



Advent Devotional 2023

# *Wonderful Words* *of* *Life*

## 2023 Advent Devotional

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## *It's Advent!*

This year Advent begins on Sunday, December 3, 2023. It's the arrival of the season when we prepare to welcome Baby Jesus into the world. What a plan God has for us; to take His Son, Jesus, from heaven and bring Him to this earth in human form, show us how to live by His example of grace, humility, kindness, acceptance, love and forgiveness, and then sacrifice Him on a cross so that our sins will be forgiven and we might have eternal life with Him ... if only we accept Him and believe.

Grab a notebook or a journal. Record your thoughts, your questions, and your reflections. I have chosen words that have been wonderful words of life to me on my journey. You probably have others. Write them down and day by day ponder on them and consider how they have been wonderful words of life for you.

God reveals Biblical truths to us as we grow closer to Him. I pray that this devotional, *Wonderful Words of Life*, will reveal new truths to you to help you become a better person, strengthen your faith, increase your love for God and make you a stronger Christian.

The Scripture passages selected are from the New Living Translation unless otherwise noted. If you don't have a Bible, contact anyone in our church office who will be happy to give you one, no strings attached.

*God's blessings on your journey!*

## Philip P. Bliss

The hymn, *Wonderful Words of Life*, was written in 1874 by Philip P. Bliss. Guess what? He's a relative! He's the great-great uncle of my mother-in-law, Bette Bliss Mahowald, which would make him my grandchildren's great-great-great-great-great uncle!

Philip Bliss was born in Pennsylvania on July 9, 1838. He grew up in the Methodist Church, but later joined a Baptist church and then the First Congregational Church in Chicago. He published his first musical work in 1871 and wrote *Sunshine for Sunday School* in 1873 and *Gospel Hymns and Sacred Songs* in 1875, as well as many others.

Bliss received training in music from teachers such as William B. Bradbury, whose well-known tunes include *Jesus Loves Me* and *He Leadeth Me*. Bliss is well known from his work with the evangelistic revival meetings of the mid-nineteenth century with leaders such as Dwight L. Moody and Daniel Webster "Major" Whittle. Bliss and his wife, Lucy, both joined these revival meetings as singers, leading the songs. The Blisses defined the era with a life on the road as traveling evangelists with their colleagues for many years to come.

Unfortunately, on December 29, 1876, he and his wife left Rome, PA for Chicago. Near Ashtabula, OH, a bridge over which the train was passing gave way and the cars fell into the stream below and caught fire. Philip walked out of the burning train car but went back in for his wife, Lucy. They both perished that day; He was 38 years old. At a memorial service in Chicago, it was recalled that at the last meeting Philip attended in that city, he remarked, "I don't know as I shall ever sing here again, and I want to sing this hymn as the language of my heart." He sang "most impressively" his own hymn, *That Will be Glory for Me* (if you are as old as I am you may be familiar with the verse, "I know not the hour when my Lord shall come.")

Philip P. Bliss wrote over 300 published songs. Some were humorous, others were for children. He also wrote songs and instrumental music for use in instruction books. He wrote both music and words for 37 hymns himself and wrote the music and/or words for others, three of which are in our hymnal almost 150 years later! (#165, *Hallelujah! What a Savior*, #377, *It Is Well with My Soul*, and #600, *Wonderful Words of Life*.) The words to the hymns are included on the Sundays of Advent.

## December 3 – First Sunday of Advent

#600

### *Wonderful Words of Life*

Sing them over again to me,  
wonderful words of life;  
Let me more of their beauty see,  
Wonderful words of life;  
Words of life and beauty teach me faith and duty.

Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.  
Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.

Christ, the blessed one, gives to all  
wonderful words of life;  
Sinner, list to the loving call,  
wonderful words of life;  
All so freely given, wooing us to heaven.

Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.  
Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.

Sweetly echo the gospel call,  
wonderful words of life;  
Offer pardon and peace to all,  
wonderful words of life;  
Jesus, only Savior, sanctify forever.

Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.  
Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.

Words: Philip P. Bliss, 1874  
Music: Philip P. Bliss, 1874

## December 4 – Love

Unselfish, benevolent concern for another; brotherly concern.

Mark 12:29-30 – *“Jesus replied, ‘The most important commandment is this: “Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.”’”*

John 13:34-35 - Jesus said, *“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”*

In the Mark reading, Jesus was responding to a teacher of religious law who wanted to know which commandment was the most important. According to my Life Application Study Bible, by Jesus’ time the Jews had accumulated 613 laws by one historian’s count. God’s laws can be boiled down to two simple commands: love God and love others. When you love God completely and care for others as you care for yourself, then you have fulfilled the purpose of the Ten Commandments and the other Old Testament laws.

In the John reading, it is just after Jesus predicts His betrayal by Judas which leads to Jesus’ crucifixion. The verse before the reading above, verse 33a, reads, *“Dear children, I will be with you only a little longer.”* Jesus was going to His worldly death. He wanted His disciples to know what was uppermost in His mind. **LOVE.**

Love should be what answers our questions. When we don’t know which way to turn, ask yourself if it demonstrates love of God and/or love for another. Knowing what was on Jesus’ mind, even when His Spirit was troubled because of the upcoming events, lets us know it was most important.

We all have people we love. Family members, dear friends, church family. What about the young person who lives across the street from you? You know the one – he’s got tatoos on his body and a ring through his nose. He has a loud car and he has no regard for you or your property. His car radio wakes you up at one o’clock in the morning blasting what he considers to be music. He backs up and runs over your mailbox and laughs. You know the one.

Well, Christian, do you love that young man? Jesus tells us it’s important to Him that you do. It’s hard to love some people, isn’t it? Pray. Pray. Pray. I ask God to intervene so that circumstances can change. I pray asking God to soften my heart; to be more accepting. It takes a lot of prayer, but a lot of hard work on our part, too. Remember that others are watching. We need to be good examples. Our love for one another will prove to the world that we are Jesus’ disciples.

**Prayer:** Father, help me to have love for others, even those I don’t understand. Show me ways to bridge the gap of understanding between us. Amen.

## December 5 – The Trinity

God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Genesis 1:1-3 - *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.”*

John 1:1-4 – *“In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.”*

The Word is another name for the Son of God, Jesus. Read this passage again. Instead of reading *The Word*, read it as Jesus or Son of God. That may make it easier to understand.

In the very first words of the Old Testament (the Genesis reading above) we find God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the Spirit may be thought of as a force, but that just isn't true. The Spirit of God is a person as is God the Father and the Son of God. We know this because He speaks (Heb 3:7), He reasons (Acts 15:28), and He thinks and understands (I Cor 2:10-11).

In the John reading, we see God the Father and His Son, Jesus present in the beginning. So in the beginning God created, the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters, and Jesus gave life to everything.

Even though Jesus had not yet been born into the world, the Scriptural witness to the Son of God first appears in the Old Testament in the abbreviated form of “Son”. While the number of Old Testament references to Son [of God] are nowhere near as numerous as that in the New Testament, they are extremely significant and have helped Christians recognize that Jesus the Christ is indeed this Son of God.

He is referenced in Proverbs 30:4 – *“Who but God goes up to heaven and comes back down? Who holds the wind in his fists? Who wraps up the oceans in his cloak? Who has created the whole wide world? What is his name—and his son's name? Tell me if you know!”*

And in Isaiah 9:6 – *“For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

And in the New Testament: Matthew 3:16-17 – *“After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.’”* All Three are present together.

Matthew 28:18-20 – “*Jesus came and told his disciples, ‘I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.’*” This is the Great Commission that Jesus gave to His disciples then and to you and me now!

We are so fortunate to have the Bible to study. We have many references by different people who witnessed Jesus’ teachings first-hand and preserved them for us. We have devotionals like this and many that we can obtain on-line. We can have a daily Scripture passage come up automatically every morning on our computer. We have opportunities all year long to take part in Bible studies.

Take advantage of any opportunity you can to learn more about the Trinity. That concept is not something that we are familiar with on this earth, three persons in one and yet each one is a distinct person. God exists as three persons. That doesn’t mean that God is divided into thirds. He is three separate persons in one.

**Prayer:** Beautiful One, help us to understand your being; God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We long to know you better. Open our hearts to truly know your essence. In your Son’s Name I pray, amen.



## December 6 – The Word of God

Communication from God to man, especially that which was given in Jesus Christ and in the Scriptures.

Isaiah 40:8 – *“The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.”*

Hebrews 4:12a – *“For the word of God is alive and powerful.”*

2 Peter 1:20-21 – *“Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet’s own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.”*

The word of God, the Bible, can be hard to understand. It can be confusing. It can be so overwhelming that we close it and choose to never open it again. That would be so sad to me. It can be, and is, all those things. That’s why our Pastors give sermons; to help us understand. That’s why there are Bible studies. We can learn from each other and ask questions. That’s why there are devotions; so that we can see Scripture in relationship to our lives today.

The word of God has been described as perfect, sure, the truth, enduring, sanctifying, harmonious, inspired, a source of joy, a standard of conduct, a source of new life, and spiritual food. We are to revere the word of God. We should stand in awe, tremble at, search it, preach it, receive it, teach it, and obey it.

If you don’t attend worship, try it. You can come in person or watch on-line. Decide if that gives you new clarity on Scripture. Try a Bible study. There is almost always one or two going on either at church or on Zoom and sometimes at a different location. There are devotions you can receive in a booklet like this or on your computer. They’re just a snippet of the Bible, but they always give one something to contemplate.

I have several different translations of the Bible. I love to find a passage and look it up in 3 or 4 different translations to see how they differ. Sometimes just one word can make all the difference in how we understand a Bible passage. If you don’t have a Bible, you can look up Scripture on-line at BibleGateway.com and put in a passage and choose what translation you would like to read. If you would like a Bible, call the church office and they will be happy to see that you receive one.

Keep reading. Keep studying. Be curious. Ask questions. Don’t give up.

**Prayer:** Oh, God, I thank you for your word, the Bible. Reveal to me the concepts that I am ready to understand. Keep me curious. Keep me searching. In Jesus’ Name I pray, amen.

## December 7 – Creation

Causing what did not exist to exist.

Hebrews 11:3 – *“By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God’s command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen.”*

Colossians 1:16-17 – *“for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can’t see such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.”*

Psalms 104:30 – *“When you give them your breath, life is created, and you renew the face of the earth.”*

In these Scripture passages we see that the authors of creation are God the Father, the Son of God (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit.

Monte and I used to take a motorcycle trip every year. We usually visited the national and/or state parks. Monte painstakingly mapped out our route. Even though we knew exactly where we were going each day, we never booked a hotel. The reason? We just might run across something we wanted to explore, or we might hear about something going on that we weren’t aware of before the planning. We might want to stay longer in one place for a certain reason.

Just traveling from one place to another we experienced God’s creation anew each day. We saw miles of fields of sunflowers or mustard, or lavender. We rode the mountain passes and rode to the top of the Rockies – breathtaking is the only word. We rode along the ocean at sunset. We rode to destinations like The Arches, The Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, Niagara Falls, Montreal, and Banff. Our favorite trip was traveling Highway 1 from Olympia State Park in the state of Washington all the way down to southern California. It ran alongside the ocean and we went through the Redwood Forest and visited San Francisco. We saw natural wonders; magnificent waterfalls, glaciers, northern lights, cloud formations, caves with their stalagmites and stalactites, and countless species of animals. Every day was a new adventure.

I am so thankful to have those memories. They have kept the smile on my face now that Monte is gone and I cannot do that kind of traveling any more. But I still experience the wonders of God’s creation watching the birds in my window feeder, growing food in my raised garden beds on my deck, enjoying the different seasons, admiring my gardens and beautiful sunrises. God is good, all the time!

**Prayer:** Almighty God, thank you for giving us ever changing seasons and the many colors of your Creation. We marvel at the animals, birds, trees, and flowers as well as the clouds and stars in the sky that you create for us to enjoy. Amen.

## December 8 – Covenant

An agreement.

Exodus 19:5 – *“Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me.”*

Hebrews 9:6-8, 10-12, 14b-15 – *“When these things were all in place, the priests regularly entered the first room as they performed their religious duties. But only the high priest ever entered the Most Holy Place, and only once a year. And he always offered blood for his own sins and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. By these regulations the Holy Spirit revealed that the entrance to the Most Holy Place was not freely open as long as the Tabernacle and the system it represented were still in use.”*

*“For that old system deals only with food and drink and various cleansing ceremonies—physical regulations that were in effect only until a better system could be established. So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.”*

*“For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. That is why he is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant.”*

In the first Scripture we see the first covenant between God and man instituted at Sinai. It is God’s blessing upon the covenant-keepers, the faithful ones.

The Hebrew readings describe how the temple was laid out and how the high priest was the only one that could enter the Most Holy Place. This is where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. The sacrifices made were from the blood of animals.

Today the old covenant has been replaced. The blood of Jesus has cleansed us of our sins. Jesus has mediated a new covenant between God and us.

When we take part in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the bread represents the body of Christ broken for the salvation of humanity. When we drink the cup, we remember the shedding of Jesus’ blood on the cross. We remember the transformative power of this covenant, transition from old to new, from sin to redemption.

**Prayer:** Father, thank you for instituting a covenant with us. I am grateful for your Son, Jesus, who was crucified to redeem me from my sins and thereby creating the new covenant. Keep me humble as I strive to live my life honoring and worshiping the One who saved me. Amen

## December 9 – Faithfulness

Making faith a living reality in one's life.

Proverbs 14:5 – *“An honest witness does not lie; a false witness breathes lies.”*

3 John 5 – *“Dear friend, you are being faithful to God when you care for the traveling teachers who pass through, even though they are strangers to you.”*

Matthew 24:45-46 – *“A faithful, sensible servant is one to whom the master can give the responsibility of managing his other household servants and feeding them. If the master returns and finds that the servant has done a good job, there will be a reward.”*

When we are faithful, others can count on us. We do what we say we will do. Our yes means yes and our no means no. We are honest and trustworthy. The best way that we can live our lives is to obey God's commands and take care of each other. When we help others or declare God's Word witnessing to others, we are in service to God. When we give of our time, talents, and money, we are honoring God and He will reward the faithful with eternal life with Him.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle said, “What is the essence of life? To serve others and do good.” What is more important than that?

And what about God's faithfulness to us?

Deuteronomy 7:9 – *“Understand, therefore, that the LORD your God is indeed God. He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.”*

Isaiah 46:3b-4a (NIV) – *“I have upheld you since you were conceived and have carried you since you were born. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you.”*

Lamentations 3:22-23 – *“The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.”*

Faithfulness goes both ways. When we are faithful to God and obey Him, He keeps His covenant with us. When we go to Him in prayer, He listens. When we confess our sins, He forgives us and we have a fresh start each day. He carries us from birth to death. Yes, He is faithful to us.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, I know that I can always count on you. Thank you for your faithfulness to me even when I am not faithful to you. In Jesus' Name, amen.

**December 10 – Second Sunday of Advent**

#377

*It Is Well with My Soul*

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

It is well (it is well) with my soul, (with my soul,)  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate  
And hath shed his own blood for my soul.

It is well (it is well) with my soul, (with my soul,)  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

It is well (it is well) with my soul, (with my soul,)  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,  
Even so, it is well with my soul.

It is well (it is well) with my soul, (with my soul,)  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Words: Horatio G. Spafford, 1873

Music: Philip P. Bliss, 1876

## December 11 – Prayer

Communication with God; request of God.

Philippians 4:6 – *“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done.”*

Psalm 100 – *“Shout with joy to the LORD, all the earth! Worship the LORD with gladness. Come before him, singing with joy. Acknowledge that the LORD is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and his faithfulness continues to each generation.”*

Years ago we had a prayer team at Coon Rapids UMC. We discovered that there were many ways we can pray. We learned about breath prayers which sound like, “Lord, keep me safe.” or “Thank you, Lord.” Short little prayers you can say in one breath. We learned the acronym **ACTS** which stands for **A**doration, **C**onfession, **T**hanksgiving, and **S**upplication:

- **A** is for Adoration. The Scripture above, Psalm 100, is a wonderful example of adoration. We come before the Lord with joy. We acknowledge God’s sovereignty and His faithfulness that goes on from one generation to the next ... forever.
- **C** is for Confession. We come before God to confess our sins. Consider words or actions that may have hurt someone else or thoughts that may be harmful to you. Don’t come with excuses. Be transparent. Along with confession comes forgiveness. God is the only one who can forgive our sins. Come before Him with a repentant heart and then open your arms to receive His forgiveness.
- **T** is for Thanksgiving. Spend time thanking God for specific blessings you have received. They might include a warm bed, family, enough food, friendships, your faith, your hope, or the ministries in which you serve.
- **S** is for Supplication. Supplication is the act of asking for something earnestly or humbly. We always want to be humble before our God. You may be asking for something for yourself (a petition) or for someone else (intercession). Either way, be specific with what is happening and what results you would like to see. You may be praying for someone who has experienced great joy, “Thank you, Father for my newborn niece. We are so grateful that she is healthy and whole.” Or for someone who has just lost a loved one, “Father, please give her your comfort and the peace that only you can give. I don’t know how she will live without him.”

There are many more ways to pray, but this will give you a guide to begin with. Set aside time each day to be alone with God. No interruptions. Get comfortable and clear your mind. If you don’t already pray this way daily, it may help to write things down beforehand; sins you are confessing, things you are grateful for, people and situation you want to bring before God. And I’ll be praying for your success!

**Prayer:** Holy Father, I am striving for a more intimate relationship with you. Thank you for all the blessings you have given to me. May each of us draw closer to you through prayer. In Jesus’ precious Name, amen.

NM

## December 12 – Forgiveness

To stop feeling angry or resentful toward (someone) for an offense, flaw, or mistake.

Matthew 6:15 (NIV) – *“But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

Luke 6:37 (NIV) – *“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”*

1 John 1:9 (NIV) – *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

Sometimes it's hard to forgive. We want to hold onto that grudge. We feel justified because someone has hurt us, or they have hurt someone we love. It takes a lot of reflection and a lot of prayer to be able to forgive sometimes.

I have wondered how people who have experienced a family member being murdered and how they can forgive their killer. In one interview I heard a mother say that she forgave her child's murderer, not for his sake but for her own sake. She couldn't let the killer keep control over her thoughts any longer. She needed to be released from him.

- When you forgive, you start to heal
- When you forgive, you feel free
- When you forgive, you are released
- When you forgive, the weight is lifted from your shoulders
- When you forgive, you grow
- When you forgive, it is empowering
- When you forgive, you are obeying God

Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. Regardless of how deep our wounds are or how long we have been carrying them, God's grace goes there. God will deliver you. We need to remember that through the cross, Christ chose to forgive all our sins. We have received forgiveness from a gracious God and so we must do the same.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank you for your unfailing love and for Your Son who came to show us how to forgive and love others.

## December 13 – Grace

Unmerited favor; mercy; compassion.

Galatians 1:15-16a – *“But even before I was born, God chose me and called me by his marvelous grace. Then it pleased him to reveal his Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles.”*

Romans 3:23-25a, 26b – *“For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. God makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.”*

Romans 6:14 – *“Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace.”*

Before Paul became a Christian, his name was Saul and he persecuted Christians. Jesus’ voice stopped him on a road one day. *“As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?’ ‘Who are you, lord?’ Saul asked. And the voice replied, ‘I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!’”* (Act 9:3-5)

Saul killed Christians. He was merciless. The first martyr was Stephen. He was stoned to death for his beliefs. Saul witnessed and agreed completely with the killing of Stephen. After that day, there was a great wave of persecution with Saul leading the way. There was no discrimination; he tormented men and women alike and threw them in prison. Then Jesus surprised him on that road. It’s the most amazing conversion story in the Bible, in my opinion. Take time to read how Paul’s heart was changed in Acts 8-9.

God showered His grace on Saul and introduced him to Jesus so that (now) Paul could bring the Good News to the Gentiles. Saul was changed, name and all. God’s grace changes us, too, when we are in ministry with Him. *“We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.”* (Acts 15:11). Let Him oversee your life and see what can happen!

**Prayer:** Lord, you are so gracious! You come upon the most adversarial people and bring them into your flock. You open their eyes and hearts to let them understand who you are, and they let go and follow you. Thank you for your work in this world. I am appreciative of those who have gone before me who have left everything behind to follow you and spread the Good News. Amen.



## December 14 – Redemption

Salvation accomplished by paying the price for sin.

*Ephesians 1:5-7 – “God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.”*

What a heavenly Father we have! As believers, we belong to God’s family and that was accomplished through Jesus. He was brought to earth as a human, He taught us how to love and how to live. God loved us so much that He sacrificed His own Son on a cross to save us. That is redemption; salvation accomplished by paying the price for sin. Our sin.

God wants to be closer to us and He longs for us to be closer to Him. We can accomplish this by learning more about God through Bible study. Reading the Bible is one thing but if we don’t understand it, what good does it do? We need to comprehend what it means for us today and we need to learn how to live it. We can understand the Bible more clearly when we examine it with others and get their viewpoints.

God can only be closer to us if we draw closer to Him. We develop our relationship with Him through prayer. Create a more intimate relationship by coming to Him with all your life, both the good and the bad. The Lord will help you through all of it. He doesn’t want just half of you; He wants all of you. Think about that. It’s easy to go to other people with our joys and our thankfulness but it’s difficult to let others into our sorrow and pain. We want others to see only the best of us. God wants us to come to Him even with the complications of life. He will help us work it out if we let Him.

How does one thank another for redemption? Live your life with gratitude. Live your life with love for God and others. Live your life in service for God. Nothing says “Thank you” more than the positive actions you take. Live your life as a child of God.

Read Romans 12. It gives us a perfect picture of how we can say thank you to God.

**Prayer:** Holy One, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, to redeem me from my sins. Help me to draw closer to you as I try to live my life to honor you and to thank you. In Jesus’ Name, amen.

## December 15 – Mercy

Compassion shown to an offender.

Jude 20-21 – *“But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God’s love.”*

Titus 3:4-6 – *“When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior.”*

Hebrews 4:16 – *“So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.”*

In the first Scripture, we are told to “Pray in the power of the Holy Spirit”. Did you know that the Holy Spirit will help us pray when we don’t know what to pray for or how to pray? It’s in Romans 8:26-27 – *“And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God’s own will.”* Then we wait for God’s mercy.

We are to be bold going before the throne of God in prayer. When we pray, God listens. When we confess to God, He is gracious to forgive us with His mercy. He washes away our sins and gives us a new life through the Holy Spirit.

Notice that all three persons of the Trinity are mentioned in Titus 3:4-6 because all three participate in the work of salvation. In my Life Application Bible, it states it so clearly. “Based upon the redemptive work of His Son, the Father forgives and sends the Holy Spirit to wash away our sins and continually renew us.” I never heard it put that way before; the Holy Spirit will *“continually renew us.”* I become more and more thankful for the Holy Spirit the more I truly understand Him. He helps me pray, He washes away my sins, and He continually renews me.

**Prayer:** Holy Spirit, thank you for interceding for me when I cannot find the words to pray. I am grateful that you take away my sins and make me new again. Now I know who to thank for that beautiful feeling I have after I have confessed my sins before the Lord, and I feel God’s mercy and know that I am forgiven. Praise be to God. Amen.

## December 16 – Salvation

The total work of God in affecting a right relationship between mankind and Himself.

Acts 4:11-12 – *“For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says, ‘The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.’ There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.”*

Ephesians 2:8-9 – *“God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.”*

1 Peter 1:8-10 – *“You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls. This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you.”*

Hebrews 9:28 – *“so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.”*

As you have read in these Scripture passages, we know that Jesus is the one who was chosen by God to be sacrificed on the cross to take away the sins of humanity. We cannot earn our way into heaven. We cannot pay our way into heaven. It is only by God’s grace that we are saved.

When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are saved. When we are saved and Jesus leads us, we want to do ministries to thank Him and to honor Him. We work in our ministries because it makes us happy. We are part of a team; we belong. We have smiles on our faces as we serve God and our neighbors. Sometimes we do our ministry by ourselves, but we still feel complete as we work to honor God.

If the ministry you are a part of does not bring you joy or doesn’t make you feel fulfilled, try another job within your ministry or join a different ministry. We all have different gifts and sometimes a ministry and your gift doesn’t match. Don’t be discouraged! Try something new! I’ll be praying for you.

**Prayer:** Blessed Redeemer, thank you for my salvation. I am so glad that we have many opportunities to serve through the ministries in our church. By serving I am helping others. By helping others, I am honoring you. As Christmas approaches, we are aware of the vast needs in our community. People need food. Homeless kids need supplies. Caregivers need rest. The elderly need company. May we be a conduit to bring help and hope to our neighbors. Amen.

## December 17 – Third Sunday of Advent

### *Whosoever Will*

Whosoever heareth, shout, shout the sound!  
 Spread the blessed tidings all the world around;  
 Tell the joyful news wherever man is found;  
 "Whosoever will may come."

Chorus: "Whosoever will, whosoever will,"  
 Send the proclamation over vale and hill;  
 'Tis a loving Father, calls the wanderer home:  
 "Whosoever will may come."

Whosoever cometh need not delay,  
 Now the door is open, enter while you may;  
 Jesus is the true, the only living Way;  
 "Whosoever will may come."

Chorus: "Whosoever will, whosoever will,"  
 Send the proclamation over vale and hill;  
 'Tis a loving Father, calls the wanderer home:  
 "Whosoever will may come."

"Whosoever will!" the promise is secure;  
 "Whosoever will!" forever must endure;  
 "Whosoever will!" 'tis life forever more;  
 "Whosoever will may come."

Chorus: "Whosoever will, whosoever will,"  
 Send the proclamation over vale and hill;  
 'Tis a loving Father, calls the wanderer home:  
 "Whosoever will may come."

Words: Philip P. Bliss 1870

Music: Philip P. Bliss 1870

## December 18 – Blessings

The gift and approval of God; one who is a helper, encourages; gives of good gifts.

Psalm 67

For the choir director: A song. A psalm, to be accompanied by stringed instruments.

*“May God be merciful and bless us.  
 May his face smile with favor on us. Interlude  
 May your ways be known throughout the earth,  
 your saving power among people everywhere.  
 May the nations praise you, O God.  
 Yes, may all the nations praise you.  
 Let the whole world sing for joy,  
 because you govern the nations with justice  
 and guide the people of the whole world. Interlude  
 May the nations praise you, O God.  
 Yes, may all the nations praise you.  
 Then the earth will yield its harvests,  
 and God, our God, will richly bless us.  
 Yes, God will bless us,  
 and people all over the world will fear him.”*

When we say that someone is "blessed", we usually mean that the person in question has had something good bestowed upon them. Examples that come to mind are someone who is "blessed" with wealth or with a particular talent.

### On other hand:

When we bless God after eating, we are acknowledging His provision and lovingkindness, not bestowing something to God. There is nothing we can add to God's glory, His attributes or His intrinsic perfections.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, we are humbled that you have made us part of your family through the finished work of our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ. As you continue to bless us through the Holy Spirit's guidance in our life, we trust you as our wise, faithful, truthful, and loving Father. Amen.

## December 19 – Hope

Reliance on God's blessing and provision; the expectation of future good.

Titus 1:2 (NIV) - *“a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,”*

Titus 3:6-7 (CSB) – *“He poured out his Spirit on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior so that, having been justified by His grace, we may become heirs with the hope of eternal life.”*

1 Peter 1:3 (NIV) – *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”*

What has given me hope in my life? God's promises to me, His Word, Jesus dying on the cross for me, and my family.

When I was 10, I received Christ as my Savior, but I don't believe I really knew what hope was at that young age. It wasn't until I was older and started reading the Bible regularly that I found and knew what hope was. It's His Word and my family that continue to help remind me of God's great hope.

We have hope because Jesus died on the cross for us.

- Hope brings us closer to God
- When we have hope it helps us to want to share the Good News with others
- Hope opens our eyes to the unimaginable
- Hope gives us strength
- Without hope we have nothing

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ who died on the cross for our sins, which gives us the hope of eternal life. Amen.

## December 20 – Resurrection

The act of rising from the dead.

Romans 8:11 – *“The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.”*

John 5:28-29 – *“Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God’s Son, and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment.”*

Matthew 22:31-32 – *“But now, as to whether there will be a resurrection of the dead—haven’t you ever read about this in the Scriptures? Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, God said, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ So he is the God of the living, not the dead.”*

1 Corinthians 15:21-23, 42-44 – *“So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.*

*It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.”*

It's so reassuring to me to read Scripture about the Resurrection. I've said many times, “I don't know how people who don't believe in Jesus make it through the loss of a loved one.” Some people believe this earthly life is all there is! That is so sad to me. Many people experience such rough lives here on this earth. They may be homeless or be weighed down with physical pain or mobility issues. They may have a terminal, untreatable diagnosis, mental health problems, or may be addicted to drugs. There are so many problems here and some of these problems last a lifetime.

This worldly life is not all there is! These passages reassure us that there will be a resurrection of our weak, broken, human bodies. We will be made new through the Holy Spirit living in us. Our worn-out human body will be replaced with a glorious new spiritual body. Then all of God's children will be raised up when Jesus returns. Hallelujah!

**Prayer:** Son of God, you were the first one raised from the dead. I am so grateful that you showed us the way so that we may be raised up, too. In Your Precious Name I pray, amen.

## December 21 – Majesty

The dignity and power of a ruler.

Psalm 93:1 – *“The LORD is king! He is robed in majesty. Indeed, the LORD is robed in majesty and armed with strength. The world stands firm and cannot be shaken.”*

Micah 5:2-5a – *“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel, whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf. The people of Israel will be abandoned to their enemies until the woman in labor gives birth. Then at last his fellow countrymen will return from exile to their own land. And he will stand to lead his flock with the LORD’s strength, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. Then his people will live there undisturbed, for he will be highly honored around the world. And he will be the source of peace.”*

When I hear the word majesty, I envision a King with a red or purple robe made of velvet and a beautiful crown bedazzled in jewels holding a scepter in his hand. Our Lord is that King who is *“robed in majesty and armed with strength.”*

Micah prophesizes the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem hundreds of years before the Messiah was born. God called Jesus to be born in a small village. The Divine is called to become human on our behalf. Jesus came humbly, in love and peace. Our Savior is called to *“lead his flock”* (that’s us! His children!) *“with the Lord’s strength, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.”*

The ruler is Jesus, the Messiah. He had been alive forever – *“whose origins are in the distant past.”* Even though He was eternal, Jesus was born into human history.

*“And he will be their peace.”* Shortly before Jesus completes His mission on this earth, He talked to His disciples about peace in John 14:27. *“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.”* We have the reassurance of God’s peace. When the world seems to be against us and we struggle in this life, whether it’s troubling relationships or a medical diagnosis, Jesus will give us that peace if only we are willing to accept it.

**Prayer:** Lord, you are King! You are robed in majesty and armed with strength through God the Father. We will be celebrating your birth soon. Amid the presents and the glitter, help us to remember what is important. You are the reason for the season. In Your Holy Name, amen.



## December 22 – Holiness

A unique quality of divinity; consecration to God; spiritual purity.

Luke 1:28-35 – *“Gabriel appeared to her and said, ‘Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!’ Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ‘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. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end.’ Mary asked the angel, ‘But how can this happen? I am a virgin.’ The angel replied, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.’”*

1 Peter 1:13-16 – *“So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. So you must live as God’s obedient children. Don’t slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn’t know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, ‘You must be holy because I am holy.’”*

2 Peter 3:11-13 – *“Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God’s righteousness.”*

What does it mean for us to be holy? Holy people are godly. They are God-fearing, righteous, good, virtuous, moral, and spiritual people. How many of these words or words meaning the same thing have we read in this devotional? Most, if not all. We know what we must do to be holy. Live a Christ-like life. And when we mess up we go to God in prayer, ask for His forgiveness and repair any relationships involved. It sounds so easy, but in reality it is so hard for us to do.

We must *“prepare our minds for action and exercise self-control.”* Another way we can express holiness is to be in service helping others. Any time you read about Jesus in the Gospels, He is healing, He is teaching, He is praying, He is mentoring. Jesus calls us to do the same. It doesn’t have to be something huge. It can be as simple as a “Good morning” to a person you pass on the way into the grocery store. It can be visiting a neighbor who is grieving or send a card to a shut-in. It can be as simple as a smile. That smile can change someone else’s day. God knows who you’re reaching even if you don’t.

**Prayer:** Father, only you are Holy. Help us to imitate your attributes so that we will be found holy, too. Open our eyes to see the needs all around us and to respond with Christ-like love. In your Son’s precious Name, amen.

## December 23 – Victory

Winning the mastery in battle over odds or difficulties.

Isaiah 53:10-12a – *“But it was the LORD’s good plan to crush him and cause him grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants. He will enjoy a long life, and the LORD’s good plan will prosper in his hands. When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of his experience, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins. I will give him the honors of a victorious soldier, because he exposed himself to death.”*

I Corinthians 15:50-57 – *“What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever. But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies. Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

1 John 5:4-5 – *“For every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith. And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God.”*

Isaiah is referring to Jesus who was offered as a sacrifice for our sins. The Messiah suffered, taking on our sins to make us acceptable to God. Think of how many lives have been saved throughout the centuries and He continues to be a sacrifice for all who will believe in the future.

God has made Jesus victorious over death. *“I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”* (Revelation 1:18) Jesus has been given the victory!

I believe that Jesus is the Son of God. I believe He shed His blood for me and for you. And part of our Apostle’s Creed says, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.” I believe Jesus will return one day. And, because I believe, I have been awarded the victory, too! Hallelujah!

**Prayer:** Son of God, you have given me the way to be victorious, even over death! It will be a glorious day when I see you face to face. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen.

## December 24 – Fourth Sunday of Advent

Another of Bliss' hymns, *Almost Persuaded*, has brought many souls to Christ. It was suggested by the last words of a sermon he heard, "**He who is almost persuaded is almost saved, but to be almost saved is to be entirely lost.**" Bliss was impressed with the thought and composed the following hymn:

### *Almost Persuaded*

Almost persuaded now to believe;  
 Almost persuaded Christ to receive;  
 Seems now some soul to say,  
 "Go, Spirit, go Thy way,  
 Some more convenient day  
 On Thee I'll call."

Almost persuaded, come, come today;  
 Almost persuaded, turn not away;  
 Jesus invites you here,  
 Angels are lingering near,  
 Prayers rise from hearts so dear;  
 O wanderer, come!

Almost persuaded, harvest is past!  
 Almost persuaded, doom comes at last!  
 Almost cannot avail;  
 Almost is but to fail!  
 Sad, sad, that bitter wail –  
 Almost, but lost!

Words: Philip P. Bliss 1871

Music: Philip P. Bliss 1871

When I read, "It was suggested by the last words of a sermon," it reminded me of a Bible study I facilitated called "*Almost Christmas*." This Bible study was based on a sermon given by John Wesley in 1741 called, "*The Almost Christian*," in which he described persons who, on the surface, had all the outward appearances of godliness. This person did all the basic things right, but Wesley would say that as commendable as that person might be, he would only be almost a Christian.

If Wesley stood before us today, he would ask, "Is that all you've got to give God?" Doesn't God deserve more? Doesn't God want nothing less than your whole heart? Wesley calls us to do more than live an "almost" life. He calls us to live an "altogether" life, one that, first, fully loves God and second, fully loves others. An "altogether" Christian is one who wholeheartedly trusts God and puts that trust into action. Both John Wesley and Philip Bliss were calling people to be the best they can be and to give their very best to God. Let us be called to do the same!

## December 25 – God’s Love for Us

### Luke 2:1-20 - The Birth of Jesus

*“At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David’s ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child. And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.*

*That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. ‘Don’t be afraid!’ he said. ‘I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.’ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.’*

*When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’*

*They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.”*

Imagine what those shepherds were thinking! They were terrified but they listened. They listened and they believed what the angel was telling them. Most importantly, they decided to go to see what the angel had told them. It was true! The Baby that had been born was the Messiah they had been waiting for!

John 3:16 (NIV) – *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

This is how much God loves us. He sent His Son into our world to redeem us from our sins. The Baby in the manger is our Redeemer, the Son of God.

**Prayer:** Father God, thank you for Baby Jesus. What a beautiful way to draw us back to you! Now help us to bring others closer to you by reflecting Jesus in our attitudes and our deeds each day. In your Son’s precious Name I pray, amen.

#165

*Hallelujah! What a Savior*

Man of Sorrows! What a name  
For the Son of God, who came  
Ruined sinners to reclaim.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
In my place condemned he stood;  
Sealed my pardon with his blood.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless we;  
Spotless Lamb of God was he;  
Full atonement can it be?  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Lifted up was he to die;  
"It is finished!" was his cry;  
Now in heaven exalted high.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

When he comes, our glorious King,  
All his ransomed home to bring,  
Then anew this song we'll sing:  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Words: Philip P. Bliss 1875  
Music: Philip P. Bliss 1875

*May God richly bless you  
and His church  
this beautiful Advent Season  
and throughout the New Year!*

*Merry Christmas!*

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