



Behold my Servant, Whom I uphold, My elect in Whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice and right and reveal truth to the nations.

Is. 42:1 Amplified Bible

Behold, Here is My Servant

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Behold, Here is My Servant

Devotional Guide for ADVENT 2014

Big Bethel AMEC

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The Reverend John Foster, PhD

Sr. Pastor



**From Your Senior Pastor
& Family**

November 2014

Dear Bethel AMEC Family:

O Come let us Adore Him, O Come let us Adore Him! Praise God for this season of Advent! Across all of Christendom God’s creation is celebrating the greatest act of love, grace and mercy in history – God sent Jesus Christ incarnate to save humanity from ourselves. Jesus’ words are true through the test of time: “I am come that you may have life, and to have it more abundantly.”

This year’s theme , "Behold, Here is My Servant," speaks to the love of both God the Father and God the Son. We receive a blessing through God offering Himself to us during this season.

Let us receive the Christ child through both prayer and celebration. Remember that all of creation receives him – the heavens, the shepherds, the magi and anyone who loves the Lord. I thank God that He is still King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

O Come let us Adore Him, Christ the Lord!

Sincerely,

Rev. John Foster, Ph.D.
and the Foster Family

Monday, December 22

Christians ought to assemble together (unite) to help one another grow stronger in the faith. The reference to people who have eyes, but are blind, or who have ears, but are deaf, suggests that we are deaf and blind to the Word. Assembling or working together might help lead them to an understanding of God's Word. I thought of the person who will say in the midst of a discussion, "I hear you" when asked if they understand or if they agree. This implies that they hear the words but have no intention of agreeing with you. In the same way, some hear the Word but have no intention of following it. So, a way to serve God is by assembling in His name and help bring His people out of their deafness and blindness.

Tuesday, December 23

Bro. Eugene Donaldson

There is power in a united people. There is no obstacle that can defeat us or challenge that shall stand when the Church is united. Unity of mind, body, and Spirt completes a person with God and humankind. For without unity, there can be no victory of purpose nor growth of a holy, righteous Nation.

Wednesday, December 24—Christmas Eve

I would imagine that because we hear the story of the birth of Jesus so often, that it is a habitual practice to read or recite it. This Christmas Eve, I am committing to read the Story to my Mother and family with new conviction and adoration. Jesus came to us, just so he could die for us. *Happy Birthday*, Jesus, and thank you for teaching us what it means to be a true servant! We love you and invite you into our hearts and home this day. And so it is.

In lieu of Bible study at church today, share with your family and friends the story of Jesus, the Christ Child. Read together, and experience unity through Christ. Merry Christmas!





Service to God through Unity

Bring forth the people who are blind, yet have eyes,
who are deaf, yet have ears! Let all the nations gather together,
and let the peoples assemble.

43:8-9a

The Reverend George Davis

During this Season of Advent and spiritual renewal, as we serve the Savior, may we rejoice in our unity of doctrine, unity of fellowship, and unity of faith. Most importantly, may our differences diminish and disharmony become less and less, while our love increases and unity grows more and more.

Prayer

Lord, unite us through your power; give us the will to cross barriers of every kind in order to serve your church. Just as your blessed Son, Jesus served you, we in honor of his coming and his birth, give of ourselves this day. We believe you are our Lord and Almighty God, and we stand united in the promise of salvation that is Jesus Christ the Lord! Amen

How will I Serve God through Unity This Week?

He will bring forth justice and right and reveal truth to the nations. Is. 42:1b

(Except where noted, all Sunday entries are from the Amplified Bible)



Welcome, Beloved, to the 2014 Advent Season! I hope you and yours will enjoy all that this holy time has to offer. For ten years, now, God has blessed and given me the opportunity to share in ordained ministry in this Zion we call Big Bethel. I thank God. Indeed, I thank the contributors in this issue and others along the way. I celebrate the Messiah’s grace! In this spirit, I invite you to look at the Advent Season as an opportunity to serve!

Using the Devotional Guide

Behold, Here is My Servant is centrally based on the Prophet Isaiah’s narratives that proclaim the Messiah as the Suffering Servant (Chps.42, 43 & 58). We know that Advent is not isolated; it leads ultimately to Lent. The birth of the Infant Christ, leads ultimately to the death of the Crucified Christ. His ultimate service to us was his sacrifice on the cross, where Jesus represented the height of servanthood. We affirm the servant theme each week starting with the concept of compassion on the First Sunday, followed by forgiveness, sharing and unity on the second, third, and fourth Sundays respectively.

The Sunday entries set the tone for the week with a companion scripture, a meditative message and prayer. There is a journal section to record your weekly commitment. Monday through Saturday entries offer a collection of thoughts from Bethel Bible study members and staff. During Advent, will you visit someone, or share more time with the church? Perhaps, you can embrace someone that needs forgiving. Pray and decide for yourself, but decide. Engage and enjoy “Behold, Here is My Servant.”

Monica



The Meaning of Advent

Advent, not to be confused with Christmastide, refers to the time of expectation when we celebrate the coming of the Savior. It is derived from the Latin term, *Adventus Redemptoris*. Advent is that time on the Christian calendar usually beginning with the 1st Sunday of December (this year, it falls on the last Sunday in November, as it does periodically when there are five Sundays in the month or when the 1st Sunday in December is in the second week) leading up to Christmas Day.

As do we at Bethel, many churches commemorate each Sunday, with a theme accompanied by the lighting of candles. Typically, *Hope* opens the season; at this point we declare our eternal hope in Christ. Then, candles are lit each week thereafter for *Peace, Joy and Love* (our order; it may vary). There is a Christmas or Unity candle that some traditions recognize which is the fifth candle; it is to be lit on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day or other designated day.

Others celebrate by claiming special themes which relate to the teaching of Christ, such as faith, trust, obedience, and so on. Whatever the tradition, the emphasis is placed on our expectation and preparation for the soon coming King!

Bethel's Candle Lighting: 1st Hope—Purple
2nd Peace—Purple
3rd Joy—Pink
4th Love—Purple & Christmas—White

Thursday, December 18

Share when you are asked, and share when you are not;
Share when you have a little and share when you have a lot.
Share when someone is looking, but even more when no one sees.

Share from your heart and always give joyously.

No matter how it may seem at the time; when you share you allow God's light to shine, shine, shine! *Anonymous*

Friday, December 19

I use to think that the saying "God loves a cheerful giver," was something preachers used to make you give (or give more) at offering time. Now, I know differently; giving with joy is the only way to witness to the world that the Lord has been good to us, and in return, we give back to him what is already his! Praise the Lord!

Saturday, December 20

When I think of how the widow that Jesus spoke of in the Gospels gave her last in order to honor God, I am reminded of how much we can take for granted. On any given day, we can spend more on a lunch from McDonald's than some have in their wallets. We have clothes we haven't worn, tickets to events that cost more than some pay for rent. Yet, we find ourselves complaining about what we do not have. *Lord, I will commit to share my tithes and offerings with you without complaint.*



Monday, December 15

I remember growing up with my brothers and our single mom. We used to share everything; we didn't have a whole lot. Each Christmas, whatever was under the tree for one brother was shared with the other. I taught this tradition to my children, and now their children are learning the same act of sharing. I think sharing is key to family relationships. In the Church it is no different. We all should share; not just material blessings, but our love for one another. It is key to our relationship with each other and with the Lord. It is important for us, because we, too, are family.

Tuesday, December 16

Sis. Annette Perry

Ever since we were little children, we've been taught to share. Yet for most of us, it remains as hard as ever to share both our resources and ourselves. Realizing that I am the prosperous recipient of abundant blessings of God, I deny any thoughts of lack and appreciate that in truth, I have everything I need. Freely, I have received these blessings, and freely, I share my resources – Faith, Love, Time, Talent and Money.

Wednesday, December 17

Sharing is part of what God expects of us in the Family of Faith; it is a gift. When someone is hungry, we must feed them. When they are lonely, we must comfort them. When someone needs to talk, we should listen. Sharing ourselves is probably the most important gift of all.



Please attend Bible study today at 12 noon or 7pm to affirm and revive your faith walk this week as we all pray for a sharing spirit.

Service to God through Compassion

Text for the Week

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

Is. 43:2

Tuning In

The Reverend Joyce Young

When we tune in to another's suffering and purpose to show mercy or offer some act of kindness, we show compassion. Compassion is that emotion that triggers a loving desire to alleviate or intervene in the situations of those who suffer or who are vulnerable. Our God shows great compassion toward us, His people, everyday. As David declares, the Lord is slow to anger and shows us unfailing love. Let us, therefore, be open to reach out and touch someone with the power of love that comes from God.



Prayer

Lord, Jesus, grant us this day a heart full of compassion for others. As we begin the Holy Season of expecting you, may we remember the love you had for us by coming to earth as an humble infant so that you could die for us as an humble Servant. We bless you and praise your holy name. Amen

How will I Serve God through Compassion This Week?



Monday, December 1

When I think about compassion I am reminded of the overwhelming compassion that the Lord shows toward me. As Lamentations states, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness." Therefore, I believe as Christians, we are charged to show compassion to our sisters and brothers in Christ just as the Lord has shown toward us. It is what the Lord expects of us.

Tuesday, December 2

When an elderly woman walked onto the elevator with a cane and package in her hand, a young boy busy listening to his hip hop music was standing in the corner. When he saw her, he immediately took off his headset and asked, "You want me to help you with that?" He was not polished; did not have on a suit; did not have perfect manners. But at that moment, he had compassion. The woman hesitantly handed him the bag, then smiled with relief as he walked her to her door. "You remind me of my Grandma," he said, and he left, headset booming in the hallway.

Wednesday, December 3

When Jesus fed the multitude, the Holy Bible states that he had "compassion" for the people. A hungry person can only think of their hunger, or at least will be distracted by it. If we do nothing else in service this Advent, let us feed a hungry family. Let us give back to community that needs our generosity. When we see the hungry, will we do as Jesus did and have compassion on them? May the answer be a resounding, "Yes!"

Please attend Bible study today at 12 noon or 7pm to affirm and revive your faith walk this week as we all pray for a compassionate spirit.



Service to God through Sharing

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them?

Is. 58:7a NRSV

I Give My All

The Reverend Monica C. Jones, PhD

The song, "I Surrender All," is a perfect message for this week's theme, for it stresses the importance of sharing all that we have with God. In doing so, we share what we have with God's people, God's ministry, and God's community. Our tithes, our time, our talents, we give them freely as servants of the Most High, and we do it with joy!



Prayer

All to Jesus, I do surrender, all to you Lord, I freely give. Won't you keep me in your loving care as I do what I can to lift others, love others, and share with them what you have given me? Won't you give me the strength to work even when I am tired? Won't you grant me the peace to be content even when I am unappreciated? I pray this prayer in your precious name, and so it is.

How will I Serve God through Sharing This Week?

Thursday, December 11

“Forgive them...” Each time these words from the Cross come to mind, I am amazed at the super human love it took for a suffering Savior to utter them. So who am I, to not forgive those who offend me or hurt me in some way? Who am I, to be stiff necked and hard of heart?

Friday, December 12

Being in church should give us a sense of wholeness and safety. It is our sanctuary! Yet, it is here where we unfortunately may find our biggest hurts, our hardest hearts. At Love Feast, we come together to share our hearts with one another in a spirit of love and forgiveness. We are taught to take nothing ungodly into the Sacred Space where we receive the Lord’s Supper. If unforgiveness lurks in my heart today, I pray the Lord will remove it and replace it with the same grace he granted me. That is my prayer.

Saturday, December 13

Easier Said than Done

The Reverend Mary Ellen Lake

When someone offends us, I have heard us say, I will forgive them, but I shall never forget this. If we say we have forgiven a matter and we continue to carry it around, we have not forgiven.. Unforgivingness eats away at one as an open wound does. If we want that wound to stop festering and spoiling our joy, we have to give it over to Jesus, let his love heal us and set us free! Set us free from this bondage, once and for all! That is why he came, to save us from our own self-destruction.. Amen.



Continuous Compassion

Bro. and Sis. Jolly

Thursday, December 4

Our Savior, Jesus Christ continuously shows compassion toward us through Grace and Mercy. If we are to be more like Him, we must open our hearts and be more forgiving, show more kindness, patience and above all, more love toward one another. To be compassionate is to be open and receptive to the needs of others and to respond to them lovingly without concern for acknowledgement or thanks.

Friday, December 5

Compassion at church really starts from compassion at home. Our children, siblings, parents, and all other loved ones need our love and understanding, just as we need theirs. Have you said, “I love you” to someone at home today? Start at home, and the compassion you share there will carry wherever you go.

Saturday, December 6

Am I being compassionate when I share with the family I love or children who belong to me? Am I being compassionate when I do something nice for someone I like? Perhaps. But the greater, more sacrificial act is to show mercy on someone whom you do not know, or someone who does care about your act of kindness. Being compassionate to those who are strangers puts us in the example of the Good Samaritan, and that is a blessed place to be!



Service to God through Forgiveness

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake,
and I will not remember your sins.

Is. 43:18-19a, 25

Cancel a Debt

The Reverend Charmain Purvis

Forgiveness: to cancel a debt, pardon, or wipe the slate clean. Isaiah foretells of the Messiah as the Suffering Servant who will stand as an instrument to absolve us of sin. This mission of grace is not loud or flashy, or selfish, but meek, mild, and quiet; although life changing. This unconditional act of love lets us receive God's forgiveness. As a result of being liberated of sin through repentance, we are free to extend forgiveness to others. We can model this grace in response to an offense directed to us.



Prayer

Lord, Jesus, empower us to forgive others as you have forgiven; us let us not carry into this Season a spirit of unkindness toward anyone.. In your name, we pray, Amen.

How will I serve this week in a spirit of forgiveness?

Monday, December 8

The Bible tells us to forgive others when we have been treated wrong. Also, we are to seek forgiveness from those whom we have offended. Forgiveness is a spiritual entity. It is a spiritual fruit of love. It must be exercised, put into action, and lived everyday. GOD gave us many examples through His love and repeated forgiveness of Israel. JESUS answered Peter by telling him to forgive continuously. Therefore, love, forgive, be humble, forgive, judge not, and *forgive*.

Tuesday, December 9

In Bible study, we talked about how Jesus told Peter to forgive “seventy times seven,” and how it strange it seemed. If I have to forgive someone that often, then maybe they were not sincere in the first place. Then, as I sulked, it became clear. A person’s worthiness is not for me to decide. My only task is to forgive.

Wednesday, December 10

When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we are given God’s command on forgiveness. It seems very clear, to me. We forgive so that God will forgive us. So I ask myself, am I serious when I say, “forgive me my trespasses as I forgive those who trespass against me”? *Lord, help me to be sincere following your command and forgiving my enemies. Help me to forgive. Amen*

Please attend Bible study today at 12 noon or 7pm to affirm and revive your faith walk this week as we all pray for a more forgiving spirit.

