

## Devotions for the Week of December 10, 2017

### LARGE-PRINT

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

### North East United Methodist Church

### By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

### Sunday, December 10, 2017 – DON'T FORGET:

### CHRISTMAS CANTATA TONIGHT – 7 PM

Many of us have a picture in our minds of the first Christmas. It is a time of peace, serenity, and quiet. We picture a beautiful starry night, the crisp, cool air on the shepherd's faces. We imagine the one star, shining brightly in the sky, over the manger, where the Christ child lay. In our mind's eye, we see the angels singing, "*Glory be to God in the Highest, and Peace on Earth!*"

Yet, in heaven there was no peace that night as a battle raged. **Read Revelation 12.** In heaven, there is an "*event of great significance.*" A "*large red dragon*" sits posed to devour the child that is to be born. The woman and child flee and war breaks out in heaven. The dragon, Satan, loses, and "*declares war against the rest of her children - all who keep God's commandments and confess that they belong to Jesus.*"

The battle has begun. As the song says, "*This was the end of the beginning.*" This was the beginning of war. And we, each of us who profess Christ as Lord, have an enemy that is hunting us, trying to keep us from God and His glory.

We see this all through the Bible, from the battles between God and evil throughout the Old Testament, to our understanding of Jesus as foretold and described in the New Testament. John the Baptist in Matthew 3, describes Jesus as "*His winnowing fork is in His hand.*" Jesus, himself, in

Matthew 10, said, “*Don’t imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! No, I came to bring a sword.*” Paul, in Ephesians 6, talks about putting on the armor of God and preparing for battle. And in Revelation 19, it is written, “*Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. And the one sitting on the horse was named Faithful and True. For He judges fairly and then goes to war...He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood...From his mouth came a sharp sword, and with it he struck down the nations.*”

Christmas, with its angels and shepherds, with its manger scene and Mary cradling the baby Jesus, with its star and wise men...Christmas was the beginning of a great battle.

This Christmas, the enemy wants nothing more than to distract you from the true meaning of the season, Jesus Christ. The enemy will use the materialism of the season, the pressure to get everything done, to have a “*beautiful*” holiday, to pull your focus off of Christ.

The enemy will have you believe that you must “*rush*” around, from store to store, dinner to dinner, gift to gift, because that is what is done at Christmas. The enemy will do whatever he can to take your mind off Jesus. As someone once pointed out: BUSY stands for “*Being Under Satan’s Yoke.*”

Take time to be with God tonight. Ask Him to help you prepare for the battle you are in...to help you become more aware that you are part of something much bigger that is going on behind the scenes. Evil is being fought, and God is ready to work through us to bring about its defeat. Pray for those who are experiencing the Christmas rush without Jesus, who believe this, our worldly existence, is all there is. Pray that their eyes will be opened to the baby born in a manger, to the King who will return one day on a white horse to reign forever.

### **Family Activity - Sunday, December 10, 2017**

Light 2 candles on your Advent wreath. Read Matthew 3: 1-12 together as a family.

### **Monday, December 11, 2017**

**Read Ephesians 6: 10-20.** We are in a battle. We sense it every day. Things just aren't the way we know deep down they should be. Even Christmas, when everyone's step is a little lighter, and the world a bit more joyful, there is something still missing in the hurry and bustle, the gift buying, the bills and credit cards, the commercialism. At times, it is difficult to stop during the season commemorating Christ's birth to simply spend time with God, to give thanks, and to remember. The enemy is hoping that the holiday goes by quickly without worship, without charity, without our thinking of others and of God. Each day we wake up we enter the battlefield, and we must take a stand against the enemy; we must cry out wholeheartedly, "*I will take time for God...I will give Him the glory...I will remember what it is we celebrate this December 25th.*" Paul knew this was difficult because the world and the enemy that roams that world carries quite a punch; but God's children are given armor for the battle.

In Ephesians, Paul talks about the armor of God. Paul says that we are to "*use every piece of God's armor to resist the enemy.*" First there is the "*sturdy belt of truth*" and the body "*armor of God's righteousness.*" Each day we must put on truth and not the lies that our culture throws at us. God is truth. We enter the battle each day as millions of commercials tells us what will make us happy, as our peers look down on us if we are not trying to climb the societal ladder. We must focus on the

truth, not the lies of the enemy. And God's righteousness must be foremost in our minds. Justice. We must take notice of those hurting around us, being stepped over, forgotten. Every time we reach out to the hurting and oppressed the enemy's plans are thwarted, and we gain ground.

Paul goes on to speak of "*faith as your shield*" and "*salvation as your helmet.*" We must remind ourselves constantly of the promises Jesus made to those who would accept Him as Savior. And the place we find this truth and remind ourselves of God's righteousness, and God's promises to us when we come to him in faith and receive salvation, is the greatest weapon, "*the sword of the Spirit,*" the Word of God. We must immerse ourselves in prayer and the scriptures, that God will be our focus during this season and all others. It is in the Word of God that we will find the armor that will cover us and protect us from our enemy.

Take time tonight to talk to God, to ask Him for help in making time every day, starting immediately, to rest in His promises and to study and read His Word.

### **Family Activity - Monday, December 11, 2017**

Think of someone you can help who has a disability and shop for them, help put up their tree, etc... Remember the holidays can be hard for people who live alone. Adopt someone who lives alone to be part of your family this holiday season. Sit down with your family and think of someone together you can reach out to or pray and ask God to help you find someone that needs help.

## **Tuesday, December 12, 2017**

**Read James 4.** There is a lot in this chapter written by James, the brother of Jesus Christ. Verse 6 says, “*God gives us more and more strength to stand against such evil desires.*” God has given us strength to stand against those things, which would pull us away from Him, including what James calls “*friendship with the world.*”

James goes on to say, verse 7, “*So humble yourselves before God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you.*”

This Christmas, don’t get caught up in the world, but instead use the season of Advent and Christmas to draw close to God, and God promises, He will draw close to you.

Take time drawing close to God tonight. Sit with Him a while. Talk to Him.

## **Family Activity - Tuesday, December 12, 2017**

Bake cookies together as a family. Let the kids make a mess. Hang some of the cookies on the tree as decorations. Put together tins of cookies to share with a neighbor or friend, or to take to an area nursing home.

## **Wednesday, December 13, 2017**

**Read John 1: 1-18.** John tells us about the “*incarnation.*” The incarnation is God becoming flesh...God being born as man...as Eugene Peterson translates verse 14, “*So God became human and moved into the neighborhood.*”

It is the incarnation we remember and give thanks for Christmas, that God wanted a relationship with us so much He was willing to enter our world to show us His love and the way.

I once traveled to Wilmington to hear the Bishop speak. At

that gathering Professor Amy Oden of Wesley Theological Seminary also spoke. She spoke on the “*incarnation*.” She explained that what God did by coming into our world, by becoming flesh, was invite us to be part of His divine plan.

Read those words again. God sent His Son, the Holy came to earth in flesh, in order to invite us to be part of the divine plan. Wow!

God opened His whole life to us and we have the opportunity to be drawn into the divine, not just for eternity, but now. Sometimes, Dr. Oden explained, we forget just how amazing the incarnation is.

Take time tonight to take a walk, sit up by the tree, light a candle and sit in quiet when the rest of the family has gone to bed, and just be drawn into the divine. Think and ask God to open your eyes to what that means, that you have been invited to be part of the divine plan. You are in the battle with God and you will share the victory. You are to experience the life God experiences. What a gift He gave us that first Christmas!

### **Family Activity - Wednesday, December 13, 2017**

Plan to invite someone who doesn't know Christ to church this coming Sunday, but don't just invite them. Plan to pick them up, bring them to church, and then take them out for a quick lunch afterwards.

### **Thursday, December 14, 2017**

Charles Wesley wrote the following words in the hymn, “*Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*.” He writes, “*Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee. Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou are; dear desire of*

*every nation, joy of every longing heart. Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King, born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring. By thine own eternal spirit rule in all our hearts alone; by thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne.”*

Advent is a time that we cry out “*Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus.*” We call out “*Come*” and “*now thy gracious kingdom bring.*” We look forward to Christ coming and bringing victory, building His kingdom on earth, and all of us finding “*rest*” in Him, all of us being raised to His “*glorious throne.*” It is a time we look forward to the end of the battle.

**Read Isaiah 35: 1-10.** What a picture of what we look forward to and we look forward with patience (**Read James 5: 7-10**) but with eager expectation and anticipation.

Take time to ask God for strength and patience as you wait for His return, as you awake each day to do battle with the world and to grow more deeply in your faith. Ask God for direction and strength and that His Will be done in your life.

### **Family Activity - Thursday, December 14, 2017**

Make an Advent tree. Secure a branch in a flowerpot. Ask each family member to add an ornament to the tree each day to symbolize a good deed. Decorations could include Bible verses, cards or Advent symbols (angels, animals, bells, holly, shepherds, etc...).

### **Friday, December 15, 2017**

Simply take time today to pray about who you might invite and bring to church this Christmas season that they too may hear and see the vision of what is to come, that they may know Christ and prepare for His return.

### **Family Activity - Friday, December 15, 2017**

Watch a TV Christmas special with your family. Afterward, discuss Christian values.

### **Saturday, December 16, 2017**

Read the Revised Common Lectionary readings for the 2nd week of Advent. The Revised Common Lectionary is a three-year cycle of scripture readings used by many Protestant churches. Each Sunday there are four readings: a reading from the Hebrew Bible, a Psalm, a reading from the Epistles, and a Gospel reading. This week's lectionary readings are:

- Malachi 3: 1-4
- Luke 1: 68-79
- Philippians 1: 3-11
- Luke 3: 1-6.

### **Family Activity - Saturday, December 16, 2017**

Read the lectionary passages together and talk about them. Then take time to simply pray together as a family.

**Don't Forget: Invite Someone To Church Tomorrow!**

