

*Good News Daily*

**Volume XV**

**December 20-26, 2015**

**Number 51**

**Sunday, December 20**

John 3:16-21 *“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so the everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. (v.16 NLT)*

John 3:16 is one of the most popular verses in the Bible. It’s on millions of bumper stickers and kitchen magnets, not to mention face-painted on the cheeks of a popular quarterback (any Tebow fans out there?). It’s a wonderful verse, but it’s so common that many don’t realize the context. Jesus said this while he was speaking to Nicodemus, a powerful Pharisee who was ashamed to be seen with him.

Nicodemus met Jesus at night, presumably because he couldn’t risk being seen with the possibly heretical rabbi. Nicodemus had devoted his entire life to religious studies. He was an expert at the complex rituals required by God to atone for man’s sin. He knew God inside and out. And yet, this itinerant preacher taught Nicodemus more in a few sentences than the scholar had learned in a lifetime. “God loves you so much that He sent *me, His only Son*, to bring you back to Him,” Jesus said. “He wants you to live with Him forever.”

Nicodemus knew God’s mind. Jesus showed him God’s beating heart.

Genesis 3:8-15, Psalms 24, 29; Revelation 12:1-10

*ANGLICAN CYCLE:* Yewa - (Lagos, Nigeria) The Rt Revd Michael Adebayo Oluwarohunbi

*DIOCESAN CYCLE:* St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Harrisburg, The Rev Timothy A.

Goodman, Priest in Charge; Kaliua Deanery, Tanzania, Rev. Nason Muhuta, Rural Dean; the Mission of Santas María y Martha de Betania, Ilo, Peru, Rev’d Victor Condori, Vicar; James O. Cravens, Lincoln, Ordination to the Priesthood.

ST. MATTHEW’S: O come, thou Key of David, come, and open wide our heavenly home; make safe the way that leads on high, and close the path to misery.

**Monday, December 21**

Titus 1:1-16 *An elder is a manager of God’s household, so he must live a blameless life. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered; he must not be a heavy drinker, violent, or dishonest with money. (v.7)*

Paul was a practical guy. Despite being extremely educated, a world traveler, a brilliant writer, and an early Christian Rock Star, his advice to the young Church was often quiet and even dull. When Titus asked how to choose a congregation leader, Paul’s advice was extremely unremarkable. He shouldn’t drink too much. He should have an even temper and be honest with money. He should lead a blameless life. In fact, Paul mentions this blameless part twice. In other words, find the most boring fellow you can and hire him.

But here’s the thing: anyone who has actually tried to live a blameless life—where you strive to live and love as Christ commanded—will tell you it is the hardest thing in the world. You live it knowing you will fail. A lot. Still you keep on trying, knowing you will sometimes “miss the mark,” but that the Holy Spirit will still guide you. The only way to live a blameless life is to give your heart over to God. And fabulously accomplished, Rock Star Paul knew that this was really the only job criteria which truly mattered.

Zephaniah 3:14-20; Psalms 61, 62; Luke 1:1-25

*ANGLICAN CYCLE:* Yirol - (Sudan) The Rt Revd David Akau

*DIOCESAN CYCLE:* Feast of Title for: St. Thomas', Glen Carbon; and St. Thomas', Salem; Elliott Blackburn, Mason City, IA and Mary Christine "Mollie" Ward, Bloomington, Ordination to the Priesthood; Wedding anniversary of The Rev. George W. and The Rev Sylvania L. Howard III, Mt. Vernon.

ST. MATTHEW'S: O come, thou Dayspring from on high, and cheer us by thy drawing nigh; disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadow put to flight.

## **Tuesday, December 22**

Luke 1:26-38 *"Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "For you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus." Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true."* (vv.30-31, 38a)

Many centuries of scholars have weighed in on the Annunciation. It's been illustrated in paintings, picked apart in countless books, and recently Hollywood-ized in a movie. I've no quibble with this, since it's an important event in Jesus' story and it should be proclaimed (or at the very least studied). But for me, the only part that really matters, is that when God asked Mary to do an impossible task, she said, "Yes."

The Bible is full of "Yeses" to God's impossible tasks. Noah said, "Yes" to building the ark. Moses said, "Yes," albeit reluctantly, to leading the Jews from Egypt. Other "Yeses" include Gideon attacking the Midianites, Queen Esther standing up for her people, Joshua, Daniel, Job, and on and on. The New Testament is also packed with "Yeses," from the calling of the twelve disciples to Christ's final "Yes" in Gethsemane.

If God is calling you to do something too big for you to handle, you're in good company. No matter how great the obstacle, the only thing required of us is to open our mouths and answer "Yes."

1 Samuel 2:1b-10; Psalms 66, 67; Titus 2:1-10

*ANGLICAN CYCLE:* Yokohama - (Japan) The Rt Revd Laurence Yutaka Minabe

*DIOCESAN CYCLE:* Birthday of Meredith Moses, Troy, widow of Richard H. Moses, Priest.

ST. MATTHEW'S: O come, Desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind; bid thou our sad divisions cease, a be thyself our King of Peace.

## **Wednesday, December 23**

Luke 1:39-56 *Mary responded, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed."* (vv.46-48)

Before there was Pharrel's song "Happy," before there was Simon and Garfunkel's "Feeling Groovy," before there was Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm," and even before Handel's "Messiah," there was Mary's "Magnificat." This ancient canticle, taken directly from the Gospel of Luke, was one of the earliest hymns sung in the Church, and has been part of the liturgy of many faiths (including Anglican) for two thousand years. That is a pretty good run for any song!

This popularity is no accident. Mary's beautiful poem is a shout of joy to the Lord. She thanks Him for all He has done for her and her people. It is Mary's lovely thank-you note to God, without any thought of herself or what the Lord has asked her to do (i.e. the daunting task of being pregnant with God's Son). It is pure worship, without any taint of "what's in it for me."

Mary may have been a “lowly servant girl,” but she knew how to truly praise God. And for that alone, it’s right that all generations should call her blessed.

2 Samuel 7:1-17; Psalm 72; Titus 2:11—3:8a

*ANGLICAN CYCLE:* Yola - (Jos, Nigeria) The Rt Revd Markus Ibrahm

*DIOCESAN CYCLE:* Lord, we pray for those who suffer through poverty, malnutrition, or disease.

ST. MATTHEW’S: O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Birthday of Holly Dyson.

#### **Thursday, December 24**

Matthew 1:18-25 *This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.* (vv.18-19)

Your life is going along just fine. Then out of the blue something comes along and knocks you to the mat. Everything you’d planned and hoped for crumbles, and you’re left asking God, “Why me?”

Joseph felt the same way when he found out his betrothed was pregnant. His dreams for a marriage and family with an honorable woman had crumbled. Joseph planned to quietly break off the engagement, which was the kindest way this good man could think to handle this horrible situation. It wasn’t fair. I image him climbing into bed that night feeling utterly dejected, wondering how he could have been so wrong to trust in Mary, and to believe in the God who had given her to him as a bride. Joseph might have stared up into the darkness and asked the Lord, “Why me?”

The next time you’re walloped by life’s events, think about Joseph. His plans failed, but the Lord’s plans for him did not. For Joseph, among all the people in history, had been chosen to raise God’s Son as his own.

Isaiah 59:15b-21; Psalms 45, 46; Galatians 3:23—4:7

*ANGLICAN CYCLE:* York - (York, England) The Most Revd & Rt Hon Dr John Sentamu; York - Beverley - The Rt Revd Glyn Webster; York - Hull - The Rt Revd Alison White; York - Selby - The Rt Revd John Bromilow Thomson; York - Whitby - The Rt Revd Paul John Ferguson

*DIOCESAN CYCLE:* Hope is born tonight in the birthing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

ST. MATTHEW’S: Redeemer of the nations, come; reveal yourself in virgin birth, the birth which ages all adore, a wondrous birth, befitting God.

#### **Friday, December 25**

1 John 4:7-16 *God showed how much He loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.* (vv.9-10)

On Christmas morning, Dad would hand our presents out one by one. He and Mom loved to watch our faces as we tore open the gifts. We never thought about how much it cost them, but my parents didn’t want us to. All Mom and Dad wanted was to see our delight when we opened our gifts.

As I grew older, I started to look at gifts as something I had to pay back in kind. Big gifts

made me nervous. I didn't want to "owe" anyone anything, not even God—*especially* not God. This was pride, pure and simple. Thankfully, I confessed it, and was able to reclaim my joy of gracious receiving.

There is no way to pay God back for sending His only Son into the world, but we aren't supposed to. Like my parents, the Lord only wants to see the joy on our faces when we open His great gift and embrace His Son as our friend and Savior. Today, I urge you to "tear open" Jesus with childlike delight. You can even squeal!

Micah 4:1-5, 5:2-4; Psalms 2, 85; John 3:31-36

*ANGLICAN CYCLE:* Ysabel - (Melanesia) The Rt Revd Richard Naramana

*DIOCESAN CYCLE:* Lord, as we celebrate the gift of your birth, help us to live each day with a sense of our true value: our value in your eyes, our maker and our redeemer.

ST. MATTHEW'S: Sing, O sing, this blessed morn, unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, God himself comes down from heaven. Birthdsy of Hally Brenneman.

### **Saturday, December 26**

Psalm 30 *Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes in the morning.* (v.5b)

In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis said that our world is "enemy-occupied territory." No matter how hard we try to avoid it, we will face trials. We will have troubles. There will be weeping. However, as this wonderful passage in the psalm reminds us, it won't last forever.

Becoming a follower of Jesus does not mean our life magically becomes perfect. Christ said we would face sorrows on this earth (John 16:33). He never sugarcoated the cost of being a Christian. But in this same passage in John, he offers profound encouragement. "Take heart," he assures us, "for I have overcome the world."

We live in "enemy-occupied territory," but Christ has overcome it. We don't have to be afraid. He will lead us safely through our sorrowful nights into a joyful dawn. All we need to do is grasp his hand and take a step.

2 Chronicles 24:17-22; Psalm 28; Acts 6:1-7; Matthew 23:34-39

*ANGLICAN CYCLE:* Yukon - (British Columbia & the Yukon, Canada) The Rt Revd Larry David Robertson

*DIOCESAN CYCLE:* Feast of Title for St. Stephen's, Harrisburg.

ST. MATTHEW'S: And thus that manger poor became a throne; for he whom Mary bore was God the Son. O come, then, let us join the heavenly host; to praise the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

*by Ruth Owen*

Used with permission from the BIBLE READING FELLOWSHIP

PO Box 380, Winter Park, FL 32790

[www.biblereading.org](http://www.biblereading.org)