

## Online Devotional

**December 1, 2009 Absolution Luke 17:1-4**

"If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent.' Forgive him."

It is hard to tell someone who has done something unkind to you that you accept an apology. Yet, telling someone you accept an apology seven times in one day would take a tremendous amount of grace, patience and love. Forgiving is a gift that allows the wrongful aggressor to start anew as though the incident had never occurred. I am not sure that it can be done without God's intervention. As an assistant principal of an elementary school, a good portion of my job is to take care of student discipline. I would say that most of the issues I deal with are encounters of the unfriendly kind between two or more students. One of the things I have the students do after apologies are given and accepted is to have each child ask the other for forgiveness. It means not thinking about the offense and dwelling on it. I can't imagine working with the same two students through seven incidences in one day!

Thank goodness, we don't have to do this alone. Do you have a hard time accepting someone's apology or offering forgiveness? Can you handle two, five or seven situations with the same person in the same day? I know that it is just a number He used to make His illustration, but as Christians we are to be willing to forgive as many times as we are asked.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, thank you for giving us guidance in interacting with others. You know that it is difficult for us to forgive. Won't you please be with us when we need to give this gift to a person who has wronged us? We are so grateful that You are willing to offer us this gift of forgiveness. Will you please forgive our trespasses, as we do our best to forgive those

who have trespassed against us? Thank you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**December 2, 2009: Absolution      Luke: 23:32-34**

"Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Him to be executed."

Jesus is on the Cross, a criminal to His right and left, and He says, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." Surely, they did not know that they were killing the Son of God! How could Jesus say that? How could He think of the people who were crucifying Him, when He was suffering, bleeding, and about to die? He didn't want His people to suffer God's wrath, because they were only carrying out God's Plan of Salvation. Wow! This kind of love is absolutely not understandable to a human mind. Yet Jesus loved us that much; to suffer and die for us so that we can be saved. And God's sacrifice is also amazing. He "gave" His ONLY Son to die for our sins. To watch His being rejected and tortured and killed must have grieved Him no end, but the ugliness of our sins repulsed Him even more. I have three children, but I could never choose to have one die...to save a righteous person...let alone a sinner! We must follow our Savior's example of forgiveness. When we are wronged, forgiveness and absolution will bring Peace and acceptance from God.

**PRAYER:** Precious Jesus, we thank you for loving us enough to die for us. Thank you for forgiving us when we sin. Help us to forgive others. AMEN

**December 3, 2009: HEALING      ISAIAH 53:5**

"And by His wounds we are healed."

He is wounded, and we are healed? As I stop and think about that, it seems a bit backward. When I had surgery, I had the

wounds, and by His healing power, my wounds were healed. So, if Jesus was pierced, crushed, and wounded by men and their sins, it seems that HE would need the healing!

This is the beauty of Jesus and His love for us. He took the beating, and the awful death of Crucifixion upon Himself, even though He was sinless. You and I needed the healing from our sins, and through His wounds, we were healed. We are healed by His forgiveness and atonement. "The wages of sin is death" (Ro. 6:23), so to be sinless and righteous in the eyes of God, we needed to die. But our loving Father gave His only Son to die on the Cross, in our place, to save us and heal us! Wow! And, Jesus willingly died to heal us, so that we could spend eternity with Him and the Father.

I still need healing from my surgery, but spiritually, I am healed and will STAY healed until Jesus comes again.

**PRAYER:** Precious Savior, how can we say thanks for the things You have done for us? We give You praise, honor, and glory for healing us. AMEN

**December 4, 2009 Healing Proverbs 11:24**

"There is one who scatters, yet increases more."

"Generosity yields happiness!" Put your pains aside and help another in need. You will feel refreshed and renewed in your faith in God to heal any pain that you may be facing. During your time away from your pain, the answer may just be given to you.

**Prayer:** Compassionate Lord, you bless us with seeds to be scattered and you promise increase. Open the scope our minds and hearts to sense how these seeds heal and provide hope for the people around us. Amen.

**December 5, 2009 Advent Micah 5:1-2**

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."

Today prior to worship Christians light the "Bethlehem Candle" to prepare their hearts and homes for the coming of the Messiah. When growing up, I prepared for Christmas by scouring the house to find my Christmas presents. One year despite my valiant efforts my search was futile. Where were they? What was I getting for Christmas? God surprises us and asks us to be prepared for the greatest gift, Jesus. Jesus came to save the least and the little in the town of Bethlehem and around the world. Are you prepared for Jesus' coming in your heart and spirit or are you looking in all the wrong places?

**Prayer:** Gracious Lord, Bethlehem means "house of bread". Provide me with the spirit of Christ to taste the bread of life. Amen.

**December 6, 2009: Healing Matthew 9:12-13**

"I desire mercy not sacrifice."

"Thank you!" We are all sinners. We all have parts of our past that we are not proud of. But the good news is that Jesus died for all of us. By accepting Him as our Lord and Savior, we are giving truth to the fact that He lives in all of us and His work is carried on through all of us.

**Prayer:** Great Physician, earthly doctors diagnose through knowledge and guess work. We celebrate that your diagnosis is verified through your mercy. Amen.

**December 7, 2009:**

**Power**

**Romans 4:20-21**

Abraham was 100 years old, and his wife, Sarah, was 90, when God told him that he and Sarah would have a son. Sure, God, at my age? Get real! Abraham had to be thinking these things, especially since he had no children, and yet God had promised him that he would be the father of many nations!

Our Scripture for today tells us that Abraham's faith didn't waiver in unbelief, but was strengthened knowing that God had the power to do what was promised. That is quite a display of power! A baby at their old age was surely by Divine Power. He needed Abraham to totally believe that God is a Promise-Keeper and that **WHATEVER** He says, He does. Luke 1: 37 states that "nothing is impossible with God."

God helps us in all things...big and little. I call Him the "God of lost keys" for He's shown them to me so often. Yet, He has the power to answer seemingly impossible situations, like parting the Red Sea for the Israelites. You can trust Him to hear your prayers, and to give Him the chance to show His powerful love to you.

**PRAYER: Loving Father, you are majestic, powerful, loving and yet gentle and merciful. You have power over all creation, and we thank you for your loving provision for us. AMEN**

**December 8, 2009: Servants John 15:15**

"But I have called you friend!"

"Friends are friends forever!" Jesus has shown us that He is the one, true messiah. In the Old Testament, Israel was symbolized as a vine. But this vine rarely yielded the fruit that God desires. But Jesus is the real vine who has fulfilled God's purpose. By

doing this he has shown us how to live with a Godly purpose and in a loving manner.

**Prayer:** Jesus, you invite us to be your friend and share our greatest need or our smallest scratch. Help us to sense this friendship as we serve you as Lord. Amen.

**December 9, 2009 Worship Hebrews 13:15-16**

"But do not forget to do good and share."

"Sacrifice of praise!" Confess Jesus Christ as you Lord and Savior. Tell all about the good news that you have seen. This is critical in being good and helping one another. No good deed goes unnoticed.

**Prayer:** Inspiring Spirit, worship comes in many forms. Give us hearts filled with praise that overflows to others. Amen.

**December 10, 2009 Wisdom James 1:2-5**

Consider it pure **joy**, my brothers, whenever you face **trials** of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks **wisdom**, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (James 1:2-5 NIV)

For James, joy became the mark of the mature believer as he or she went through trails. Why would James place "wisdom" in the same context with trials? I would've suggested a stronger word like "power" or "authority" something that can counter a trial and bring us out on the other side victorious. What is wisdom's connection to trials? How does wisdom make trials better? As I

pondered these questions all the sudden the revelation came to me; wisdom is like a tutor at our disposal, ready to navigate us through hard times.

**December 11, 2009**

**Deliverance**

**Micah 5:3**

"Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel."

How shall we explain the mystery of God's timing? When we see the need or wish to control our lives, we learn that it's not our timing that's important. God's time! In God's time God delivers us from ourselves and circumstances of the world. How many times have we prayed: "Lord, answer my prayer right now."? At times our lives keep an incubation period for growth. One truth jumps out at us: God delivers us!

**Prayer:** God of time and circumstances, we ask you to deliver us from evil in your time and make us conscious that we are the remnant and your children. Amen.

**December 12, 2009**

**Providence**

**Micah 5:4a**

"And He shall stand and feed his flock."

The word, providence, is not used much unless you live in Rhode Island. Yet God promises to provide "His flock!" I can't remember a time in my life when God didn't provide my "daily bread". How shall we picture our good Shepherd leading us to the green pastures of life? Shall I picture Jesus with an open hand and smile watching His flock grazing peacefully? Yes, Jesus fulfills his promise to feed us.

**Prayer:** Good Shepherd, you not only gather us together but you place us in the green fields. We thank you for the joy of being part of your flock. Amen.

**December 13, 2009**

**Advent**

**Hebrews 10:17**

**<sup>17</sup>Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."**

Today at worship we light the Shepherd's Candle. Sheep herding was not a glamorous occupation in biblical times. People were not lining up for apprenticeships. Yet, the all omniscient God choose to tell the good news of Jesus birth first to shepherds. The key was the angel's proclamation to "all people" starting with the lowly. The good news started with the grass roots people who were looking for a savior. Shepherds of every generation and every nation begin anew as God promises to remember their sin no more.

**Prayer:** Lord, we are the shepherds today. Our fields are made of concrete and our pastures we call Smith's or Albertson's. We pray for open hearts and minds as we hear the Christmas message again as shepherds lost in our 21<sup>st</sup> century wilderness. Amen.

**December 14, 2009**

**Sacrifice**

**Hebrews 10:14**

**<sup>14</sup>because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.**

The runner was on second base and we were one run behind in the bottom of the sixth inning. The pitcher's duel between two strong lefties kept the crowd in suspense. My counterpart was throwing a one hitter and I was throwing a no hitter. The coach flashed the bunt sign. My thoughts ran wild: "I don't want to bunt! I want to hit and win this game." A half hearted bunt follow with a foul ball and again on the second strike. The third pitch

came and I grounded out and left the runner stranded. The no hitter was lost in the next inning along with the game. Christ died as the one perfect sacrifice for all and continues to inspire us and make us holy.

**Prayer:** Jesus, your sacrifice was perfect for me. You know my weaknesses and my vulnerability. Keep the "under construction sign" forever in front of my eyes. Amen.

**December 15, 2009                      Steadfastness                      Micah5:4b**

**In the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God; and they shall abide.**

Heights leave me insecure and frail. The three longest days in my life were working with fellow parishioners as we shingled the parsonages. At noon when we stopped for a break, Lowell sat next to me and said, "Relax! You're not going to fall off and this garage is not going to cave underneath you." I assured Lowell that I was OK! He looked at me and said "is that why your heels are grinding into the shingle you just hammered in?" When we view the situation from a faith perspective, Jesus is our firm foundation. When we look up, we can see His majesty. That's steadfastness.

**Prayer:** Lord, we abide in your steadfastness. The majesty of your name is written in the sky and the abundance of your grace in the earth beneath our feet. Give us strength to abide in your steadfastness. Amen.

**December 16, 2009                      Greatness                      Micah 5:4c**

**For now He shall be great to the ends of the earth.**

We sat on the bench discussing the names of renown athletes from the Youngstown, Ohio area. Bo Rein, Larry Csonka, Paul

Warfield and more flowed from our mouths. Greatness! How many times can we laugh at our minute worlds compared to God's greatness? The ends of the earth reveal the greatness of God. This scripture opens up the door for God's people to embrace the coming of the Messiah: Jesus.

**Prayer: Lord, we are like sand on the beach. Yet you came to save us. We await the day when you shall come again with power and love. Amen.**

**December 17, 2009**

**Peace**

**Micah 5:5**

**And this One shall be peace.**

Elsabe had shared more than 50 years with her husband, Herman. Their quiet demeanors and humble clothes graced the same pew for decades. When Herman died, we expected Elsabe to be lost and have a difficult time with death. She proved us wrong. For the next six months she prepared for her own death. The peace of Christ flowed from her body and spirit. The "One" Micah writes about is the Prince of Peace. We call him Jesus and Elsabe calls him Lord.

**Prayer: Jesus, you personify peace. Even in your most difficult hour you prayed "not my will but your will be done." Give us the faith to fall into your loving arms and be at peace. Amen.**

**December 18, 2009**

**Promises**

**Joshua 21:45**

**Not one of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.**

How good are you at keeping your promises? Don't answer the question! For our path is littered with the trash of broken promises. Joshua points out to the people of Israel that "all the promises came to pass." Straight "A's" for the Lord! Read

through scripture and you will discover that "all the Lord's good promises" have come to pass.

**Prayer:** Lord, your Word is righteous. Your promises fulfilled. We thank you for even when we are faithless you are faithful. Remind us of your promises daily. Amen.

**December 19, 2009**

**Advent**

**Matthew 26:26-30**

**Take eat, this is my body. Then He took the cup and gave thanks, gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you>"**

Why am I referring to the Last Supper when we are in the Advent season? The Jews celebrated Passover, but this particular Passover was critical to Christmas! Breaking bread was traditional, but Jesus added, "This is my body." How confusing. Later, we see the meaning. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which means "house of bread." He was laid in a manger or feeding trough. He once said, "I AM the living Bread, which came down from Heaven. Anyone who eats of this bread will live forever." So we see the plan of salvation. Jesus is born of man, suffers and dies, is resurrected and lives again. If He never came down to earth, we'd still be enveloped in our sins without hope. Now, partaking of the Bread of Life, we have eternal life with Him. As we sing of Bethlehem's manger, remember the infant King came so that we might eat this bread and partake of His divine nature.

**Prayer:** Precious Jesus, thank you for coming to earth, for saving our souls and for feeding us the Bread of Life. Amen.

**December 20, 2009**

**Advent**

**Luke 1:44**

**<sup>44</sup>As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.**

Today prior to worship we light the "Angels' Candle" and the darkness reveals waiting faces. Waiting is very difficult for me. Advent needs to be over. We need to be singing Christmas carols and celebrating. I've heard that for more than 35 years of ministry. Mary had to wait for the "Angel!" Joseph had to wait for the "Angel!" The baby "leaped for joy" in Elizabeth's womb because Jesus was in Mary's womb. Wait for the Lord and your "Angel" will surprise you with the presence of Jesus.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for angels who announce the coming of Jesus and guard us along the ways of life. Amen.

**December 21, 2009 Birth of the King Luke 1:26-33,  
2:4-7**

**And having come in, the angel said to Mary, "Rejoice highly-favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women. . .Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son. . .**

How scary this must have been for this teen-aged girl, named Mary! Not only did she see an angel, but the angel told this virgin girl that she was going to have a baby! What? What will I tell Joseph? How can I explain this to my parents? Will I be cast out and stoned?

On that night in Bethlehem, Mary endured the pain of the baby's arrival, without aid of anything more than Joseph's roughened hands. There may have been shepherds and angels singing in the fields, but all they heard were sounds of animals, birth agony and the first cries of God in baby form. But as Joseph laid the infant in Mary's arms, what joy, fear, wonder and pain must have coursed through her heart. She knew that this was the Son of the Highest who was promised. How was she going to mother this

One? This tiny bundle would be King whose kingdom would never end. Thank you, God! Thank you, Mary!

**Prayer: Holy Father, you took two ordinary people, and chose them to bring forth your extraordinary Son. What a gift! What a Savior! Thank you. Amen.**

**December 22, 2009**

**Covenant**

**Matthew 1:18-25**

**And she will bring forth a son, and you shall call His name, Jesus, for he will save His people from their sins.**

When Joseph was betrothed to the virgin Mary, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph had a visit from the angel of the Lord in a dream and was given instructions. How obedient Joseph was! How scared he must have been. He was speaking with an angel and learning about Mary's baby, but also risking his reputation. In those days, if a woman was pregnant and unmarried, she was to be stoned or divorced. Joseph was obedient in marrying Mary, but also in naming the child Jesus, which means: "He will save!"

Christmas began with a present from God to His sin-damaged world! As we approach Christmas, it's good to remember why He came. He came not to establish a nostalgic, family-oriented, commercially successful holiday. Amid the parties and festivities, let's remember He came to save His people from their sins. The best gift of all. . .Jesus!

**Prayer: Holy Father, we praise you for loving us enough to send us your ONLY Son to earth; an earth filled with sin. Thank you, baby Jesus, for being the Christ in Christmas. Amen.**

**December 23, 2009**

**Compassion**

**Matthew 1:18**

**Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: after His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.**

How did "betrothal" happen in Joseph's day? First the parents or a confidential friend, of the bridegroom chose the bride. The parents' consent was asked first, then that of the bride. The dowry to the bride and/or her parents are called "mohar", those to the relatives "mattan." The dowry could take the form of service. Between betrothal (engagement) and marriage all communication between the couple was carried on through "the friend of the bridegroom". They were considered to be married to a degree, so that being unfaithful was punishable by death — as it was for any marital unfaithfulness. If the bridegroom did not want to go through with the marriage, he could divorce her by a bill of divorcement. Joseph was dealing with the news of pregnancy and what to do with Mary.

**Prayer: Dear God, teach us to live by faith and follow the law of love. Amen.**

**December 24, 2009**

**Christmas Eve**

**Matthew 1:20**

**But while Joseph thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.**

When we were expecting our first child, we talked about parenthood and our roles. Books on parenting and words of wisdom help are readily available. Yet, there's that tinge of fear that accompanies the role. Yet we walk in faith waiting that special day. Joseph's tenure as an expectant father was filled

with the awe of Mary carrying the child of God. Tonight we experience the same awe as we worship the birth of Jesus.

**Prayer: Eternal Father, your wisdom creates and redeems. Provide faith as Joseph to trust you wholeheartedly. Amen.**

**December 25, 2009            Christmas Day            Matthew 1:21**

**And Mary will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.**

Jesus was a familiar name in Israel during the first century. The name comes from the Hebrew form of Joshua which means "saves" or "will save". Saving is an act of heroism and sometimes the savior loses his life to save the victim. My brother dived into the Mahoning River to save a friend. He spent almost a year recovering from the acid burn. Jesus jumped into the river of sin and accepted God's call to "save us from our sins."

**Prayer: Jesus, your name is above all names and yet you came to save us from our sins. May we always remember your name. Amen.**

**December 26, 2009            Fulfillment            Matthew 1:22**

**So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying. . .**

Finally is a word we use with finality. "You're finally here. . .you finally finished the. . .finally it's time. . .and more. I remember my sixteenth birthday finally arrived. What a celebration in my mind. Freedom and hope along with fireworks. Fulfillment came via Jesus as Savior for our sins. His work was just beginning. Finally God came through to fulfill the ancient promise.

**Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the finally finally fulfilled for our sake. Amen.**

**December 27, 2009**

**Compassion**

**Matthew 1:19**

**Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.**

Our world thrives on gossip! The tabloids are visible as we enter the check out at the grocery. The integrity of Joseph is spelled out as he attempted to divorce Mary quietly and privately. This compassionate action displays the type of man. The Bible says Joseph was a **"just man"**. For Joseph Mary's integrity was foremost. God knew who to choose to be the earthly father of His only Son.

**Prayer: Dear God, give us compassion and integrity to deal with each circumstance in our lives. Amen.**

**December 28, 2009**

**Immanuel**

**Matthew 1:23**

**"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."**

Virgil and Kathleen talked to their girls prior to their first dates. They told Becky and Ellen to remember that three persons were on each date: the boy and the girl and Jesus. Yes, Jesus was sitting beside them in the car. I wonder how if this truth effected the date? "God with us" is the promise fulfilled to save us from our sins.

**Prayer: God, we thank you that you are with us even when we don't want you around. Amen.**

**December 29, 2009**

**Obedience**

**Matthew 1:24**

**Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife.**

When I meet with couples who are planning on exchanging the vows of marriage, we talk about the vows they are exchanging. Almost without exception both the future bride and groom don't want the word "obedient" in the vows. Obedience is essential for marriage and life. Joseph's obedience to God's will via the angel's command moved beyond him as Jesus was obedient even unto death on the cross.

**Prayer: Obedient Savior, save us through obedience and grace. Amen.**

**December 30, 2009            Obedience            Matthew 1:25**

**And Joseph did not know Mary till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he call His name Jesus.**

As a youngster I remember reading Genesis and asking myself what "he knew her" mean. For in Genesis the words camouflaged the truth of procreation. For Mary and Joseph Mary's virginity was sacred unto Jesus was born. We, too, should remember the sacredness of the relationship of a husband and wife along with the gift of children.

**Prayer: Father of all families, we thank you for the joy of the family and the sacredness of the love of husband and wife. Amen.**

**December 31, 2009            Spiritual Sight            John 9:1-11**

**"As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world." (v.5)**

Jesus was asked, "Who sinned, making this man blind? Was it his sin, or his parents'?" Jesus said that it was neither, but he used him to do the works God sent him to do. He mixed clay with His saliva and anointed the man's eyes. After washing in the pool of Siloam, he could see!

The blind man received physical sight, and later, (Jn. 9:35-38) he received spiritual sight. We also receive spiritual sight by reading God's Word. Jesus brought light and sight into our world of darkness and sin. In verse 5 He says, "I AM in the world, and I AM the Light of the world." Do you realize that here He is proclaiming His equality with God? The Father told Moses that His name was I AM. The great I AM sent you. Can you see how Jesus heals our blindness over and over?

Many of the religious authorities who investigated the healing, refused to believe that Jesus was not a sinner (by inferring that He was equal with God.) God's Word is what will open our eyes and cure spiritual blindness.

**PRAYER: Heavenly Father, open our eyes that we may see visions of you in glory and visions of you in our everyday lives. AMEN**