

ADVENT IV  
Redeemer Lutheran Church - Milwaukee  
December 24, 1972

"A Prayer for Peace"

"Always be full of joy in the Lord; I say it again, rejoice! Let everyone see that you are unselfish and considerate in all you do. Remember that the Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs and don't forget to thank him for his answers. If you do this you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thought and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:4-7)

As we conclude Advent on this Fourth and final Sunday, we are all aware that our Advent preparations have taken on BOTH a secular and sacred focus. For today the preparations for GOD'S VICTORY and a PACKER VICTORY both come to a climax. By the end of this day, we HOPE to have celebrated TWO VICTORIES.

For those of us who have followed the Packers closely, there have been MANY Sunday and weekday hours of preparation and celebration. All those hours viewing the sports news and Channel 12 Sunday afternoons have been Packer preparation during Advent. Every Packer-backer at this moment awaits the "good news" of a Packer victory today. I count myself among those who have followed this secular preparation.

I wonder, however, if our Advent preparation for God's victory has been as INTENSE and as INTENTIONAL. I would venture to bet that most teen-age boys (and their fathers) could give more accurate vital statistics about Scott Hunter or John Brockington than about Jesus of Nazareth.

Might that say something about the REAL SOURCE of 20th century worship? I guess "boys" will always be "boys!"

But for those of us who have chosen THE PEW rather than THE BLEACHER this morning, God gives us a final hour to prepare for his victory. Yes, "the Lord is coming soon." We here gathered might consider THIS HOUR to be the final strategy session before the victory.

But the victory we will celebrate will not be witnessed on a gayly lighted grid-iron. Our attention will find illumination from a star.

We won't be witnessing a multitude of cheering fans - just a few messengers, peasants, and cattle.

We won't be recalling the sounds of noisemakers, or cannons, or a marching band - just the shrill cry of birth and the stillness that follows.

We won't be looking at OR from a million dollar stadium in a \$25.00 reserved seat - just a barn, a manger, and a few simple poor folks will be our environment.

But the simpler surroundings will not depreciate the most important thing. EVERY CIVILIZED PERSON, here and everywhere, whether in Washington D.C. or Milwaukee, WILL KNOW that the hour of God's victory is at hand. Regardless of the degree of sacred preparation - regardless of one's church attendance - regardless of the secular events of the world - NO ONE at this very hour is able to say that he has not heard about the "Good News" to be proclaimed tonite and tomorrow.

And so, we who are hungry for continued preparation right up to that hour, have responded to this final hour to be filled. How shall we make our final preparation for God's victory - God's incarnation into life?

We have many options. We could punish ourselves for not doing enough sacred preparation. We could praise ourselves for the

have done. We could attack ourselves for putting too much emphasis upon our commercialized preparations. We could condemn ourselves for allowing evil and destruction to coincide with our preparations. Or our preparation could be to REMAIN OPEN to God's revelation at this late hour.

I have chosen the latter. God's revelation for this late hour is from Paul to the Phillipians. He says quite simply; Tell God your needs - Be open and grateful for his answers -- and YOU WILL experience his peace.

We all know of our need for peace. Peace with God. Peace with one another. Peace with all racial brothers and sisters. Peace with our Viet Nam friends and enemies. Peace with our government. Peace with ourselves.

We're all concerned about PEACE. In fact, over 1/3 of the Christmas cards that Susan and I received focused on the theme of peace. So this is our preparation for this late hour - we must prepare ourselves for the PRINCE OF PEACE.

In other words, we must prepare ourselves for WHOLENESS and HARMONY in life's relationships. Because that is the peace of God. WE MUST PREPARE OURSELVES TO BE LIKE THE PRINCE OF PEACE, if His birth is to profoundly affect the future of our lives and those we live with.

And so the remainder of this morning WE WILL share Paul's strategy for Peace. I have called this sermon, A Prayer for Peace. It will be a prayer by his formula -- and that is simply a conversation with God and with you - a spelling out of some needs and some thanks that we should share.

We can only hope these words will better prepare us to live as followers who have known the wholeness and harmony of their PRINCE OF PEACE.

I need to be told of my failures--  
We need to hear of our failures--  
We need to have the courage and faith  
to overcome our failures.

Above all, I need--we all need--to be especially  
COMPASSIONATE with those who have experienced  
the depths of failure. Whether economically,  
maritally, or religiously.

The fullness of the PEACE OF GOD can be  
experienced in this Christian family. There is  
so much compassion and mercy and forgiveness  
that we can share RIGHT HERE. God HELP US  
become instruments of PEACE here. God has  
given us the power to share his peace -- we are  
FILLED WITH THAT POWER. Let us OPEN OURSELVES  
to its wholeness.

Finally, Father and friends,  
I thank you for the gift of your son. He will  
be the only gift I receive this Christmas  
WITHOUT A PRICE TAG. Such a free gift can  
only offer me PEACE.

I need to be more aware of that kind of  
gift giving, my Lord and friends. I need  
to give freely, and I need to accept graciously.

O God, help me, help each of us at this late  
hour TO PREPARE FOR this night and tomorrow  
BY GIVING without the thought OF PRICE TAGS.

For as WE GIVE and RECEIVE without PRICE  
TAGGING our gifts of love, then we will be  
PREPARED TO RECEIVE THE PRINCE OF PEACE.

And we will experience the peace of God which  
passes human understanding. We will be full  
of the joy of the Lord. And we will rejoice,  
praising God and saying:

"Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth, peace among men with whom  
he is pleased."

Amen.

And so I offer some of my reflections of the "needs" and "thanks" that we should be sharing with God and one another.

Dear God, and friends,

I thank you for these moments of freedom--  
freedom to proclaim the gospel--  
freedom to recognize the need for peace--

But I have a "need" in regard to that freedom, Lord and friends.

I need to take that freedom less for granted.

I need to be a greater corrective influence on my government and friends when they prohibit me and others from free expression of the truth.

God and friends, I cannot be at Peace with you or myself if I know that the truth is distorted or imprisoned within the bureaucracies or privileged few.

Break down the bars that often imprison freedom of the truth.

My God and friends,

There is wholeness and harmony in having the fulness of health -- I am grateful for this blessing, Lord.

I am thankful for this peace offered to others -- several this past week -- many this past year. For your mercy and love through surgery and medication -- in spiritual and physical attention, WE ALL GIVE THANKS.

But I have a need regarding health - and so do many others here. Some have lost health - others whom we all have loved have died.

I need -NO, we need to help those yet living with the question - WHY?

Dear Father and friends, NONE OF US can be at peace without helping our friends and loved ones with the question, WHY? "Why did he

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suffer so? Why am I plagued with this?  
Why should I want to live? Why does  
so much suffering? -5-

There will not be wholeness and harmony in  
lives of the grief-stricken until they find  
direction through their grief.

Maybe rather than blaming all tragedies on  
God, we might simply say - "I don't understand  
all the mysteries of life."

God, help us to be less omniscient -- help us  
to take off our super-Christian masks, so that  
we can truly become MERCIFUL PEACEMAKERS.

Dear God and man,  
I am thankful for thirty years that have  
never seen a bomb explode in my back yard-  
for thirty years that have never witnessed  
troops machine-gunning or raping my family  
members-  
for thirty years of WHOLENESS in this land.

Dear Father and friends,

I need to know more deeply THE PAIN AND  
HOPELESSNESS of a war that seems endless-

I need to FEEL the heartaches of soldier and  
victim BEFORE I can really comprehend the  
NECESSITY FOR PEACE.

O God and friends, the hour of the Prince of  
Peace is at hand -- I will find it difficult  
to REALLY EXPERIENCE his peace - there will not  
be wholeness and harmony in human relationships---  
until this war ends.

Let us call for an undistorted picture of  
this Viet Nam inferno.

Eternal Father, worldly friends in Christ,  
I give thanks for the successes of this year;  
I give thanks for your giving --  
I give thanks for the success of our ministry-

ADVENT IV

Luth Church of the Master, Troy  
December 19, 1976

"FIRST THINGS FIRST"

Jesus said, "I have come to do your will."  
. . . By this 'will' we have been sanctified  
through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ  
once for all. Hebrews 10:9,10

Well, only five more shopping days until  
Christmas. So - how are you all doing?? From  
observing the pace and tensions in myself and  
others, I'm afraid we call all sing with  
Ole Olsen, "Well I yust go nuts at Christmas."

During these four Sundays of Advent, I have  
sought to develop sermons which seek to  
contrast our fantasy worlds with the real  
world.

Each year we dream of the joys and pleasures  
of Christmas. But soon after Thanksgiving  
that dream looks so much more like a nightmare.  
The secular realities of the past 25 days so  
often turn anticipated joys into deeply felt  
agonies.

These days have seen us gear up our shopping  
apparatus -- our typing ~~machines~~ -- we have  
made long lists -- we have or are still trying  
to clear the cobwebs and dust in the corners --  
yes, we've done our best to do our duty to  
make things right for Christmas.

Well - then we should be overjoyed -- filled  
with the pleasures of our accomplishments. But  
why then is there all this fretting and fuming  
going on. Where has the dream of peace gone?

Maybe your dream has held together -- but  
just looking at the last two days in the life  
of this church seemingly shows the contrary --  
the dreams of joy have seen vivid streaks of  
frustration and disappointment appear.

Our intentions have been good ones -- often even Godly ones. We have wanted to make this Advent and Christmas a thrilling one. Many sacrifices have been offered to accomplish this -- although there have been no burned sacrifices yet (but pretty close). Yes, a handful of dedicated disciples have really sought to make our Advent and Christmas celebrations a "Really Great Show."

I can only believe that God is pleased as I have been by these sacrificial efforts. But, what's gone wrong? How could there possibly be disappointment, fatigue, maybe even a little bitterness when these efforts have been directed toward peace and joy?

Could it possibly be -- even with the best intentions -- that we have scrambled our priorities. Could we at times be suffering because we're more concerned about preparing the way for "OUR SHOW" rather than "HIS SHOW" -- his showing of himself. Maybe our energies have somehow twisted so that we're doing "our will" rather than "his will."

In other words -- like Jesus said through the writer of Hebrews -- maybe our own sacrificial offerings have become more important than what we have already received from God -- the body and life of Jesus Christ. Maybe we have been looking for peace and joy through our sacrifices rather than through God's gift.

That would mean we don't have "FIRST THINGS FIRST."

I need only look at myself. As pastor, so often I act as if I must carry the church. Ba humbug - I forget the church carries me. Christ bids me to take his yoke which is easy and his burden which is light -- these should lift me up and enable me to fly as God's messenger.

How often I look at my schedule of unfinished business and set out to conquer it all WITHOUT



first kneeling and asking and seeking God's help -- just to see if I'm doing **my** will or your will rather than HIS WILL.

Yes so often I carry on like the eager conqueror rather than the tool in the hand of the Master who has already conquered all. I set my jaw against the world, not remembering him who has already overcome the world by crib and cross.

Yes - I get upset because I don't see the visible results of my seed-planting. But oh how I forget -- I forget I was called to be the seedplanted and waterer -- not the harvester. The harvest is God's department.

I ~~sermonize~~ on forgiveness. I teach the gospel of God's mercy. I announce God's grace in his Name. I officiate as God bestows his free gift of eternal love in Baptism. Then I promptly ignore applying the gospel to myself. Instead I allow my guilt feelings and my guilt to push and shove me around -- I try to justify my existence by responding to my guilt.

I wrap myself in the swaddling clothes of "church talk" -- making the preservation of the institution my goal, failing to see that it is the Christ child in the swaddling clothes who is my Lord and deserves my worship.

Yes - these are just some of my sins, But I'm sure they are not only my sins. They are the sins of the church, and with different trimmings -- they are the sins in our homes, offices, factories, and bustling shopping centers

We have allowed our energies, our creations, our gifts, our plans & sideshows to become the primary focus of our celebration -- failing to do the simplest thing first, the first thing first -- being ready to receive what God has offered us. For there is no way that we can experience the peace and Joy of Christ's birth WHEN WE are nearly exhausted or burned out from doing our own thing.

And so during these last five days, I hope I will really hear God's message for me in Advent. I hope I will hear his message of FIRST THINGS FIRST.

That first, I ~~will~~ <sup>will</sup> simply get ready to receive him. And that I'll be more ready if I don't try to steal the spotlight from the babe of Bethlehem. That it's the babe's presence that we have come to share at Christmas.

And that means that our shows don't have to be perfect -- a few cobwebs and dust won't detract from the Christ child; a few flaws in the Christmas program won't disturb the real peace and joy of Christmas at all; a gift or two in the name of Christ is quite sufficient for any one who lives by His will.

Yes - just being ready to receive him will surely make Christmas a great day of peace and joy.

And so my Christian friends, I apologize if the church or I have joined the ranks of the secular guilt factories around us -- forcing us to make burnt offerings -- forcing us to make Christmas a celebration of doing our thing-- of more attention to our gifts and sideshows, rather than attention to the one whom God sent as a free gift for all.

FOR by this act - God's will - we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

AMEN

ADVENT IV

Luth Church of the Master, Troy

Dec. 24, 1978

"THE HIGHEST FAVOR OF ALL"

"Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name, Jesus." Luke 1:30-31

NAME: *Mary, meaning bitter myrrh in Hebrew*  
BORN: *probably around 10 B.C. or thereabouts*  
AGE: *around 14 at the time of Jesus' birth*  
PARENTS: *possibly Joachim and Anna, of Nazareth*  
MARITAL STATUS: Engaged teenager  
SOCIAL STATUS: Peasant girl  
FIANCE: Joseph,  
Carpenter, migrant laborer  
TALENTS/ABILITIES: Selected as the  
"favorite" by God to bear the Savior  
of the World.

So says today's text: Mary was the one with whom God had found FAVOR - she had become one of his favorites. She had been given the highest favor of all: to be the mother of Jesus. But what does that all mean? What does it mean to be the "favored" one of God?

In our contemporary world - we all know what we mean when we **ask**: "Who's your favorite." We mean the best one! The most attractive! The most talented! And if we're talking about a favorite son or daughter, very often we mean the one WHO WE GIVE PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT -- the one who gets SPECIAL PRIVILEGES - maybe even the ONE WHO HAS BEEN SPOILED. Whatever the case - to be the favorite ONE in our world is to have a life of greater esteem -- to be living a life of greater privilege & popularity

Well - would any of us believe that such was the case for Mary as the favored one of God??

We need only look at a few facts of her life to see that being favored by God DOES NOT MEAN a life of great esteem and pomp and popularity.

Right from the start - Mary was struggling with negative social pressure. How could she explain to her girlfriends that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit? Imagine the gossip as the gals went to draw water each morning. Being engaged to Joseph would help - but the tongues would still be wagging.

Then there was the journey to Bethlehem for census taking. As a pregnant woman, Mary had the great privilege of bouncing around on the back of a burro. No hospital or doctor awaiting her arrival -- just a stable with the stench of cattle dung.

And after that first birth as a teen-ager -- there would soon be the necessary escape to Egypt to avoid Herod's massacre. That's hardly what any mother would call a privileged transfer.

Then it was back to Nazareth to live on the salary of a carpenter -- today comparable to a migrant worker's living. Poverty was the trademark of this holy family. And to complicate her life - Joseph must have died early -- for there are no references to him when Jesus began his public ministry.

Yes - she was the favored one of God. But did that mean any special privilege with her Son, Jesus? We see time and again - that Mary could not have felt much self-esteem based upon her treatment from her son.

At twelve, Jesus strays from his parents at the temple. And when they find him - the rabbis tell them what a great son they have -- yet here's a son who seems to have very indifferent feelings toward his own folks.

Imagine Mary's feelings the time she came with her other boys - seeking to see Jesus. The disciples answered the door - and then told Jesus that his mother and brothers were waiting to see him. And he responded - "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother."

Another time a woman yelled out to Jesus: "Blessed is the womb that bore you," and Jesus replied: "No, rather, blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it."

Is all this what it means to be the favored one of God? And yet after all this seemingly indifferent and stand-offish treatment - Mary loved her son Jesus to the bitter end. It was Mary at the foot of the cross with her son -- his trusted disciples had deserted him in his greatest hour of need. But not Mary - not the favored one of God - she was a faithful and loving mother through the last agonizing breath.

And that, dear friends of the Christ-child, is the trademark of being a favored one of God: the one who lets God's power shine through his or her life to the very end regardless of his/her difficult circumstances of life.

THE HIGHEST FAVOR OF ALL is to be used by God to fulfill his purposes in life. There is no higher favor in life. There is no greater privilege. There is no greater self-esteem than TO DO THE WILL OF GOD.

And that was the example of Mary -- from the angel's announcement to the early morning hours at the empty tomb. Mary lived as the favored one BECAUSE SHE ALLOWED GOD TO USE HER for his purposes. It would have been so natural for her to say: "I'm not good enough for this favor, God!"

But thank God - he used her - and he uses all of us - EVERY faithful follower is a favored one @ each of us has been chosen to bring the Christ into this world. Each of us has been given the HIGHEST

FAVOR OF ALL -- the privilege and opportunity to offer Christ's forgiveness to one another and to that part of the world that we can touch! To be used by God in this way is the highest favor of all!

And yet - millions choose to go unused. To go through life unwilling and unwanted to accommodate the power of Jesus Christ. This is the greatest of all tragedies.

They put up all kinds of roadblocks -- some saying the whole thing is a fairy tale -- others saying it can't be true because of all the suffering in the world -- still others rejecting THIS HIGHEST FAVOR because they don't like what they see from other Christians in the church.

But how sad! Because they get caught up in the details of a birth or in the hypocrasies of a religious practice AND OVERLOOK THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR OF ALL: the great favor and privilege - the great peace and joy -- the great love OF LIVING IN THE IMAGE OF CHRIST!

Thank God for the example of Mary. Thank God that he took the risk to use this common woman. Thank God that she responded to the HIGHEST FAVOR OF ALL to be used as a carrier of Christ's presence into this world!

AMEN

ADVENT IV  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
December 23, 1984  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"DON'T BE AFRAID!"

(Gabriel) went to Mary and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God."  
Luke 1:28-29

A great thrill of parish ministry is sharing the joys and agonies of pre-marital couples. Not so different from the day that you and I were married, pre-marital couples still come to their pastors with some very deep questions about the future. To put it into the words of today's text -- they are often "deeply or greatly troubled." Stated more simply -- they're scared! Scared about looking 25 or 35 or 45 years down the road!

It's much like the young couple who not so long ago shared the following thoughts with me: "Pastor, it really is difficult to make a decision to get married. There's no doubt about our love -- we really love one another, but the commitment is so great ... so lasting. WE really believe that God will grace us to make the right decision. We really believe we should be married. But it's just THE LIVING OUT OF THAT DECISION that really scares us!"

How true those words are for all of us. The decisions, even the big ones like marriage, they are not always that difficult to make. But THE LIVING OUT OF THOSE DECISIONS.... that's another whole thing .... that's the real scary business of life. And then take it all one step further -- LIVING OUT THE DECISION THAT SOMEONE ELSE HAS MADE FOR **You**!?

Imagine that kind of pressure cooker. That was the situation faced by the mother of our Lord, Mary. She did not make the decision TO BE WITH CHILD. She did have the pleasure of sexual intimacy. God did not ask her: Mary, how would you like to be pregnant?? Mary, would you like to bear the Savior of the World? Mary, how would you like to be the teen-ager who goes down in history as radically altering the world's religious focus?? God did not give her the choice. He simply called a messenger, Gabriel, and said: "Go tell Mary that she will be the one." So Gabriel made the announcement: "Greetings Mary, you are the highly favored one of the Lord. The Lord is with you."

The evangelist then says: "Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be." Talk about understatement. Talk about irony and humor. In short, Mary had to be thinking: "Gabriel, you can go and powder your wings ... or something else. What are you talking about? Why me?"

I'm a nobody! You've got to have the wrong girl. There's no way I can be the "favored one of God." Thanks alot, Gabriel, but I think you'd better give the honor to someone who's more qualified."

Who could possibly blame Mary for being "greatly troubled" -- or in the vernacular, scared out of her wits? It's hard enough to live out our own decisions. But who wants to live out someone else's decisions -- and not only someone else -- but God's?!? That's all a bit too much!

Can we not appreciate Mary's fear? A fifteen-year old peasant girl is told by God's messenger (and that's pretty incredible already) that she will be the great one to bear the Son of God. Moreover, she's told that she will become pregnant by the Holy Spirit -- now that's enough to cause her some wonder and confusion! Moreover, that this Son of God will come into the world to save humanity from its obsession with evil -- and that ~~God's~~ salvation will be accomplished through her son's suffering and death! Bad enough to be the mother by the Holy Spirit -- but what mother wants to see her son willingly die for the sin of mankind?? What mother would not be terrified by this kind of news?

But almost in the same breath Gabriel announces: DON'T BE AFRAID, MARY, FOR YOU HAVE FOUND FAVOR WITH GOD. And within moments Mary responds -- "I am the Lord's servant ... may it be so as you have said."

Talk about a sudden change ... an instant conversion. How can Mary so quickly go from fear to ~~courage~~? The answer is almost a cliché ... a platitude, but nevertheless the truth. "To find favor with God" means that God not only makes a decision for us, but he walks with us as we live out that decision. That's the difference between faithfulness and fearfulness. The faithful knows that God is walking with him. Mary came to the realization that she would not be alone -- that God would be walking with her.

How was this so? First and foremost, God gave her his word! He promised he would be with her -- he would not desert her! Moreover, he gave her his special sign -- the messenger Gabriel. Moreover, he gave her the support that she needed -- a loving husband, Joseph! Moreover, he gave her the support and assurance of her friend and kinswoman, Elizabeth. In short, God gave her what anyone of us would need under the circumstances: HIS LOVING PRESENCE THROUGH OTHER SUPPORTIVE PEOPLE. For that's the way God walks with us -- through his servants, through his ministers, through his caring, loving people known as the church!

That's always the way God turns fear into faith -- he gives us his supportive love through caring friends and relatives. That's the kind of supportive love that was truly evident in this community this past week -- possibly more evident than it has been for months. It's truly regrettable that sometimes tragedy is the only thing that motivates people TO REALLY CARE ... TO REALLY



LOVE AND BE CONCERNED ABOUT ONE ANOTHER. Since Billy Fisher's death, new meaning has been given to supportive love and friendship at Ottawa Hills High School. Students, parents, teachers, administrators, clergy -- the whole community struggled a little harder this week to be supportive of one another. Because there's been lots of fear ... lots of scary feelings since Bill's death last weekend. And fear can only be overcome when people begin to genuinely care about each other; when people truly begin to communicate with each other; when parents and children really take the time to listen to one another and <sup>share</sup> each other's hurts. In short, when people begin to walk with God ... to share his supportive love ... then fear becomes faith and trust and hope!!

Well, the facts are that not only Ottawa Hills has had to live out this decision this past week. Because God has not only tapped the heart strings of Ottawa Hills. God has done for all of us exactly what he did for Mary -- he has chosen each one of us to be a Christ-bearer! Each of us has been chosen to bear the burden of his Son in this world. He has not only asked us to make a decision for Christ; he has asked us to live out that decision for Christ, just as he did for Mary!

And our reactions are not much different than Mary's, are they? Who me, God?? Why me?? You can't possibly see me as a favored one in this world! There are a lot of others who are better than me ... a lot more religious! Certainly I can't assume responsibility for Jesus Christ in this world!?! I mean, after all God, that causes me to be greatly troubled! That's really more than I can handle!

Most of us are far beyond 15, but many of us respond to God's call for discipleship much like a teen-ager! We are afraid. We are inhibited. We are unsure of ourselves. Like the little peasant girl, Mary, we are very quick to point out all of our inadequacies.

But God will not have us that way! He will not allow us to see ourselves as impotent or inadequate for his mission. He will not allow us to belittle our gifts and talents. Even with our imperfections, he wants us to be impossibility thinkers -- to seek to do the impossible for his sake. He wants us to bear the Christ child in the world.

So he assures us as he did Mary: "Don't be afraid, for you have found favor with God." The three greatest words of the New Testament: "DON'T BE AFRAID." I am with you -- I will walk with you to help you fulfill my decision for you. Emmanuel -- God with us. "Don't be afraid" -- how critical those words of faith!

Every time God give us a task to do in his name, He also gives us a messenger-like Gabriel saying: "DON'T BE AFRAID." Trust God to help you. Trust God to forgive you. Trust God to support you. Trust God to find servants who will minister to you.

In Mary, God took the lowliest of his maiden people -- a poor peasant girl. A girl without status, without honor, without wealth, without land or cattle, without parental experience. He took her in her own world, her own house, her own body, her own womb, in short, in all the things that count -- and he called her out of herself to become someone greater than she was or ever imagined herself to be. So who are you or I to think that we are unable to be the bearers of Christ -- we who have so much more than Mary could have ever imagined!! Mary simply trusted that God would help her fulfill his mission; and he did, for Christ was born of Mary. So Mary said: I am the Lord's servant, do to me as you have said.

When we learn that faithfulness is simply letting God walk with us to live out his decisions. Sure it's risky! *Sure* it's sometimes scary! Sure it's filled with unknowns! But what greater love is there? What greater purpose for life is there? What greater fulfillment can there be ... than to say to God and one another: "HERE I AM GOD; DO WITH ME AS YOU WILL. USE MY ABILITIES. USE MY GOODS. USE MY INTELLIGENCE. USE MY COMPASSION. USE ME TO SERVE THE GOOD WILL OF ALL HUMANITY -- for in so using me, this world will come to glorify you and learn of your love for it!

God used Mary to give the rest of the world hope and courage. Oh, it wasn't an impossible task for a 15-year old virgin to bear the Christ, the Son of God. But it was a necessary task if hope and courage were to be given to the world.

God uses and calls us much in the same way. He doesn't give us impossible tasks -- tasks beyond our capabilities. But he does give us the necessary task of bring hope and courage to the world BY BEARING THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

For some -- the specifics of that task may be knitting mittens for children to poor to buy them for themselves. For others it may be visiting an elderly shut-in who is alone and possibly forgotten on Christmas Day. For others it may be calling attention to some unethical practices that ought not be part of business as usual. For still others it may be taking an active stand against further escalation of the nuclear arms race. For still many more it may be giving generously to some cause like Feed Your Neighbor even when we know it will only help to feed someone for a short time.

The important thing is not only to make the decision for Christ -- but to live out that decision by bearing his love in this world. Like Gabriel, God continues to send messengers of encouragement for us. Today, his messenger is Peter, but the message hasn't changed in more than 1900 years: "DON'T BE AFRAID, FOR YOU HAVE FOUND GREAT FAVOR WITH GOD."

AMEN

ADVENT IV

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

December 20, 1992

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"IT'S ALL IN A NAME!"

"Behold, this virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call him Emmanuel, which means "God with us." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took Mary as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he name him Jesus."

Matthew 1:24-25

In 1945, Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin met at Yalta. During the conference, Harry Hopkins, then personal attache to Roosevelt, asked the three to give their autographs for his son back in the states. They heartily agreed, but the only scrap of paper they could find was a rublenote worth about \$8.00. In recent years, that signed note was sold at an auction for \$42,000. It is the only known document that had the NAMES of these three men who changed the course of history. IT WAS ALL IN THEIR NAMES -- the names made that \$8.00 rublenote 5,250 times its original value.

Just yesterday, that reality was again illustrated for me. As a family, we finally took the plunge on Dec. 19. For months, Sarah has been badgering her parents for a dog. And with her sister now in Norway, the frequency of her appeals has escalated. So, lo and behold, when dad called the Humane Society yesterday - they had an 8-week old mixed terrier puppy who resembles Benji. When Sarah and friends arrived home after the Sunday School rehearsal - there was great joy ...for this was the one thing that she wanted for Christmas. But the first question asked by her friends within moments of their arrival was: WHAT WILL WE NAME HER?

Whether born in Bethlehem or Toledo, Ohio ... whether dog, cat or human being ... the first thing of any great significance for any living thing is HER NAME. To be born is not to have a number ... not to have a sign ... not to have a shape, but to have a word signifying one's IDENTITY. One of the greatest gifts given by God is the ability to remember another person's name. Anyone having that gift knows its benefits in making friends and influencing people. And what a tragedy when we lose that gift. To live is to be named ... and to celebrate the goodness of that identity for a lifetime. In fact, some families get so caught up in "names" that they NAME all their children with same letter: Samantha, Stan, Susan, Sondra, Sherry & Seth. And we all know how good we feel when a family or friend names their child after us. Yes, even in this computer age, a number is not enough: IT'S STILL ALL IN A NAME!!

But names not only reveal identity, they also convey power and authority. A mortgage contract is worthless unless

it bears a name. Which one of us can honestly say that we would never want our names in the news!?! Journalists have long recognized that if you want people to get excited about your publication - then just put their names in it. That's one of the reasons the Village Voice in Ottawa Hills is so popular - it keeps the residents names in the news. And to the contrary - sometimes we know the danger of having our names printed ... IT WILL DIVULGE WHAT WE DON'T WANT KNOWN IN THE COMMUNITY. Yes, esp. in these busy days of Christmas buying -- we know the power and authority of our names WHEN SOMEONE SAYS: JUST SIGN ON THE DOTTED LINE!! Come about January 15th -- we all wish we could change our names!!

Speaking of signing one's name, I'm reminded of the story told to me by one of our members recently. A leading industrialist had three trusted friends - a doctor, pastor & lawyer. This industrialist was the wealthiest man in the community, and the three friends were always kidding him: "Well George, you know, you can't take it with you." Having been ribbed ONE TOO MANY TIMES ABOUT THIS, he finally devised a way that he could take it with him. He gave them each \$75,000 WITH ONE STIPULATION: ON THE DAY OF HIS FUNERAL, EACH OF THEM WAS TO DEPOSIT THAT SAME \$75,000 INTO HIS GRAVE. He figured he'd take at least \$225,000 with him.

The day of the funeral came. While at the gravesite, all three tossed in their envelopes before the dirt was shoveled. As they were leaving the cemetery, the pastor asked the doctor: "O.K. doc, did you really leave all \$75,000?" "Well," the doc answered, "we're just getting a new MRI scanner at the hospital; all we needed was \$25,000; so I skimmed off 25 thou, but there were 50 one-thousand \$ bills in my envelop! How about you, pastor?" "Well, I have to admit -- I wanted to leave it all -- but we only needed \$30,000 for Debt Free in '93 - so I left \$45,000 all in 100 \$ bills in my envelop." They both looked at the lawyer: "Well, how about you?!" Without missing a beat, the lawyer said: "Being a trusted member of the bar, I left all \$75,000 in my envelop! I just wrote a check for \$75,000, signed my name, & dropped the whole thing in that gravesite!" (Told by lawyer)

Obviously, this story illustrates that our names can be used for UPLFITING PURPOSES or for GREEDY SCHEMES! When I preached on this text 12 years ago, I told the story of the couple we knew in Milwaukee, Wis. They had given birth to two daughters, and they were again with child. But this time they were convinced that God would finally bless them with a baby boy. As you guessed, they had a third daughter ... and they named her "JinX!" Tell me now that there is no power in a name! Which one of us would want to spend a lifetime with the name "Jinx?" Is it any wonder that in one county in Minnesota last year there were 641 applications for a change of name. Our names reveal a great deal about our NATURES.

That's why the 2nd Commandment says: "You shall not take the NAME of the Lord God in vain!" It is not God's NATURE

to damn or curse anyone or anything! Jesus teaches us to "hallow his name" because that's the essence of God's nature: He has shown us that his nature is not one which curses or deceives or destroys; his nature is to love, to forgive, to offer mercy even to sinners like us!

So, on this 4th Sunday in Advent, the pericopes direct us to concentrate on ONE NAME ... THE NAME ABOVE ALL OTHER NAMES ... EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US! The gospel tells us today that in our Christmas preparation and anticipation ... WE NEED GO NO FURTHER THAN THIS NAME! It's All In This Name! When we sing, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," we've sung it all! But how can that be so? How can "it all be in a Name?"

First, the name "Emmanuel" signifies a radical difference of our God from all other gods: OUR GOD CAME TO BE WITH US!! All other religions remove their gods from the people who are supposed to be the followers! Our God takes the initiative TO COME DOWN TO EARTH AND BE WITH US! Our God does not force us to make a lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca in order to have an authentic religious experience. Our God does not put himself up on some ivory tower where he is unreachable by the average believer. OUR GOD IS NOT AFRAID TO SHOW US WHAT IT MEANS TO BE TRULY HUMAN! Even at the risk of rejection and persecution - our God comes to BE WITH US!! I have always found it strange when people say they can't accept God as Jesus. In Jesus, God shows us the light and countenance of his character. Only an arrogant or ignorant person would choose the darkness rather than HIS light!

But the name "Emmanuel" not only signifies this radical difference. Most other gods ONLY COME TO THIER FOLLOWERS AFTER THEY HAVE SHAPED UP! This Emmanuel comes to his subjects while they are yet sinful and unclean! Emmanuel is a God who came into a world yet filled with lust, adultery, bloodshed, violence, poverty, arrogance, greed, and all the other unspiritual crudities! This Emmanuel, unlike the saint in the red suit with the white beard, not only gives gifts to good little boys and girls: HE OFFERS HIS GIFTS TO EVERYONE WHO NEEDS THEM, BECAUSE WE HAVE ALL FALLEN SHORT OF HIS GLORY BY OUR OWN GOOD WORKS! This "Emmanuel" knows what it's like to be a Peter or Paul, John or Jeffrey, Deborah or Danielle -- this God knows the meaning of hunger & hassles - of temptation and trauma - of loneliness and laughter - of ridicule and rejection! This "Emmanuel" is not a Lord of the heavens, but a God of the earth - who cares about the human frustrations & joys & sorrows OF BEING HERE WITH US ON EARTH!

Yes, finally, this "Emmanuel" is the only name NEEDED TO GAIN ENTRE INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD. - It is by his name, not our own names, that we are found worthy to be the royal priesthood of our God. Let's face it - we all know the importance of having a mediator - a conciliator -- OF HAVING SOMEONE WHO PREPARES THE WAY FOR US OUT OF THE GARBAGE AND GOOK THAT WE HAVE GOTTEN OURSELVES INTO IN THIS WORLD! That is our Emmanuel! In Holy Baptism, it is his name that we

carry through this world; and it is through his name that we gain entrance into the mansion that he has prepared for us. Not our good names; not our good works; not our piety or pompous religiousity. All these virtuous acts are important, but secondary! Nothing compares to Emmanuel -- the God with us ... the Christ who came to assure us that nothing in all creation would separate us from the love of God the Father!

Do you need any further convincing that "It's All in A Name?" I hope not - because this is THE ONE NAME that we take with us into the grave; it's the ONLY TREASURE that defies any price at any auction or any funeral. "It's all in this Name, Emmanuel" and that's why we sing: "O Come let us Adore Him, Christ the Lord!" AMEN.

Advent IV  
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo  
December 22, 1996  
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor

## **“JOSEPH TELLS IT LIKE IT WAS!”**

*“... an angel of the Lord appeared to (Joseph) in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sin. [Matt. 1:20-21]”*

**Tell me, what would you have done? When the rabbi asked me, “Have you brought a token to give to the bride to signify that the covenant has been made?” What did he expect? I was a poor man -- I could not bring her a dowry of wealth!! But I did bring her total commitment! I had complete love for Mary! She was my temple ... my wealth ... my wisdom ... my passion! I would bring to her all I possessed--every stick, every penny, every piece of hewn wood! The Scribe wrote out the terms of the contract, and I spoke the words: **“I, JOSEPH, WILL WORK AND HONOR MARY IN THE MANNER OF THE FAITH OF ISRAEL AND OUR GOD! ANY MY PROPERTY WILL BE HERS FOREVER!”** And it was done! We were betrothed--engaged to be married! This act of engagement meant that Mary would keep herself only to me!!**

**Then three months before we were to be married, Mary returned from a visit to her Aunt Elizabeth and told me, “Joseph, I am with child!” Imagine, just like that, she says, “Joseph, I’m pregnant!!” What would you have done?? And then the most preposterous, most ridiculous of all: the story about an angel and his message. What would you have done?? She says to me, “I’m pregnant by the Holy Spirit!” Sure enough -- my fifteen-year-old-bride-to-be is pregnant by some Holy Spirit; I figured she was possessed by the devil. Then I thought, maybe she’s really guilty and covering her sin with this story of the Holy Spirit.**

**But to be the mother of the Messiah!?! To be the mother of the promised Son of God!?! No way!! This was far too much to believe! That evening I was so stunned I couldn’t speak! I staggered home as one having drunk too much wine! I lay in bed--my face hot with tears--my body racked in agony and**

sweat!! Over and over again, I asked: "*Whose child is this?? Who has slept with my Mary??*" I could not even pray!!

You have no idea of my sleepless nights: tossing, turning, sweating, fretting--what to do? what to say!? I could denounce her publicly for violating God's law ... and of course, Jewish law also prescribed her punishment: DEATH BY STONING! But I loved her! I loved her dearly! I had already pledged my lifelong affection and obedience! And now, to demand death?! No Way!! No matter what she had done, I could not see her destroyed or humiliated!! But what could I do?? She was already showing ... and people were looking at me strangely! If I did not denounce her publicly -- then everyone would think I was responsible! I was too much of a coward for that!! There was only one way -- I would privately give her a bill of divorcement; this way she would not be hurt publicly!!

That night with my course of action finally determined -- I lay restlessly in bed: tossing, wrestling, struggling, searching ... trying to answer: "*Whose child is this?*" It was in this half-awake ... half-asleep steeper that I heard my name ... as if someone was calling it through a long tunnel: "*Joseph, Joseph, Son of David ... it is all right ... be calm Joseph.*" If you really knew me ... I was anything but a calm person normally. Then suddenly out of the darkness, an angel emerged in this dream & said: "*I am a messenger from God. I am sent to tell you that you must not fear to take Mary for your wife, for that which is conceived in her is indeed of the Holy Spirit as she said. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name, Jesus, for He will save his people from their sin.*" This messenger went on: "*Remember, Joseph, the prophecy of Isaiah-- 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel, God with us.'* That prophecy is fulfilled, Joseph, son of David. So delay no longer in taking Mary as your wife. But know her not until she has borne this Holy One."

What happened after that I was never quite sure! I simply awoke knowing what I was to do. I was not a man given to seeing visions or hearing strange prophecies. I was a simple carpenter--and now I was being asked to believe the incredible! My Mary--My Mary was to be the mother of the Messiah --the mother of the One sent to Save Isarel!! Incredible!!



Tell me, what would you have believed?? What would you have done?? Would you have run to your doctors ... your psychiatrists ... your pharmacists ... your learned scholars?? It was simply too incredible -- me, the stepfather of the Son of God?? I could not comprehend it all!! Yet one thing I knew: I loved Mary deeply -- with all my being!! I wanted her as my wife ... and I would believe her story and all that I had seen & heard whether it was comprehensible or not!!

So - you know how the story went from there. We received word of an enrollment for taxation: the Romans demanded that we return to the town of our ancestors for this enrollment. Being of the lineage of David, it meant Mary and I had to journey some 80 miles on foot to Bethlehem. That was no easy journey. Bethlehem was crowded with enrollees. The smell, the stink, the noise was unbearable! There was no room for us anywhere! As you know, our son was born in a cattle cave carved out of a hillside! The place reeked of manure and urine! There was no bed, no bed clothing, so Mary wrapped him in swaddling cloths & laid him in a manger--a feed trough for animals. Physicians in your day might wonder how he survived in that filth!! I marveled as well!! If this really were God's Son-- then why such meager circumstances ... why such filth ... why such suffering & hardship from the beginning?? As you can see - your baby Jesus did not enter this world with the kind of romantic limelight you sing about in your Christmas carols!! He entered much as he left -- amidst the smell, the stink and the corruption of humanity!!

I'm sure you remember we could not return directly to Nazareth; we had to spend a couple of years in Egypt while Herod bloodied innocent children in his rampage to destroy Jesus. But God was again victorious -- he used Mary and me to protect the infant Jesus so that He might grow and fulfill his purpose for all humanity. After leaving Egypt, we reached Nazareth and settled down to the daily routine of parenting and work. Over the years we had six other children: four sons -- James, Joses, Jude & Simeon; and two daughters. We were a poor family, but spiritually rich & devout! It was my duty to see that my sons were brought up in the full knowledge of the scriptures. Your society often seems to think that this is a

mother's job; how pathetic that so many fathers provide such a poor spiritual example for their sons & daughters!! As fathers - we insisted that religious education be given to every boy of every village. In fact, in every village, a beth-midrash--a house of learning served as the place of education & prayer. At the end of a working day, like other fathers, I would go and read and study with my sons together with their religious teachers. As you can see -- it was Judiasm in the ancient world that initiated the importance of teaching laity the faith. Your reformation was merely re-establishing something that was taken for granted in the 1st century!! We fathers set the example for the young of our day: we went to church school as adults & children!! There was no such thing as a church school for only children. It was from our people, the Jews, that Jesus came ... and it was our heritage of religious education that has been passed on to you! So my friends -- you have not only received Jesus from us ... but you have also received our heritage of educating God's people!

And yes -- just like other boys -- Jesus grew and asked many perplexing questions. And as a family, and esp a father, we sought to struggle and answer those questions of faith. For that is what it means to be a Holy Family -- it means that God has given us the privilege of blessing our children with His Godliness ... His Holiness ... the privilege of being guided by the greatest Light of all Time -- Jesus Christ, the Son of God!! You who are yet alive still have this great blessing & privilege: **GOD CALLS YOU TODAY & EVERY DAY TO HIS HOLY FAMILY!**

Like no other generation -- you have seen the fulfillment of God's love in Jesus. You have so much more than a manger! You have the cross! You have the empty tomb! You have the resurrection & assurance of everlasting forgiveness! Are you sharing these blessings with your children?? Will they be Holy Families to their children?? Will the tradition of Holy Families be continued from now & forevermore?!? **GOD HELP EACH OF YOU TO REMEMBER: YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED & CHOSEN TO BE HIS HOLY FAMILY!!**

AMEN.

Advent IV  
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo  
December 21, 1997  
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor

## **“THE BEST IS YET TO COME!”**

*“O Bethlehem, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel ... and he shall feed his flock, in the strength of the Lord in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.” Mic 5:2-4 “My soul manifests the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” Luke 1:47*

Have you been in the new-born-infants department lately? Do you remember your first-ever-time in the new-born-infants department?? One of my fondest memories of new borns are rocking horses!! Others often admire baby booties. My absolutely favorite wearing apparel was always what I called “the one-piece overnight jump suit with the rear-end-flap compartment.” Boy - do I remember how many of these we would need to wash every week!! Can you imagine what it must be like to have seven-new-borns in rear-end-compartment-jump-suits at the same time!?!?

Well - you obviously can see that I spent part of this last week in the new-born-infant department instead of shopping for my own family. I was having one of my favorite moments--watching pregnant mothers (and a few fathers) anticipate their new borns. If any of you are depressed at the moment -- I suggest that you go to the mall this afternoon and spend a few hours in the new-born-infant dept. You will see radiant happiness there like no other place at Christmas. You will see anticipatory joy--and you will learn anew what Advent is all about: GETTING READY FOR NEW LIFE! But most of all - as you watch the faces and fantasies of these expectant parents -- you will see them saying: “THE BEST IS YET TO COME!”

And just imagine -- if in 1997 we can get excited about anticipating new-borns today in our lives--or seeing the excitement of expectant parents--then imagine how exhilarating it must have been for both Elizabeth and Mary. They were not only excited about being mothers -- God had chosen them to be the mothers of infants who would change the course of human history. After the birth of John the Baptist and then Jesus -- our relationship to God and each other would never be the same again. If the world could ever say, “The Best Is Yet To Come,” this was one time in history that there was great truth in this saying!

And so we might say that every year on the 4th Sunday of Advent we celebrate a “pregnant moment!” Because the term “pregnant” means “rich, fertile, full -- it carries the implication of unrealized potential.” Dear friends - go into any new-born-infant department and you will see rich, fertile unrealized potential. You will see great hopes! You will see great dreams! You will see visions of sugar plums dancing & great promise from a child soon to be born! Young teens ... hear my words: This is how your parents felt & feel about your coming into the world to them! Your parents have always had great hopes and dreams

for you... and they still do and always will! So get into this spirit of Christmas!! Never forget what God expected from you and His own Son: that "The Best Is Yet To Come!" In fact, even before Jesus was born, the Hebrew writer clearly said that God already knew that from His Son-- "The Best Was Yet To Come!"

Is it any wonder that both Micah and Mary could proclaim in verse and song today: "Oh Bethlehem ... from you shall come forth for me own who is to rule in Israel ... whose origin is from old ... And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God." "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Do you hear these verses saying, *"The Best Is Yet To Come!"*

Well, as we all know -- expectant parents don't remain in the new-born-infant department forever. The fantasies of parents often become deep frustrations when our children hit "the terrible twos," or "the angst of adolescence," or even "the terror of the twenties" in the real world. When parents encounter these realities we sometimes wonder how we ever thought our "pregnant moments" were the beginning of "the best that is yet to come!" But today, Mary's faithful example shows that God fulfills his promise of "The Best Is Yet to Come" even with a mother who had the worst of life's human frustrations with a son.

First, Mary's example teaches that God never promised his "best" instantly to her or anyone else! The Christ-child was born Lord of all ... but it would take many years of waiting and hoping before his Lordship would finally show itself on Calvary and the Empty Tomb. Up to the Easter event - Mary had to assume a posture of "patient obedience" -- waiting for the fulness of her Son's Lordship to fully show itself. And we know from scripture there were many frustrating moments for Mary - but she remained "patiently obedient!"

*This becomes the ethical imperative of this lesson for every faithful Christian -- "patient obedience" -- always seeking and demonstrating God's mercy and loving kindness even when THE BEST HAS NOT YET COME!* That's why Mary was undoubtedly a better disciple than the other twelve. She was patiently obedient -- seeking always to demonstrate God's mercy and loving kindness even when faced with the rejection & crucifixion of her own Son.

Especially these days of Christmas madness - we need to pray for "patient obedience" - to learn how to WAIT for God's grace & goodness to be fully revealed in our earthly relationships. "THE BEST IS YET TO COME," but we must never forget that this may not happen in your lifetime or mine! And yet, "The Best Always Does Come" because the resurrection is God's promise to all of us who remain patiently obedient and faithful. We must not compare God's "BEST" to our "instant gratification" notions & desires -- God's mercy & loving kindness require a lot more patient obedience than microwave popcorn!

Secondly, the prophet today reveals that "The Best Is Yet To Come" because the Messiah will be a shepherd king, not a human ruler who seeks his own power, glory and prestige. In short, Christians seek a pastoral caregiver and servant -- not a pompous prince or pope who glorifies himself. *That's why "The Best Is Yet To Come" for Glenwood ... because that remains the focus of your Search -- a representative of the Christ who is truly a servant who feeds this flock with mercy, forgiveness and loving kindness ... rather than a bully who likes to throw his weight around to simply get things to go his or her way!!*

Finally - "The Best Is Yet To Come" because in Mary and all pregnant mothers we see what God values most in all obedient children -- an intimate faithfulness rather than a superficial acquaintance. Every person and every congregation will never be secure if his/her relationship remains a "superficial acquaintance" with God Almighty. *God's grace is like what we cherish with our most intimate friends -- with Him, we can risk telling Him everything in absolute confidence that He will "forgive us & remember our sin no more!"*

Regretably -- some say they know God -- but they remain forever bound by guilt, greed & hostility - making life miserable for themselves and others around them. Such persons only have a "superficial acquaintance" with the Father of the Christ-child ... because Jesus came into this world to put an end to everlasting guilt, greed & shame. When we really get to know God in the person of his Son, Jesus -- then like his mother, we can sing: *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness ... on the guilt ... on the failures & frustrations ... of this servant."*

When we know the Christ-child of God with this kind of patient and intimate obedience -- then we can always say - "THE BEST IS YET TO COME!" And that glory & truth of God will be more fully revealed on Christmas Eve!

AMEN.