pulses daily so that others may know for sure who our hearts beat for.

Friday, December 4, 2009

## *The Best Way to Celebrate Christmas!*

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Charlotte Seay

### **Scripture Reading: Luke 2:11**

*“And the angel said unto them, “Fear not: 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.”*

### **Reflection:**

Every year I spend a good bit of time looking for Christmas cards with some depiction of the nativity on the front. That’s very important to me and I always pray it will mean something to friends, neighbors and family I am sending them to. Another reason I only buy Christian cards rather than just holiday cards is so that the greeting card industry will have to keep printing them for us Christians. And lastly, I want to keep reminding myself that I am celebrating “Christmas” and not a “holiday.”

As our society is becoming more secular, it is gradually withdrawing the honors that it once gave to Christianity. It has renamed the “Christmas” tree the “holiday” tree. Some are even advocating that religious words be removed from Christmas carols to make them suitable for secular audiences. The secular world seems to be saying that the best way to celebrate Christmas is to remove all references to Christ. Isn’t that sad!

The verse that we read today captures an essential message of the Christmas season. Christmas is about a gift that the world is being offered – a Savior that was born for you and me. As with any gift, the most important steps are the receiving and the gratitude that we show towards the giver of the gift. God gave the shepherds a great gift at the birth of Christ. They were told the good news. After the angels departed, the shepherds could have chosen to ignore or postpone the message. They could have said to themselves, “Who would look after our sheep if we go to seek out the child? Is it not pointless to search for a baby in a manger? After all, there are hundreds of mangers in Bethlehem.”

However, they did not do that. They were obedient. They were told to find the child wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger. And they rose up and did just that. They celebrated Christmas by following the Savior’s plan, once it was made known to them. As I go through this season, I pray that I will be more sensitive and obedient to God’s plan.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, I pray that I will be filled with the joy of Christ through this season and throughout the year, and I pray for a heart that is receptive to your plan.

### **Act of Faith**

Take some steps of obedience, such as forgiving someone, this Advent season.

Saturday, December 5, 2009

## *Stuffing for the Soul*

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Nancy Crutchfield

### **Scripture Reading: Psalm 23**

*“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”*

### **Reflection:**

How many of us gain weight between Thanksgiving and Christmas? Each year I gain between 5 and 10 pounds. I eat desserts, special casseroles, cookies, pastries, Kringles, log rolls, triple baked potatoes with extra cheese – you get the idea.

This year I am going to try something new. Instead of filling my tummy with food “stuff” I am going to nourish my soul with God’s word. Each day during the holidays I am going to “stuff” myself, family, friends and home with “God stuff”. It might be reading a new devotional, baking for a friend, volunteering in a new place, helping with White Christmas, or just reading a new Bible verse each day. Clearly, my cup will be full of “God’s stuff”. We might even discuss our stuffing at the dinner table at the end of each day. So this holiday season I challenge you to let your cup runneth over with “God stuff”.

Can we meet in January and discuss our stuffing for our soul instead of going to the gym to get those extra pounds off?

### **Prayer:**

Dear Heavenly Father, Please help me remember that Christmas is so much more than food and gifts. Let God’s love during this Christmas Season shine through us. Amen.

Sunday, December 6, 2009

## *Rejoice in the Light*

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Laurie King

### **Reflection:**

As I sat down to write this devotional, I tried to think of the things that have "nourished my soul" during recent Christmas seasons....and I started to laugh! Everyone knows that this time of year is all about survival, right?! With Christmas parties to attend, cupcakes to bake, presents to wrap, dresses to iron, cards to mail, and lights to untangle, who has time to "nourish" anything? But as I thought some more about the things, the **little** things, that have made Christmas meaningful throughout my life, I discovered a common thread.....

As a little girl growing up in Stone Mountain, I loved helping my mom and dad put those big, fat, multi-colored lights onto our tree and then watching in amazement as my dad plugged the whole gaudy thing in! Also, I can remember riding around the neighborhood, looking at all of the houses decorated with beautiful Christmas lights as my sister and I "oohed and ahed" from the back seat. But my most favorite memory is attending candlelight service on Christmas Eve. There was just something so peaceful and magical about the moment when all the lights were turned off and the entire congregation was singing "Silent Night" by candlelight. I've often wondered, "How can I possibly recapture that awesome feeling during the present Christmas season that has become so cluttered with "busy-ness"? I find comfort in the following scripture:

**Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." -John 8:12**

And so I challenge us all, that as we hustle and bustle around this Christmas season, we take the time to nourish our souls by remembering that Christ is the light of the world and that we, as Christians, are called to reflect that light. As we walk through the story and symbols and experiences of this blessed season, I pray that God will reveal to us His way and His will in the light that is Jesus Christ. So light an extra candle, hang up an additional string of lights, or put an extra sparkly scoop of glitter in the reindeer food. Then sit back, relax, and enjoy the season that He has given us.

### **Prayer:**

Heavenly Father, during this holy season of Christmas, help us turn our hearts, souls, and minds towards You in devotion and wonder at the gift of Your son Jesus Christ, light of the world. Amen

Monday, December 7, 2009

# *A Gift Worth Giving*

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Peter Infanger

## **Scripture: Philippians 2:5**

*“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus . . .”*

## **Reflection:**

When our children were very young we were living in Laurel, Mississippi where, like Dalton, the railroad cut a path through the middle of town and we spent many minutes sitting in the car counting the number of cars being pulled by the locomotive as the train passed by. John and Robert were especially interested in the trains and we soon discovered a hobby shop in town that had a number of full-blown and rather detailed train layouts in the store. Mr. Lindsay was the owner of the hobby shop and he spent countless hours entertaining our children as they watched him run the trains.

Lynn and I often asked Mr. Lindsay about used trains that we might be able to afford so that we could buy them for our children to enjoy in our home as they grew older. It seems that every time we went into his shop to ask he had either just sold whatever used train sets he had or, what he had was just too expensive for us at the time.

One year, on a day in December that was not too long before Christmas Day, Lynn and I were the entertainment for one of the local civic clubs and Mr. Lindsay was in the audience. The title of our program was “I Love Christmas” and it included just about every fun Christmas song that you could imagine. One of the songs must have gotten to Mr. Lindsay because, when I got back to my office after that lunch-time program the phone rang and Mr. Lindsay’s gruff voice said, “Peter, I have something down here at the store that you have been wanting for a long time and I want you to come down and look at it.” I told him that I appreciated his thinking of us, but we just couldn’t afford a train set this particular Christmas. He snapped, “I’m not selling it. I’m giving it to you!” I couldn’t believe it and told Mr. Lindsay that I would be by his shop later in the day – on my way home from work. He snapped again, “You’d better come now, I might change my mind!”

You might say that Mr. Lindsay was something of a Scrooge until that December day when his soul was nourished and he decided to have the mind of Christmas and be happy. And, in so doing, he made an entire young family as happy as could be.

## **Act in Faith:**

Jump into the spirit of Christmas by giving something away that will make someone else enormously happy.

Tuesday, December 8, 2009

## *Praise the Lord*

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Betsy Helton

### **Scripture: Psalm 117**

*“Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is His love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD.”*

### **Reflection:**

How many times do we take God's blessings for granted? Often it is easier to focus on our problems and forget the blessings we have received.

Scott and I have gone through many trials together. Some of the most difficult were the loss of both my parents and having to be the caregiver at such a young age and the birth of our son Henry (who has down syndrome and had open heart surgery). However, we have always felt that God's blessings and gifts exceeded our trials.

What I have learned over the years is that God's love for me is strong and that his faithfulness is eternal. But, no lesson has had more impact on me than Henry's open heart surgery. We knew not to worry, because God and our church family and friends were taking care of us. With God's love I have been able to overcome crisis in my life. His love has given me the strength to see the many blessings I have received.

Everything I have achieved leads me to "Praise the Lord!"

### **Prayer:**

Open my eyes and help me to recognize the gifts and blessings you have bestowed on me. Help me to accept your love and acknowledge your faithfulness. Help me to respond in a manner that my actions and deeds will demonstrate my love for you. Help me to Praise the Lord in everything I do.

Amen

### **Act in Faith:**

Look for and expect the good things or blessings in your life and you will find them. Especially, take the time to find and praise God for all your blessings during this Christmas season.

Wednesday, December 9, 2009

## *Thanks, Mr. Grinch!*

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Karen Townsend

### **Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:4-13**

*“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice, Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”*

### **Reflection:**

Christmas is such a special time of year for us as Christians because we celebrate the birth of Jesus and spend time with our loved ones and friends. This time of year can also cause a little thing called ANXIETY, if we let it. It is often so easy to get caught up in the commercialism and business that come with the whole “Christmas Experience” that we lose sight of what is really important. Dr Seuss wrote something that speaks to me in my favorite Christmas book, How the Grinch Stole Christmas, “It came without ribbons! It came without tags! It came without packages, boxes or bags! And he puzzled three hours, till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn’t before! Maybe Christmas, he thought, doesn’t come from a store. Maybe Christmas perhaps means a little bit more!”

### **Prayer:**

Our Father in heaven, we love you. Please remind us that Christmas means so much more because we have you. Thank you for promising us that we do not have to worry or be afraid. Please help us to put good, fair, honest, and beautiful thoughts in our minds. We are anxious to be like Jesus. Remind us of what we are celebrating during this Advent season. Keep our eyes and hearts focused on you. In Jesus’ name, Amen

Thursday, December 10, 2009

## *What I want for Christmas: a Quiet Heart*

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Sherry Patterson

### **Scripture: Philippians 4:7b:**

*“His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Jesus Christ.” (Living Bible)*

### **Reflection:**

It's mid October as I write this. “Ten weeks till Christmas.” I just heard this from the mouth of a TV reporter. How quickly the season seems to come as I have grown older. It seems I just put the decorations away from last year and soon it will be time to drag them out again. I feel already the excitement that comes with the sights, sounds, and smells of the season. I love it all!

But what I love most is the opportunity to experience again the wonder of the birth of Jesus. To us His children, God sent His beloved Son into the simplest of scenes to be born: young, poor earthly parents in a place surrounded by barn animals and visited first by shepherds. No adornments except starlight. Yet, today we sometimes drive ourselves to create the most extravagant adornments to celebrate the season and make ourselves overly tired in the process.

It takes my breath away when I think of God's Son coming so humbly to mankind. It was a quiet event that dramatically changed the course of history.

Yes, I love the season and all the lovely things that accompany it. But what I yearn for most is what Paul in Philippians called “a quiet heart”; a renewed sense of the peace that comes only through trust in Jesus Christ.

How can I prepare myself to receive this? Not missing the real Christmas by filling my time with external, material things. By keeping my focus, not on fancy adornments, partying, buying, rushing, and cooking but on moments to pray, meditate, spend “quality time” with others, listen to music, and be in church. By focusing on the quiet, simple, yet astounding truth that God has given me a Savior. Just maybe, if I can do this, at least some of the time, I will be open to receive the most precious gift of Christmas: the peace of Christ.

### **Prayer:**

Precious Jesus, this Christmas season and always, help me to be increasingly open to your presence everywhere around me and in me.

### **Act of faith:**

I will take time to visit some folks who are lonely or hurting and just “be in the moment” with them, away from the rush of the season. Jesus will be there too.

Friday, December 11, 2009

## *God's Peace in 2009*

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Kay Lauman

### **Scripture: Philippians 4:7**

*"And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"*  
(NKJV)

### **Reflection:**

At this time of year we revisit the wonderful birth of our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus, and listen again to the angels voices in Luke 2:14 "...and on earth, peace, good will toward men". As a child, I had such peace and joy at Christmas time. We were poor in money, but rich in love. A Christmas tradition for our family of 4 children was to listen to a dramatized version of "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens. My father was a minister, and the Christmas programs at church were special – the music, the plays and the "Christmas Tree" program when all the children were given gifts, and all families were given fruit and food.

When our children were young, we enjoyed taking "White Christmas" boxes of toys and food to needy families. We also loved the Christmas Eve candlelight service ending at midnight and carrying our lighted candles out into the starry night. This peaceful quiet continued during the drive home.

As we look at today's world with so much violence, war, and hate, peace seems more difficult to find. Yet we still see a gentler, kinder world among Christians during the Christmas season. How do we achieve this "Peace of God"?

John tells us about a different kind of peace, not one without conflict: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you..." John 14:27a (NIV.)

Isaiah 26:3 "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because YH trusts in You". Romans 8:6, "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

In Weirsbe Expository Outlines on the Old and New Testament, he writes that the Peace of God and the presence of the God of peace comes when the believer practices right thinking, right praying and right living. Paul tells us about "right thinking" in Philippians 4:8... whatever things are true; ... noble ... just ... pure ... of good report; if there be any virtue, anything praise worthy, meditate on these..."(NKJV) Right praying comes from the heart – one of praise in good times and bad times. Right living comes with trust, prayer and doing those things we have learned as a basis for living. (Phil. 4:9)

### **Prayer:**

"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer" Psalm 19:14 (NKJV)

### **Act of Faith:**

Obtain God's peace by right thinking, right praying and right living.

Saturday, December 12, 2009

## *The Thirty Pound Turkey*

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Curt Adams

### **Scripture: John 21:15**

*When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."*

### **Reflections:**

My mom was a great cook! She seemed to never get worried about preparing a meal no matter what the circumstances. Our extended family was coming to our house for Christmas dinner one year. She sent my brother and me to get a turkey for the dinner. We asked her what size she wanted and she said, "Get the biggest one you can find." We wanted to know an approximate size and she said to get the biggest one we could find. We said, "You mean if we found a 30 pound turkey that you would want it?" She said, "Yes, but you won't find one." Little did she know!! That was a challenge to us. We went to almost every store in town until we found a 30 pound turkey! It took all the money we had in our pockets to pay for it. Mom was surprised, but she handled it well and prepared a wonderful Christmas dinner with the 30 pound turkey.

Mom did more than feed us with delicious food. She fed us spiritually as well. She was the one who insisted that we attend Sunday school and worship services. She saw that we were involved in other church activities. She was my den mother in Cub Scouts. She was always there to help us and see that we lived the way we were supposed to live. Most of all, she lived a dedicated life as an example to us and all the kids in our neighborhood. She welcomed all our friends and neighbors with a warm friendly attitude that made everyone look up to her.

My mom died last November. Even in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's, when she could not remember her family members, Mom would sing along on the beloved old hymns, recalling the words. They were so deeply a part of her that they reached the automatic part of memory that is the last for Alzheimer's to destroy. She continued to feed us until the end.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, give us the love and strength to feed your lambs.

Sunday, December 13, 2009

## *To See Is To Believe*

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Carolyn Land

**Scripture: Mark 10:14-16**

*“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”*

**Reflection:**

Several Christmases ago my first two grandchildren Lathe and Bowen, who were very young, came to Pa-Paw and Ma-Maw’s to see all the Christmas decorations, trees, lights, Santas and the nativity scenes. They were so excited. I had placed all the nativity scenes at eye level so it would be easy for them to see. To my surprise this is what caught their eye, the manger and baby Jesus. They began going from room to room looking for the mangers. As they entered the last room, Lathe, with great joy, called out to Bowen, “Bo-Bo come see, another baby God!”

This is a family tradition that all eight grandchildren come to Pa-Paw and Ma-Maw’s to see the Christmas decorations and make cookies, but most of all to see the baby God.

My prayer for you this Christmas is that the baby in the manger will catch your eye and you will focus on the real meaning of Christmas.

Monday, December 14, 2009

## *What does He Want for Christmas?*

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Sue Phelps

### **Scripture: Psalm 119:89-94**

*“Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures. Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you. If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have preserved my life. Save me, for I am yours; I have sought out your precepts.”*

### **Reflection:**

When our children were younger we would establish a place and a sheet of paper and ask them to make a Christmas List. What do you want for Christmas? As the December days slipped by the list would grow in length.

During this Advent season I wonder....Does God have a Christmas list of what He would like to have from me for Christmas? Would the list suggest that He needs more of my time spent alone with Him? Does He want me to love my neighbor or at least get to know them? Does he have a job for me to do that is going undone because I have heard not His call? Is He disappointed that I have not even thought to include Him on my list of people to remember?

### **Prayer:**

Dear Father, forgive my neglect and help me to make a Christmas list for you that would bring joy to you and children.

### **Act in Faith:**

Consider including your Heavenly Father on your list.

**Tuesday, December 15, 2009**

## *Every Good and Perfect Gift*

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Jim Dykes

**Scripture:**

*“Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all he created.”*

**Reflection:**

The squeaking wheel was the first indication that I was about to encounter a wonderful gift. Waiting in “The Heirport” at Dekalb General Hospital, I had already had the phone call from the doctor that the surgical delivery of our baby had gone well and that both Cheryl and the baby were doing fine. The long anticipated day had finally arrived and Cheryl and I had been blessed with the gift of a new life in our family. The squeaking wheel was on the isolette being brought up from the surgical delivery suite to the neonatal nursery.

A voice called out, “Mr. Dykes, would you like to see your baby?” I went running down the hall and met the nurse with the isolette. Wrapped in a delivery blanket was one of the most beautiful sights I had ever beheld—OUR CHILD, a wonderful gift from God. Tears were streaming down my face as I beheld the miracle of new life. The nurse asked, “Don’t you want to know the gender?” My reply was a simple, “It doesn’t matter! That is OUR baby.” She said, “Congratulations! You are the father of a son.” I said, “Hello, Andrew. Your mother and I love you!” With that exchange ended, the nurse whisked Andrew McKendree Dykes into the neonatal nursery and I stood looking through the window as the staff went about their work in making his first hours in the world what they should be.

Cheryl and I had made the conscious choice not to know the gender of our child until after birth. We had spent long conversations in deciding on names and had decided upon Andrew as the male name. Ashley was our choice for the female name. With the birth of our son, the feminine name was relegated to the repository of memories. That all occurred in July 1980.

On October 24, 2009, Cheryl and I were blessed anew. It was our privilege to be a part of one of the great blessings of life. Our only child, Andrew, was getting married. He and his bride had asked me to officiate and as the ceremony unfolded, my memory flashed back to that July day of 29 years ago. Our baby boy had grown into a fine young man and was now embarking upon a new life with his own bride, a precious and lovely young lady whom we adore. As I pronounced them husband and wife I was reminded anew of the wonderful constancy of God’s faithful and abiding love. They were introduced as “Mr. and Mrs. Andrew McKendree Dykes. You know them as Andrew and Ashley.” God had given us our Ashley in the gift of our daughter-in-law.

Advent is the season of preparation for The Gift of God’s Love that comes in Christmas. Every day of life is a day of celebration of the Gift of God’s Love and the constancy of that Love. Andrew and Ashley are living testaments to that Gift.

**Prayer:**

Gracious God our Father, thank you for the Gift of the constancy of Your Love for us and for the wonderful revelations of that Love in so many wonderful and unexpected places. As we prepare our hearts anew for the celebration of The Gift, fill us anew with the wide-eyed wonder of a child as we encounter all the wonderful and unexpected blessings of Your Love for us. In the Holy Name of The Gift I pray, Amen.

Wednesday, December 16, 2009

## *Are We Blots or Blessings?*

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Brenda Long

### **Reflection:**

I accepted the Lord as my personal Savior when I was eleven years old while attending a neighborhood Vacation Bible School. My parents did not attend church and my sister and I were invited by our cousins. It was a small country church and I vividly remember the lady who was VBS Director, Mrs. Ruth Dills. She was also the music leader, worship leader and most importantly, in charge of refreshments. She didn't seem to mind having to do so many jobs. She had such a warm and tender spirit and as she spoke so affectionately about our loving Savior, I just had to receive him as my own. I remember going down and kneeling at the altar and that glorious feeling of being forgiven and cleansed, even though at eleven, I was not a hardened sinner. I credit Mrs. Dills with planting the seed that began my relationship with my heavenly Father. As a result, I began to beg my dad to take us to church and not long after, he and my mom began attending church regularly. Our home life changed dramatically as my father and mother committed their lives to Christ. Since that time, He has been a constant companion, directing my steps, comforting me in times of sorrow, pouring out His mercy in my times of rebellion and selfishness, giving me peace that passeth understanding in times of sickness, miraculous healing and restoring of my health and leading me to an intimate relationship with Him. All of this because Mrs. Dills was a willing servant and gave of her time to minister to little children. Since that time, my life has been impacted by many willing servants who have inspired, encouraged and reflected God's love to me. There is a saying that "You are either a blot or a blessing; a blank you cannot be." My prayer is that I will be a blessing. I love chapter 5 of II Corinthians and in verse 20 Paul says "*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.*" May we see ourselves daily as ambassadors for Christ. Thank you, all the Mrs. Dills in my life, for answering this call.

Thursday, December 17, 2009

## *God's Citizens*

Bob Neuls

### **Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:11**

*“He will lead His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs in His arms and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.”*

### **Reflection:**

The Christmas season will soon be upon us and I will be caught up in the excitement. For me, the joy of Christmas is always overwhelming. I will try to pause amid all the glitter and reflect upon my preparations for the coming of our savior. I want to channel my perspective on how God's greatest gift and His new covenant with us, should direct my activities.

In years past, I was busy trying to accomplish and succeed. Even then, I felt that in my lifetime I must be an asset to others. But it seemed that I could not find time for personal involvement. I did not take time for others for whom simple gifts could be life altering.

I know God always looks after the least of us and if I allow Him to guide me, I will feel empowered to do His will. Opportunities to serve others abound. What a wonderful way to serve Him! Let the joy and excitement of the coming of our Lord lead us to provide loving care for those who are victims of social and economic displacement. Let's be God's Citizens!

### **Prayer:**

Almighty God, You know that we all experience selective blindness toward persons who need our help the most. Cure us of our blindness and instill in us the right spirit as we serve You.

Friday, December 18, 2009

## *In the Joy of Christmas*

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Kathy Lindsey

### **Scripture Reading: Psalm 46:10**

*“Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth.”*

### **Reflection:**

Christmas – my favorite time of the year with all the music, decorations, shopping, gifts, family gatherings, parties, baking – the list goes on. More often than I like to admit the joy, happiness and true reason for Christmas becomes overshadowed by too much busyness in my life.

Recognizing this frantic pace, I should stop, take a deep breath and remember the true meaning of the glorious Christmas season. I should be still and feel the presence of God. To find joy in the birth of Christ and feel the love of God – that’s the joy of Christmas. Share that joy with everyone you meet.

### **Prayer:**

Dear God, Thank you for this joyous season. Lord, still our hearts and lives so that we may share and be joyful in the birth of your son – Jesus. Thank you for Christmas. May we always be still and know that you are God – our God not just at Christmas but always. Amen.

Saturday, December 19, 2009

## *A Joyful Heart*

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Renee Golden

### **Reflection:**

Rejoice! We hear this word so often during this blessed time of year. But what does it really mean to truly rejoice? Webster's Dictionary defines the word rejoice this way, "to be glad, to take delight in". So what does that mean for you? For each person it holds a different meaning. We rejoice in a win from our favorite football team. We rejoice when we finish a project or succeed at work. We rejoice when our children remember to say "please" and "thank you" without us reminding them! This last point makes me think of my relationship with my own children and the lessons I have learned about rejoicing from my parents.

As a parent, I find that most of my rejoicing comes from the actions of my children. Seeing my daughter on stage in the Nutcracker, getting a big kiss from my son, seeing their sheer joy on Christmas morning, all of these things give me reason to rejoice! I can now understand where my parents were coming from as I was growing up. They didn't miss a thing that I was involved in. If I was on the field cheering, they were there; if I was on stage dancing, they were there- I even joke that my father would actually come watch me COACH cheerleading! This meant that he sat in the bleachers and watched me sit in the bleachers watching my girls cheer!! Now that is dedication- why was this reason for him to rejoice??? Now, as a parent, I see it! The Bible tells us to "*rejoice with them that rejoice, weep with them that weep*" (Romans 12:15). My father has always been the perfect example of this unconditional, parental love! If it made me happy, it made my dad happy, if it made me cry, he cried right along with me. I always thought he was just overprotective, but I realize that he simply found all the reason in the world to rejoice IN ME! I couldn't understand why he would want to spend an entire Catamount football game on the field taking pictures of me cheering when he LOVED watching football so much. I knew he wanted to be in the stands watching the game, but instead he spent his time snapping pictures. Now that I am a parent, I have come to realize that he loved me so much, even more than the Catamounts! I was his reason to rejoice! (and don't even get him started about his grandkids!!) I take this lesson into my relationship with my children now. My father was there because he wanted to be there, not because he felt some sense of obligation that he HAD to fulfill. He was just happy to see me happy, he was rejoicing when I succeeded!

*"And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house"* (Deuteronomy 26:11). Our children are truly a gift straight from Heaven, given to us by God- they are our reason to rejoice! In this fast-paced, cyber world we live in, it is so hard to just even keep up sometimes, much less stop and rejoice, truly rejoice in what the Lord has given to each of us. This Christmas season I renew my dedication to my children and my family, not because it is an obligation, but because they are my reason to rejoice!

### **Prayer:**

"Father, help us to each find and renew our reasons for rejoicing this holiday season. Help us to remember that every good thing is a gift from You and gives us reason to rejoice! Thank you for sending your Son as the ultimate gift to us! Amen"

Sunday, December 20, 2009

## *The Gift of Laughter*

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Ann Warren

### **Scripture Reading: Psalm 126:2a KJV**

*“Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing...”*

### **Reflection:**

Christmas 1975, was my new sister-in-law's first Christmas with our family. My parents gave the newly weds a place setting of their china. Earlier in December, I had been given an unusual set of salt/pepper shakers. They were in the shape of potbellied stoves, made of orange and black pottery. Placing them in an Old Spice box, I wrapped them as beautifully as I could and presented them to the new member of our family. As she unwrapped and opened the box, the expression on her face was priceless! She didn't know whether to like this gift or not, until giggling and laughter began filling the room.

The next Christmas, one of my gifts was a large, beautifully wrapped box, enhanced by a lovely bow. As soon as I opened the larger box and saw the red and black Old Spice box, I knew I had been bested!!

This Christmas, 2009, will mark the thirty-fourth year this set of salt and pepper shakers has been passed back and forth. It wouldn't be our family gathering without this piece of loving fun. In fact, one year it was my turn and I FORGOT! That won't happen again, because the children will remind both of us.

Oops, this year I'll be the recipient!!! I wonder how it will be disguised??

### **Act in Faith:**

Christmas isn't about what you give or receive. It's about the love that prompts the giving and receiving. No one can outdo God: He gave His Son Jesus. It's up to each of us to receive Him into our hearts and lives. That's the Gift that is ETERNAL!

### **Prayer:**

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the priceless Gift of Your Son Jesus Christ and for the gift of laughter. Help us during this Advent season, to keep our priorities straight. In Jesus' Holy, Precious Name. Amen.

Monday, December 21, 2009

## *A Father's Loving Heart*

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Tut McFarland

### **Scripture Reading: Isaiah 54:13**

*“And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.”*

### **Reflection:**

Advent has always been for me the most wonderful season in the entire Christian calendar- a magical, beautiful, spiritual season—a season of colorful decorations, uplifting music and miracles. As a child, I would often go into my grandfather’s parlor in early Fall and gaze at the spot in front of our window where the tree would stand—tall and beautifully decorated complete with a lopsided cardboard star I had created and covered with tinfoil. Early in December I remember traipsing through mud with my father searching for the perfect tree to cut down and take home. One of my most memorable Christmases came during the Depression years when Daddy worked late into the night for many nights creating a fabulous dollhouse for me—a dollhouse made from scrap lumber and lighted with Christmas tree lights. When finished, it was decorated by my mother and my aunt. After almost seventy-six years the lights are still burning brightly as a testimony of a father’s love. We are reminded of our Heavenly Father’s love in sending His son to be the light of the world. Through the years as I worked with our children on our White Christmas programs I’ve been reminded of our many blessings as I watched the wonder and expectations on the children’s faces throughout the Christmas season.

In later years, one of the most meaningful parts of the Christmas season is the beautiful music rendered by our choirs as they lift their voices heavenward renewing the spirits of all hearers. Thus we see, hear and feel the beauties of this magical season.

### **Prayer:**

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for this wonderful season. May we be reminded of the true meaning of Christmas and once again experience it with the wonder of a little child. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

Tuesday, December 22, 2009

## *No "Bah Humbugs" This Christmas*

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Janet Bandy

### **Scripture Reading: Psalm 51:10**

*"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."*

### **Reflection:**

In the story "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens, the main character, Scrooge, hated Christmas. A simple "Merry Christmas to you, Mr. Scrooge" sent him into a grumbling tirade of "bah humbugs". The season was a complete waste of time, in his opinion. Any sign of joy or merriment was a source of unrelenting irritation. His idea of Christmas was a classic case of an itch he couldn't scratch. Poor Mr. Scrooge. He had hardened his heart to the holiday and nothing was going to change his mind. Period!

We have all been in Mr. Scrooge's shoes at one time or another. Christmas can be a difficult time for many people. Unemployment, divorce, illness, money concerns or any number of life's challenging moments can create in us a Mr. Scrooge heart. Too much rushing around, too many things to get done, too much pressure from all sides can turn Christmas from a time of joy to one of dread.

In Dickens' classic story, Mr. Scrooge had lost sight of the true meaning Christmas. He had blinded himself to the blessing of the holiday and in doing so, had wasted precious time with precious moments. Fortunately for Mr. Scrooge, he realized his mistake and came to sincerely understand the true meaning of the season. He eventually softened his heart to be able to accept the love and joy of this special time of year.

This year, if you find yourself grumbling humbug, take a moment to stop and think what the true meaning of Christmas is all about; the birth of Christ. God loves you so much that He sent His son to be born into this world that we could be saved. God gave us the ultimate gift. With Jesus Christ, all things are possible and with Christ the difficult times and the challenging moments can be turned around into blessings. He can soften even the hardest of hearts and turn your sadness into joy. Take the time this Christmas to count your blessings and thank God for this wonderful holiday. Silence those "bah humbugs" with a simple "Thank you, God" and may this Christmas season be the best Christmas you have ever had!

### **Prayer:**

"Dear God, in the name of Jesus, create in me a pure heart. Open my eyes to the glory of all the blessings you have bestowed on me. Help me to walk in the fruit of the spirit—love, patience, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control—and guide my steps for the rest of my days. Thank you for this precious season and thank you for the gift of your son Jesus so that all who believe in Him will have life everlasting." Amen

### **Act in Faith:**

This Christmas season, if you or anyone you know is having a hard time, stop and pray about it. Seek God's help first. Put your trust in Him and He will guide you in the best way possible.

Wednesday, December 23, 2009

## *Let God's Light Shine*

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Matt Land

### **Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:14-26**

*"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

### **Reflection:**

One of the things I love most about Christmas is candles. In fact, one of the things I've missed about having four kids is midnight communion on Christmas night. The somberness of the sanctuary lit only by the light radiating from dozens of small candles. These star lights of glory represent so many things to me, and remind me of so many special occasions. However, the most glaring reminder as I gaze into the deepness of each individual light comes from Christ himself.

In Matthew's gospel, the fifth verse, we are told to be the light of the world, a city on the hill. In fact, Christ asked the crowd, "Who would light a lamp and put it under a basket?" Sometimes, I feel that we as a church and I as an individual do that very thing. God has given us so much at Dalton First, so many talents and so many skills. How do we let our lights shine? Do we light the way for the community of Dalton and Whitfield County? Do we expose the darkness, as well as draw others to the light? As we begin a new year, let's live the words of Christ in verse 16: "In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven."

Merry Christmas from the Lands!!

Thursday, December 24, 2009

## *Christmas is a time to Rejoice!*

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Brian Anderson

### **Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:4-8**

*“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”*

### **Reflection:**

Most that know me know that I love Christmas music. My children kid me every year about how soon I will start listening to Christmas music. Christmas was always a happy time for me growing up. We did not have much, but at Christmas my parents did all they could to make Christmas special and to give my sister and me more than we deserved. Heather and I also do our best to make the Christmas season one for celebration in our home as we rejoice the many blessings given to us by our Father in Heaven. The Christmas season is foundational to a spirit of giving and rejoicing.

Due to a myriad of issues facing our world, our nation, and our local community, it will be challenging for many this year during the Christmas season. And most will be tempted to become discouraged or down due to worldly concerns. But just as those in Philippi were encouraged by Paul, we have every reason to be encouraged and to rejoice. Because our Father gave us the gift of his Son, we can rejoice. Regardless of our earthly conditions, we should not worry or be anxious about anything. We are encouraged to pray with a heart of thanksgiving, turning all our needs over to him who knows us and loves us. Jesus wants us to rejoice in the knowledge that he came and gave us the ultimate gift – eternal life!

### **Prayer:**

Father God, give us a joyful spirit as we rejoice in the knowledge that we have been saved by your son - Jesus. In those weak moments of worry and discouragement, lift our eyes to you and replace our worry with peace, hope, and love. Keep our thoughts on all that is honorable, excellent, and commendable. Amen.

### **Act in Faith:**

In the hard moments, let us count our blessings. When we think that the tough issues will get the best of us, let us remember Paul's encouragement to pray, turning all over to God. And as we enjoy the season of giving, let us rejoice in our Lord!