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Jesus – The Reason for *All* the Seasons

We are just coming out of November with remembrances of our Thanksgiving celebrations still fresh on our minds. Being thankful sets us up right to enjoy the heart-warming love of a Christmas season. The love of and sharing with our family and friends; sharing with those in need (secretly is the most gratifying); the bright, multi-colored lights; homes decorated with ribbon and garland; the scent of pine, cinnamon, and spices; Christmas trees decorated with memorable ornaments over beautifully wrapped gifts; candy canes, cookies, fudge, and candies; the smell of wonderful foods drifting from the kitchen; and yards decorated with Santa and his reindeer and Nativity scenes are all just part of the Christmas season.

As we start this gift-giving season, I am reminded of James 1:17 stating that *every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.* Of course, the greatest of all gifts is the gift of love from the Father, given through His Son, Jesus Christ, and the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16 and But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Romans 8:11*

Through our belief, repentance, confession, and baptism, we are brought into a relationship with the Father and the Son. *For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. Romans 8:14-16* [Note: This is shared from the internet: The word *Abba* is an Aramaic word that would most closely be translated as “Daddy.” It was a common term that young children would use to address their fathers. It signifies the close,

intimate relationship of a father to his child, as well as the childlike trust that a young child puts in his “daddy.”] One of the verses of the song, “As the Deer Pants for the Water,” goes...

You're my friend and you are my Brother
Even though you are a King
I love you more than any other
So much more than anything

We are children of the Lord God Most High—a brother or sister to Christ Jesus, our Lord, the King of kings. **This is an amazing fact.** While Christmas is not a religious celebration, the Christmas season is filled with love, thinking of others, gratitude for blessings, and Christmas makes some people think of the birth of Christ. Any time we remember and reflect Christ, it is a good thing—a very good thing.

Sometimes I must admit that “political correctness” gets to me. It is no longer politically correct to say Merry Christmas for fear of offending someone. *“Jesus—the Reason for the Season”* This phrase is Christians’ way of trying to make people stop and think about the fact that Jesus Christ is the foundation for why we do the things we do. I understand this concept and agree that Jesus is the foundation for what we do; however, love, thinking of others, gratitude for blessings, sharing Christ with others are things we, as children of God, must do and show, not just during the Christmas season, but for *all the seasons...every day, all day long. Jesus is the reason for ALL the seasons.*

It is usually people of the Christian faith that say Merry Christmas. While I don’t want to be offensive, I am a child of God; I am a sister to Christ Jesus; I am a Christian; and I say Merry Christmas. And I know that Jesus is not just the reason for *this* season but for *all* the seasons—Jesus is the way to eternal life. *And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. John 17:3*

Merry Christmas, family-in-Christ!

Kathy Webber, Rolla, MO
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Mary's Prayer

Remember that when unforeseen circumstances come upon us, we need to understand that our existence on the earth is not about us—it is about finding God's purpose for us. Let our prayer be like the young virgin Mary's: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.*" (Luke 1:38)



Jeanetta Watkins, Adamsville, AL
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Shirley Isbell



Shirley Isbell was born in Rolla, Missouri. Her family owned and

lived on a farm between Rolla and St. James. She has lived all her life on the same farm—it's just not as big now as it was then. For two years, she lived in Texas and New Mexico. Her husband was from Texas, and she met him at Ft. Leonard Wood at the skating rink. She only had one sister, seven years older than Shirley, who wasn't able to go to school.

Now Shirley lives in the house her dad built using lumber off their farm. That is one reason the house is so dear to her. Back then, neighbors helped each other; and they were very close to their neighbors—like a big family. She went to grade school in a one-room school house where there were about 25 children, first through eighth grades, with one teacher for all of them. She went on to St. James High School.

When she was a child, her family ate Sunday dinners with her grandparents and her mother's brother and his family. Her uncle's farm joined her family's farm on the south side, and her grandparents' farm joined them on the east side. Sometimes in the summer, she would stay all night with her grandparents and walk home the next day through the field. Her grandmother had lots of beautiful flowers in the yard. People were amazed to see how many she had and how pretty they were. She loved them, and they were her hobby.

One Christmas Eve, her family stayed all night with her grandparents. She wanted to sleep downstairs on a daybed so she could see Santa Claus, but she never saw him. She would hang up her stocking and get a dime and an orange in it. She thought that was great! On Christmas Day, there would be a houseful of aunts and uncles and cousins. Some of them came from St. Louis,

and others came from nearby areas. It was always a great time.

When she grew up and was 16 years old, she was baptized at the Christian Church in St. James, where she attended for several years. She got married in 1954. Her three sons—Steve, Stan, and Ron—were also baptized in St. James Christian Church. She says, "I know the Bible says to repent and be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit so that you can go to heaven. Without that, you cannot go to Heaven." Her favorite scripture is John 3:16. The reason she especially likes this scripture is, "God gave up His only begotten Son to die on the cross for our sins. I have three sons, and it would be very hard for me to do that."

It was several years after she married before she went to work. She got a job at the Rolla Public Schools and worked for 22 years in the cafeteria retiring in 1995. She also started going to the Church of Christ in Rolla. She says, "I love it and also the people. I am thankful to God for helping me find such wonderful, loving people."

Shirley is a treasure. She is a contributor to Sunrise, and she loves to give and to receive hugs. Even the little child who sits just down the pew from her gives her a big hug each Sunday.

NOTE: *This is the twelfth in a series highlighting noble Christian women in our congregation. We truly have many "treasures among us" in the women who exemplify Christianity in all its facets and have much to teach us all.*



HUNGER FOR WORSHIP

Have you ever heard someone say something like this: "Nothing in the Bible says we have to assemble twice on Sunday and once more on Wednesday. I dare you to show me where that is. I worship on Sunday mornings when I can and have Bible reading and prayer alone at home. That's enough, so don't go trying to put me on a guilt trip by saying I need to worship with the church three times a week"?

Amos (not his real name and his wife **Rose** (not her real name) live in Palestine. They would give anything to be able to worship with other Christians. They are former Muslims and have been Christians for four years. At first, Amos said, "I would like to deal with Christian friends." But there were no Christian friends for him and his wife. They have had to worship alone.

Amos is a university professor. He told his students about Christianity's "peace, tolerance, and non-violence" in hopes that he could meet with some of his more interested students secretly. "I want to serve what I love (Christianity). Let me prepare them until conditions are changed." But his government

confiscated his computer, and he went into hiding. His computer was returned and nothing more was said. But several months after that, he lost his job. Why? Because he dared to assemble with others to teach them about Jesus Christ.

John Mark (not his real name) and his wife, **Sue**, (not her real name) in Afghanistan would give anything to be able to worship with other Christians. They are former Muslims and became Christians three years ago. He said he was observing the Lord's Supper with his wife but wasn't sure they were doing it right.

"I am alone. If possible, please introduce me to other Christians who live in my province. I want to worship in a church. Yes, my worshiping is with my wife, but we are very interested in worshiping with others. Where is it possible?"

A few months later, John Mark was nearly imprisoned. His wife took their children to another province, and he escaped to yet another province to draw attention away from his family. They were in hiding for over two months, moving to a different location every night. They finally settled in a new place and now try harder to hide when they worship with their four children.

Andrew (not his real name) is in a Middle Eastern country and would give anything to worship with other Christians. Andrew is a former Muslim and became a Christian a year ago. He said, "I want to be with Christian brothers for my remaining lifetime. But in my radical Muslim society, if anyone knows I left my religion and accepted Christianity, they will kill me. I pray every Sunday like Christian brothers and sisters, not in a church building, but in my bathroom. I feel myself alone, because there is no Christian brothers or sister to tell my pain and discomfort to. I'm keeping my every Sunday worship and am praying with my wife. But I have not anyone else to tell what is going on in my mind regarding my faith."

Do we take for granted the opportunity to worship and have Bible study with other Christians? Christians in other parts of the world would sacrifice anything to have this made available to them. And three times a week would make them feel like they were already in heaven! Should we turn down the privilege of meeting with other Christians without fear of imprisonment or death? Do we take any of this for granted? God forgive us!

Katheryn Haddad, Arizona
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Beneath the Dirt...

Looking out at the early wintery wonderland and hearing the rustling wind reminds me of what is beneath! What lies still and silent will soon break beyond its barriers to reveal ever changing growth.

Life sometimes throws us seemingly paralyzing curve balls. They are not only hard to connect with; but even when impact is made, that ball just doesn't go where we had planned. As I look over the many prayer requests of friends and acquaintances, I'm reminded that life on earth is filled with unknowns and sometimes just plain gets covered with dirt! We become so buried in the darkness of trials or sins that we allow that darkness to invade our joy, faith and hope in a better tomorrow. We sometimes forget that God is the author of light and darkness.

Why do we fear the darkness so much? Perhaps we fail to see the light in the darkness...

FEAR: False Evidence Appearing Real! I've always loved that acronym as it lessens the impact of my fear somehow. When I look honestly at the source of my fear, I realize it takes root when I forget to rely on God for the truth and growth in the darkness.

The seasons of the year bring various stages of life to earth. The winter happens after autumn have fallen and some become buried beneath the dirt. But the truth is...the seeds are planted, not buried. There they lie; hidden, walked on, covered, unseen, yet all the while change is taking place. Much happens while the seed is covered in dirt. The hard shell breaks as the seed absorbs water. The embryo gets nourished and enlarged as the seed coat bursts open. The tip of the seed roots downward to help anchor the seedling; all the while it is absorbing nutrients from the soil. The stem of the seed grows upward, through the dirt, in the direction of the light. Only the seeds that get sufficient amounts of oxygen, water, and soil with proper temperatures actually germinate to become vibrant plants for food, flowers, etc., that yield beautiful blossoms.



So it is with our lives. Sometimes we get buried beneath the dirt. That dirt can come in the form of many things. A lost job, a failed marriage, untrue rumors, financial crisis, damaged friendships, sickness, marital distress, struggles with children, and more. It is what we do while covered in dark times that matters. Do we reach for the light? Do we get the nourishment we need from worship with fellow believers? Do we feed on the words of Jesus? Do we hunger and thirst after righteousness? Do we anchor our situations in faith that 'We can do all things...?' *Phil. 4:13*

New Growth is coming. The dirt is there to remind us of the struggles necessary to bring beautiful blossoms colored with wisdom, hope, strength, character, patience, perseverance, and victory in the one we call our God, and Savior Jesus Christ. When we are planted, our true potential can be reached. The germination

process begins. We can explode in foliage and blossoms that we never thought possible before the dirt, while rising toward that light.

We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed...2 Corinthians 4:8-10

Be confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:6

What will YOU do while lying beneath the dirt?

By Connie Erisman, Rolla, MO
11-17-2014

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NATIONAL CEMETERY/HALL OF FAME

What started out as a visit to family graves in the national cemetery became a walk through a “hall of fame.” Fallen heroes of our Nation are buried on that beautiful hillside in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

As we walked past row after row of grave markers, we began noticing names, dates and details on the headstones. Some soldiers had served in peace time, but many had served in one or more conflicts. It was surprising how many had served in as many as three conflicts, notably, WWII, Korea, and Viet Nam.

Some had been awarded Purple Hearts, some the Bronze Star, and some the Silver Star. A select few had won (earned!) the Medal of Honor, the highest commendation possible. Many medal winners died without knowing the honor bestowed on them later. Most of them were ordinary soldiers who found themselves in incredibly dangerous situations and responded with equally incredible bravery and honor.

Intrigued, we continued strolling through the cemetery and found graves of men who served in the Civil War, the Mexican War, and even the Indian Wars. The headstones were all strikingly similar—except one elaborately carved marker showing a soldier reclining against a tree stump. It said, “DENNIS O’LEARY Pvt., Co. 1, 23 INFTY, died April 1, 1901, age 23 yrs. & 9 mos.” Remarkably, the marker, including the date of his death, was carved by Private O’Leary himself! That fact was known to him because he took his own life on the date he had earlier inscribed into his grave marker.

There are lots of unknown soldiers buried in this national cemetery. There is undoubtedly a story about every soldier buried there, and it was humbling to us that so many had served and died to preserve and defend our freedom and way of life.

We couldn’t help but think of the early Christians who fought different kinds of battles and wars. For preaching the saving gospel of peace, the apostles and other early Christians were often persecuted and abused. Many

were martyred for their faith—fed to the lions as amusement for the Romans, burned at the stake for refusing to renounce Jesus, or used as human torches to light the gardens of Nero. Others lost their families, homes, and businesses and were ostracized from society. Letting our imaginations roam, we could “see” the apostles being awarded “medals of honor.” Others, such as Stephen, who suffered greatly for their faith might be awarded “silver stars” or “bronze stars.” How many preachers, elders, or even “ordinary Christians” have been “wounded in action” and will receive God’s “Purple Hart” awards?

One stark difference in God’s army is that, unlike the national cemeteries where our Nation’s fallen heroes lie, there will be NO UNKNOWN SOLDIERS in God’s Hall of Fame. Each one will be known by name, by faith and by deeds. Each soldier will be welcomed and rewarded by name by the loving, merciful God we serve.

Soldiers of our day and time serve, fight and sometimes die, to preserve and protect our Nation and the freedoms we hold dear. Are we, the soldiers of God’s army, wearing the proper armor and fighting with the proper weapons? Are we dressed with truth? Do we wear the breastplate of righteousness? Are our feet shod with the gospel of peace? Is faith our shield? Is our helmet the salvation that is possible only through the blood of Christ? Is our weapon the sword of the Spirit, the word of God? Perhaps just as importantly, **have we even engaged in battle with the enemy** to protect and bring to safety (freedom in Christ) the souls of our families, friends, or neighbors? When this life is over, will there be a place for us in God’s Hall of Fame?

Evelyn Waite, Rolla, MO
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Sunrise is a monthly newsletter written and/or assembled by Kathy Webber and Evelyn Waite, members of the Rolla Church of Christ. If you would like your sisters in Christ or your relatives, friends, co-workers or neighbors to receive it, you can share your copy with them. If they would like to receive it, please send their email addresses to evelynwa@fidmail.com.

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