



President Walton's December 2020 Message

Tis the Season to be Jolly



What a strange year 2020 has been. Many of us entered this year thinking we would have a clearer focus on the future. We even adopted a little motto: “Reaching Many in 2020...for Jesus!” Last Christmas was an amazing time in my family as we welcomed our grandson, Fletcher, just a week before Christmas day. My wife Edith and I anticipated spending many moments with our growing family, now with five grandchildren. There is something about Christmas and babies that fills our hearts with joy.

Christmases past and Christmas present seem miles apart. Last year people traveled to be with family and friends freely and without any real concern. Malls were filled, as were the roadways. Most people looked forward to the New Year with great anticipation with high hopes and dreams, goals and plans. Now people are eager for 2020 to come to an end. Last year we sang, “Tis the season to be jolly...” This year many are left with unanswered questions. Will there be a resurgence of COVID that will lock down our nation again? Will we see a successful vaccine, and when will it be available to us? What about the economy, the transfer of power for the presidency, the civil unrest in our nation? It is a season of wonder. Many wonder when we will have the ability to gather and actually hug our loved ones again? Maybe we wonder if our churches will recover if we are unable to gather for worship again. We wonder about communion, weddings, funerals, things like confirmation and graduations. So many looming questions that take the jolly out of the season and draw our attention away from the reality of what God has done for us in Jesus. Yet, this is the jolliest of seasons as we remember God’s grace for us in Jesus.

Remember the hauntingly beautiful Christmas carol, “I Wonder as I Wander”? Think for a moment about the lyrics. *“I wonder as I wander out under the sky; How Jesus my Saviour did come for to die, For poor on’ry people like you and like I, I wonder as I wander out under the sky.”* ([link to song](#)) What makes this season truly jolly is remembering our God has a plan, and it remains unchanged even now. He already had people like you and me in mind as the angels spoke to the shepherds abiding in the fields. In fact Paul reminds us in Ephesians 1, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who *has blessed us in Christ* with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as *He chose us in Him* before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love *He predestined us for adoption to Himself* as sons [and daughters] through Jesus Christ, according to the *purpose* of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which *He***

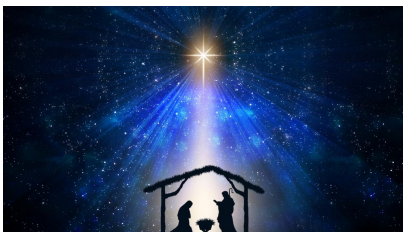


has blessed us in the Beloved. In Him [Jesus] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.”

It is so easy and tempting to look at the circumstances surrounding us and fail to remember our God has already laid out His plan. When the time was right, He sent forth His Son, born of a Virgin, to redeem us from our sin. All our doubts, all our fears, all our hurts, all our anger, all our transgressions of any kind, without exception, have been covered by God’s plan. There is not a person who is alive, or even who has lived or will live that isn’t covered by God’s plan of salvation. Nothing can separate us from His promise in Jesus—absolutely nothing.

Knowing we are redeemed in Jesus is a great gift. Christians were chosen, by grace, in Jesus for all eternity—but this gift is not exclusively for us alone. Jesus came for all and God loves the whole world, even unbelievers. This is why He sent Jesus. In Jesus all people, without exception, can have redemption and forgiveness. All people can experience His grace. This is the good news—a great gift we get to share with the world around us, and God gives us so many opportunities, even with our currently limited access to friends and neighbors. We know the story well so think of creative ways to let the jolly signs of the season tell the story of God’s promise.

God’s promise, delivered on that mystical evening in Bethlehem, sealed on the Cross of Calvary, makes this a jolly season. It is so easy to get distracted by the “wrappings” of Christmas. While I know this year especially people are looking for ways to make the season bright. Many of my neighbors have had Christmas lights up since the first week of November, and some complain and say, “It’s too early.” For me, it’s a reminder of the joyful hope that we have in the Light of the World. I used to never listen to Christmas music until after Thanksgiving. I’ve been listening to Christmas music well over a month. It makes me happy! The older I get, the less concern I have about when I “should” listen to the timeless truths of the Christmas carols that tell of my Savior’s birth. We have the privilege of listening anytime. Imagine the opportunity for witness this offers when someone asks why you’re listening to Christmas music in October! I tell them it reminds me of my Savior’s birth and what that means to me! Tis the season to be jolly indeed.



The truth is, as believers in Jesus, we know that the best is yet to come! This is the theme for our Advent Devotions this year. With all the challenges we have faced in 2020, how can we not look forward to the future with a hopeful anticipation, even as our forbearer’s did. From God’s early promise of a Savior in Genesis 3:15 God’s people have always looked for the promised Messiah. Throughout history many failed to recognize His arrival, even though the Advent of His coming was foretold by the Prophets, celebrated by the Gospels and reflected on by the Epistle letters of Scripture. Today we celebrate His Advent as He comes to us in Word and Sacrament, and we look forward to His Advent, when He will come and claim His own and take them into His Kingdom, where we will live eternally with Jesus. We invite you to join us on a daily grace-filled devotional journey with thoughts shared, both written and orally, by leaders across the Florida-Georgia District. Being confident in His joy, with great expectation we anticipate the Advent of Jesus, even as we celebrate His coming among us now! As we fix our eyes on Jesus, we will find that this is the season to be jolly!

May God bless all your Advent preparations and Christmas celebrations as we keep Jesus in the heart of all we do! He is the reason for the season!

Peace in the Prince of Peace,
Greg



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Daily Advent Devotions have begun!
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