

## Devotions for Jan 2 - 8, 2012

### **Monday, January 2, 2012: *Less Than Spectacular* Daily reading: Isaiah 61:10-11**

The second section of Isaiah was written shortly before the Israelites' return from Babylonian captivity. The prophet paints a picture of a glorious homecoming, but the reality is less than spectacular. Jerusalem is in ruins. The fields and orchards, left untended for 70 years, are desolate. The people must labor daily to scrape out a living. As you look ahead to 2012, how are you anticipating that you will change and grow? Maybe your current reality is less than spectacular. Do you need to labor every day just to scrape out a living? These words from Isaiah give us confidence that God's presence does change our future. Ask God to give you hope for the future.

### **Tuesday, January 3, 2012: *Already, But Not Yet* Daily reading: Isaiah 62:1-3**

The prophet continues to promise God's faithfulness, an abundant future which reveals God's salvation. What's been promised is still to come. It is already (they're out of captivity) but not yet (it will take a while to be fully revealed). This "already but not yet" is the connection between this passage and the lesson from Luke 2. God's salvation will glow like a flaming torch for all nations to see. God's righteousness (synonymous with vindication and salvation) will be revealed, a crown of beauty. While the people complain that God has been silent, the prophet cannot keep silent. He proclaims what God has done, and is doing, in the midst of the people. Can you grasp this "already, but not yet" concept? It's like getting a sticker from FedEx on your door, announcing that the package you've been waiting for has arrived. It's not in your hand yet, but you have confidence that it will arrive, and will be fully realized, when you open the package. Ask God to give you hope for the future.

### **Wednesday, January 4, 2012: *Good News* Daily reading: Luke 2:22-40**

Observant Jews, Mary and Joseph obey the command and travel to the temple in Jerusalem for Mary's purification, and the redemption of the firstborn. Luke emphasizes their poverty, telling us that they can only offer a pair of birds as a sacrifice. This is ordinary for Jewish families at the birth of the firstborn male. In the temple, Mary and Joseph encounter a man named Simeon who is devout, filled with the Holy Spirit, and looking forward to what Luke calls "the consolation of Israel," the fulfillment of God's plan in the Messiah. Simeon takes Jesus in his arms and praises God, saying that God's salvation has come in this child, Jesus. What does that mean? Many Christians today assume that God's salvation refers to heaven, but for these Jews, it means liberation in the present, from economic, political, and religious bondage. Salvation refers to the new Kingdom that Jesus has come to inaugurate, in which justice and peace will reign here and now, on earth as it is in heaven. That's good news! Ask God to give you hope for the future.

### **Thursday, January 5, 2012: *Redemption* Daily reading: Luke 2:22-40 again**

These words must blow Mary and Joseph away! Can you imagine? But Simeon isn't done. This salvation of God, this child, will also bring difficult times. Jesus will divide the nation as some believe the good news and others reject it. Simeon also says that Mary's soul will be pierced, the first foreshadowing of Jesus' crucifixion. As if Simeon's words are not enough for one day, Mary and Joseph also encounter a woman named Anna. Anna is old, and has been a widow for most of her life; she has dedicated herself to worship in the temple. This is a devout woman. Anna also praises God for this child, bearing witness to those looking for the redemption of Israel. What does that mean? Redemption, in the ancient world, is tied to being bought out of slavery. In this case, not slavery to sin, but physical slavery. The later church did connect Jesus with our redemption from sin and death, but in its original context, this probably refers to Israel's redemption from political and economic slavery to Rome. Ask God to give you hope for the future.

### **Friday, January 6, 2012: *Salvation* Daily reading: Romans 1:16-17**

Throughout Advent, we've been expecting Jesus. We've been expecting him for nearly 2,000 years! By this weekend, the warm glow of the holidays is over, and we're dealing with moldy leftovers, over-stimulated kids, messy homes, relatives who have stayed too long, Christmas trees that are dropping needles everywhere, and bills for things we shouldn't have bought and don't have the money to pay for. Where exactly is this promised salvation? Living in hope isn't easy. By definition, hope is daring to trust in what we cannot see.

revelation of God's salvation. For now, all they have is a hint of it. In your life, look for the glimpses of God's salvation that build your confidence in the "power of God for salvation." Ask God to give you hope for the future.

**Saturday, January 7, 2012: *Glimpses* Daily reading: Matthew 5:14-16**

Mary and Joseph hold a child in their arms. How can they possibly believe the hope that Simeon and Anna hold out to them? Christians must live in the tension of "already, but not yet." God's salvation, God's Kingdom reality, has come in Jesus. We see glimpses of it, though not the fullness of it. Every time love wins over hatred, generosity over stinginess, forgiveness over bitterness, we see a glimmer of what we will experience in fullness when Jesus returns. For now, we not only wait and live in hope, we respond to God's call to be a people who, together, reveal God's Kingdom to the world with our lives. We are living signs of hope in the world today. In the darkness of these days, we are a people called to "let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Ask God to give you hope for the future.

**Sunday, January 8, 2012: *Hope* Daily reading: Ephesians 1:11-14**

Hope. Without it, the lights seem dimmer and the days seem darker. With it, our reality may be exactly the same as the day before, but our attitude is different. Remember the story of a little girl living in an orphanage. The food is average and the care is barely adequate. Her days are all the same, and there's no sparkle in her eyes. But one day, she receives the news that she's been adopted by a loving family who will take her home forever. What news! For the moment, she is still in the orphanage. That hasn't changed. But now she lives in hope, and there's a sparkle in her eyes. This is the kind of hope we have because of Jesus. Ask God to give you hope for the future.