

THE FIRST 15

Tuesday, December 17, 2024

By: Jan Davis

Today is Tuesday, December 17 and this is the third week of the Advent season. We are studying the song of the Angels recorded in the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke following the birth of Jesus.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy and loving God, in the early morning of a dawning December day, I seek Your presence. As I journey through the season of Advent I find my heart growing in anticipation as the celebration of the birth of Your Son Jesus draws near. In this place of stillness, I quiet my mind and prepare my heart to reflect on a humble manger in Bethlehem surrounded by shepherds and angels. I listen attentively for Your message. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. Luke 2:5-8

REFLECTION

When our daughters were young they loved to play a practical joke on gift recipients. They would take a great deal of time and wrap presents in multiple layers. Once they gave my husband a Christmas gift in a big box. He unwrapped the box only to find another layer of wrapping paper underneath. He removed that layer and opened the box only to find another box inside wrapped with layers of tissue paper, ribbon and plastic wrap. And tape, lots of tape! Laughingly he unpeeled layer after layer, like an onion, working his way through all of the Christmas trim. Eventually he got down to the heart of it all and found a small but special gift inside.

Sometimes Christmas feels like that. We have this wonderful gift given to all the world, Jesus Christ, and that is why we celebrate Christmas. But we spend over a month wrapping Christmas up in layer after layer of ribbons and bows, trim and tinsel, food and sweets, lights and decorations, events and parties. We add layer upon layer of wonderful goodness to Christmas.

When Christmas finally arrives and we indulge in the unwrapping and celebrating and eating. Sometimes we might wonder if we will get to the heart of Christmas? As we patiently peel back all of the wonderful layers of Christmas, will we find Jesus at the heart of it all? Will we find the greatest gift ever given to all the world? Or will our gift be lost amongst the trim, the trees and the tinsel?

The Good News of Jesus Christ does not need embellishment or ornamentation. The greatest gift ever given to the world comes in the most humble, simple, quiet, and unadorned manner imaginable. Mary gives birth in a stable, not a palace. The Messiah is laid in a feeding trough lined with straw, not a richly adorned bed lined with velvet. The angels appear to poor shepherds out working in the fields, not to the rich and powerful of the day. God chose the first witnesses of the birth of his Son to be the working poor – those who were outcast, who lived out of doors in the cold, who were ostracized, who were incapable of doing other work in society, who were often mentally impaired or physically disabled. God chose them to witness the Messiah – to be the first to find Jesus. The gift of Jesus is for all people. The gift is not given to a chosen few, the elite, the smart or the successful, but for all people in all times and all places. This Savior is born for everyone - especially for you, especially for me, and especially for the people you love. For everyone.

Ask: Have I gotten to the heart of Christmas this year? What can I do in this last week of Advent to simplify Christmas and get to experience the true gift of the season?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy and loving God, in these last seven days before the celebration of Christmas, remind me to keep my focus on what truly matters. Amid the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, in the long check out lines, congested parking lots amid frustrated shoppers, breathe Your peace into my heart and awaken me to the magic of the greatest gift ever given - Jesus Christ. Help me unwrap all the bows and trimmings and get to the heart of Christmas this year. Amen.