

Blessings

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (James 1:17)

This is an interesting time of a very challenging year. As I write this message, Thanksgiving Day is only a few days away. A month after that comes Christmas Day. In between is the church season of Advent. Each of these is prompting some thoughts, which I will share with you here.

Thanksgiving is a “holiday” in the United States; also in Canada. Originally it was intended to be a day set aside to pray to God with thankful hearts for a good harvest and an abundance of other blessings, and especially for having brought the country’s people through some difficult times.



Not any more. Now for most of us Thanksgiving is given over to self-indulgence, with little or no thought of thanking God for His help and blessings. It’s the first day of a four-day weekend,

during which we stuff ourselves with turkey and festive foods. Some of us watch a lot of football on television; while others look for “Black Friday” bargains or just do something they enjoy.

What does it mean to be thankful? The sad truth is that for many people—probably most people—the phrase, “I’m thankful for” something simply means “I’m glad or pleased about” whatever it is. Even the exclamation, “Thank God for that!” only includes God in a sort of offhand way. The idea of intentionally turning one’s face toward God and saying, “Thank you for this blessing” does not usually occur to the person who says it.

Having an attitude of gratitude means not only appreciating our blessings, but acknowledging and appreciating the loving God who gives them to us. We shouldn’t think that we deserve our

blessings, and it is very foolish simply to ignore the one who gives them to us.

Which brings me to the best blessing God has given to us—the gift of eternal life with Him, bought for us and paid for with the sacrificial death of God’s own Son, our Savior, Jesus. At Christmas we celebrate—or at least we should celebrate—the birth of Jesus, the coming of God to earth as a human being. Not only a human being, but the perfect human being, the only one who could ever qualify as the perfect sacrifice to atone for the sins of all people, for all time. How thankful to God should we be for this blessing?

It’s so easy to get caught up in all the worldly aspects of the Christmas season. It seems right to have a good time enjoying the lights, the glitter, the gifts given and received, the music—“Jingle Bells,” “Here Comes Santa Claus,” even “Rudolf, the Red-Nosed Reindeer.” We include some angels and three Wise Men, and of course a stable, Mary and Joseph, and a baby lying in a hay-filled manger. But it all sort of runs together, and we tend to forget about what God did for us by sending us a Savior. Instead we celebrate ourselves by having a good time



Advent is not a day, and it’s not a celebration. It is a season of the church year. In many Christian denominations it’s a period of time when sermons and lessons focus on the coming of the Christ into the world, and what that means to us. Some denominations also use this time to focus on the fact that Jesus will eventually be coming again into our world. The Bible gives us numerous hints about what that will be like, but different churches interpret those hints in different ways. There are a few things that seem clear:



- When Jesus returns He will come “in glory,” not as the suffering servant, but as the majestic Lord and Ruler of all things.
- Those people who have died and those who are still living will all be judged by Him.
- Those who are saved will live joyfully with God forever (heaven).
- Those who are lost will suffer by being separated from God forever (hell).

So now, thinking about these three currently appropriate topics, what shall we do about them?

Thanksgiving Day, and the days around it, should remind us that we should always be thankful to God for the blessings we have been given. Paul wrote this: “... giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ...” which is part of a passage (Ephesians 5:15-20) that is a good summary of the Christian life.

Thank God for everything? It’s hard to be thankful for things that are painful, but we should try. The essence of being a Christian is trusting God even when we don’t understand what’s happening.

What should we do when we don’t measure up to God’s standards of behavior? We can’t fool Him and we can’t hide from Him. The answer, of course, is “trust Him.” Turn to him in prayer, admit that we have failed Him, and ask for His forgiveness and His help to do better.



How should we, as Christians, deal with all the secular hoopla that is attached to Christmas? My answer is, enjoy it for what it is, if you want to, but spend your energy on the true celebration of the coming of the Christ into the world. Without Him we would be forever lost; with Him we are forever saved.

By God’s grace we have the gift of eternal life, if we will accept it on God’s terms. And His terms are simple: He is God; I am not, and you are not. Just worship and love Him, because He is infinitely worthy of our worship and our love.

During Advent it’s always appropriate to re-read and remember what the Bible says about the first coming of Jesus. Of course this is a most important passage: *“For God so loved the world*

that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17)

The beautiful story of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:5 through 2:20) is always worth re-reading. I urge you to read it at least once during December, to refresh your memory of how that all “came to pass.”



A final thought: As we look at this country, it’s obvious that as a society we look more and more like the Israel of Isaiah 29:13: we give lip-service to honoring God, but for the most part our hearts are far from Him. We need to take to heart, as a message for us, God’s promise in 2 Chronicles 7:14. *“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”* Revive us again, Lord!

Peace and Joy in our Lord Jesus —

Brother Roland

Send me your address changes and subscription requests. Also send me any Bible questions you have — I’ll try to give you a helpful answer.

I’m sorry, but I do not have any Bibles or study materials to send to inmates. The latest information I have about sources is not very current, but I’m including it on Page 3.

**Brother Roland
PO Box 14
Fayetteville PA 17222**

The Christmas Story

Here is a puzzle using many of the words and phrases associated with the birth of Jesus, including the prophecy in Isaiah. As you solve the puzzle, think about what His coming means to you!

Puzzle:

H R Z X N N G X J Q V S D R F M B K Y W W S D V O K O S W H T H W
R D W B U U W W D V S P E W V X Q R M B G Q X S O N K S G E A A Y
Q O I M S B R B S R L M D L Y S A P G N Q Y W Q G H Q N P I I F Y
D K G J U X B V J O E E O U B M Z B D O R E H G N I K Q R E R P N
H G U B T I W Y X E M E Z X N W B Y S E S O R T V N G A H H U Y U
U W F K S G L M D M A U C I T Y O F D A V I D T N L H C R P R V I
T D L H U O S E A Z C D G A O C L P T D Y C I A P C E R P E H E I
P B O Y G X R N M F X R O B E J T V P R S I V P E R Y E P I K N M
Y H C H U X G A B R I E L Z Y P E N S E V G A Z C M F E X N Z Z M
G E K V A E U M S V M E H Z N V F H T A L M D O G F E L E R B A A
E Z O D R R Q A X D S E U E E D E O R M K I F I S K O M B E S J N
O T F C O H J J V X U X U R A P H T E V Q L O Q N L E E T D C R U
T H S A R N V B V S V Z L U H V S S N C G M E I C S E Q N H A S E
N L H B E X O G U K I A T E O C E O C P N G N K I O L G F S M O L
I J E G P W I T V G S M R X P E C N N X O I O W A W X Y N X E V T
E N E E M H V H B T T D E J L D I N L O L S R H T E R A Z A N I D
E I P S E I A O I E S X R O O J O G D Y F V H P J M M T X W R Q M
L E A P U I R N M I A N D G N H J N O R H G T H S O L D K I K J H
F P F G S S G E N J O F O X V C E V M O G O O B Z I Z Q P H T R Q
O G E S T F E F F Z Z T R B G W R B Q P D P S D D V S S F Z H D L
G D E A A X I J M S Y A B A S B U S F U R W W T S A Y A E E J C A
H M N T C E G I Y R D M T R I U I G Q X B O I N M L E P V L F G V
L N H V L E G C O B G L H J B D N U H E N T P L O I F S J I W T H
A E U D Y H O L F R A N K I N C E N S E M U E H L R D N D Z O W Z
R O S H T E G N E C F B L C R F X S T X C X A D E M C J W A H R X
Q Y X Y D A K K E M E H E L H T E B T Z S B W E G C U R R B G I K
I M G L I B M N A A F N I K T X K G N A Y Z U L A D Y Y A E X V L
O O L E C I O C O H R O W C U K B X O X B H W S A E W Z L T R E B
D J O S E P H R X D R T G W W I I X K L J L P H J R J X P H S P Z
H E P W H V U F F H D P H V S L J X X P D H E S E R O P T J E X Y

Words:

ANGELS	EVERLASTING FATHER	INKEEPER	REDEEMER
ANNA	FLEE INTO EGYPT	JOSEPH	REJOICE
BABY JESUS	FLOCK OF SHEEP	JUDAH	SAVIOR
BETHLEHEM	FRANKINCENSE	KING HEROD	SHEPHERDS IN FIELDS
CAMELS	GABRIEL	MANGER	SIMEON
CITY OF DAVID	GLORY TO GOD	MESSIAH	SON OF GOD
CRECHE	GOLD	MIGHTY GOD	STABLE
DONKEY	GOOD NEWS	MYRRH	STAR
DO NOT BE AFRAID	GOOD WILL	NAZARETH	THRONE OF DAVID
DREAM	HEAVENLY HOST	PEACE ON EARTH	VIRGIN MARY
ELIZABETH	HOLY SPIRIT	PRINCE OF PEACE	WISE MEN
EMPEROR AUGUSTUS	IMMANUEL	PROPHECY	ZECHARIAH

From the Christmas Carols

Here is a puzzle based on the titles of a number of beloved Christmas carols. How many of them are familiar to you? When I see these words I want to sing along — I love the Christian Christmas songs. Enjoy! (Oops! I included one carol twice. Oh, well, find it twice.)

Puzzle:

A W A Y I N A M A N G E R W V M K O G O K E W U N E H Q Y K R C
R I N F A N T L O W L Y K Y Y Z X F A I F U O O C G X A Y X O Z
P E E H S Y M Y B E L I H W R W A Z D V S X P I I O D R Y Z G S
J U A Y C H A G R D K A L L A E M O C O Z U O H F S C R R F A J
T E J L O Y O R V U K G Z Y E U B E N F E J N O A S O S A L T D
B E S M M T L E V A H E W S L E G N A M E O R M T L L E S S V I
F L G U E S M O O C O M E O C O M E A R D I T S G E H E L F K C
P T S L S H O X H K G P P U T I W C N R E S I F O T C I L D P P
N T L S A B E F Q T O O G G H X T E A N I T O N M N J K E A I C
F I X I I O O L G N N E Q A G I M E T R P S T O E Y W X B P L J
T L N J L H F Y H L N A N A I A H A H A M S R W O R H X E L H U
T T A R I R T T V T O G F G N H R C B L R F G S M R A V H R G D
U E N R N C P S L L E R O N D E N E A I S N X O L E T U T Y Q O
P E Q G G Z B E I L X B Y Z I O H E F L I S C E T M I T D E B N
C W T L I I M T S D D D F I M T R E E K R G U H C E H V R I V T
W S R X N E T F G M L L E O E L H G D E L N G G P Y E W A S Q H
U C A I N L R S C D T I R W H T N O A K A I A O O T A O E A A E
K M B C E O B I B H W H H O T A O Q N M N K U O D S R Z H W J M
B N U T M D C L H J B C X C W G T V M Y M E F D L E H Z I T N O
T N O T W R A E H U O Y O D T E O E L C X E M C H R Y O I H T U
D W H A I D H N F P K O V P H A H O N U Y R I H U D X O R R D N
N E G U N E T T O G E B E V O L H T Z P Y H W R K O F M Y E F T
P D D K G A H N F I R S Y P E O P W O A V T P I H G L D B E R A
M G T V Y K E I I W S Y O F T H E F A T H E R S A V L G M S B I
G N I S S L E G N A C R H C G Y V L D R Y W K T D Q N T R H K N
Q B X F P L G H S K N A B S N A D R O J N O G I X M M K S I S S
Y M Q Z A B G T L X Q M Y E F A I T H F U L J A Y L W C D P H N
G H A R K T H E H E R A L D R P E W L X R B Y N F Y V P F S L T

Words:

IT CAME UPON
THE MIDNIGHT CLEAR
SILENT NIGHT
AWAY IN A MANGER
I SAW THREE SHIPS
COME SAILING IN
JOY TO THE WORLD
ON JORDAN'S BANKS
THE BAPTIST'S CRY
THE FIRST NOEL
ANGELS FROM THE
REALMS OF GLORY

GO TELL IT
ON THE MOUNTAIN
GOD REST YE MERRY
GENTLEMEN
HARK THE HERALD
ANGELS SING
O COME ALL
YE FAITHFUL
O LITTLE TOWN
OF BETHLEHEM
WE THREE KINGS
OF ORIENT ARE

O HOLY NIGHT
WHAT CHILD IS THIS
DO YOU HEAR
WHAT I HEAR
GOOD KING WENCESLAS
ANGELS WE HAVE
HEARD ON HIGH
ANGELS FROM THE
REALMS OF GLORY
I HEARD THE BELLS
ON CHRISTMAS DAY
MARY'S BOY CHILD

O COME O COME
EMMANUEL
SWEET LITTLE
JESUS BOY
INFANT HOLY
INFANT LOWLY
OF THE FATHER'S
LOVE BEGOTTEN
WHILE BY MY SHEEP
GOOD CHRISTIAN
MEN REJOICE