



Christmas Prayer: Welcoming the Word that Became Flesh



BY ANDREW COMISKEY

'Jesus, friend of a lonely heart, you are my haven and my peace in times of struggle and doubt. You are everything to a lonely soul.'

St. Faustina

"No amount of faithful gatherings, family, or friends can be for us what Jesus alone can be... we discern the overload and pull away to be with the One who matters most."



Although the holidays are usually associated with excess, it may be precisely in the 'too much' of our traditions that God invites us to experience most acutely our ache for prayer, for Jesus. Perhaps we can say that our deepest cry at Christmas is satisfied only in quiet: 'How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!' No amount of faithful gatherings, family, or friends can be for us what Jesus alone can be.

We turn to Him as the answer to the deepest cries of our hearts. We become aware of the encroachment of too many things—we discern the overload and pull away to be with the One who matters most.

Thomas Merton says it best: "We live in the time of no room, the

time of the end, the time when everyone is obsessed with a lack of time and space, short-circuited by new technological furies... News becomes a new noise in the mind, briefly replacing the news that went before it, only to yield to the noise that comes after it, so that everything blends into the same monotonous roar. News? There is so much news that there is no more room for the 'good news.' As the end approaches, there is no room for solitude, for attentiveness to our own state or that of another. There is no room for God."

Please, don't get me wrong. I love holiday clutter: movies, parties, opportunities to serve in a spirit of good cheer. But I know that unless I withdraw to seek Him

in quiet, I can become a holiday monster: engorged and grouchy. So I unplug and listen in the spirit of Samuel: 'Speak, Your servant is listening' (1 Sam 3:10). I quiet myself and wait on the One who is there. I wait for His whispers.

I start by gazing on the manger scene before me then raising my eyes to the cross. That reminds me of the war that was declared at Christmas and won at Calvary. It reminds me that the war still being waged for souls can be fought only through prayerful attentiveness on the God who became flesh and offered His flesh in exchange for us. Holy prayerful days prepare us for a new year. Prayer fulfills Jesus'

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words: 'Apart from Me, you can do nothing' (John 15:4).

Abiding in Jesus truly gives grace but also can expose gaps in our lives. We may exit Christmas feeling cornered by the challenges that await us in the New Year. Take heart! We can start 2016 by entering into enter into the spacious place of prayer promised to us in Psalm 31:8—'You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place.' Through turning quietly towards Him, He invites us to return to the Source, the freshest, sweetest water there is. We wade in that water and wait for the awareness that He is purely good and

strong, the One to whom we can entrust uncertainties that might otherwise sink us.

I hold in vivid memory several Christmases past which nearly anchored me to some bitter disappointments. Trained in prayer, I realized that I had a place to go!

Trust turned the tide of fear and gave me rest.

He gave us that place of rest through His crib and Cross, 'that gate by which God unceasingly enters our lives.' (St. John Paul II) We surrender to Jesus whatever arises in silence to Calvary; we lay down the whole of our lives before the One who has done all to grant us a place of rest (Hebrews 4: 11). Merton again: 'God works in us as we

rest in Him; beyond all our grasping is the holy work of our Creator. Rest shines forth as more productive than all our work.'

'Work' involves all our own efforts to solve our problems, to gain control over our uncertainties. Real prayer, on the other hand, exposes our cares, fears, and controlling efforts; once we release those to Jesus, we can then rest in the Love that is there for us. After all, 'What do we have that we did not first receive?' (1 Cor 4:7) More than expecting a concrete answer to our concerns, we entrust the concern to Him and can know that answers will come as we abide with Him and go forth from the place of quiet.

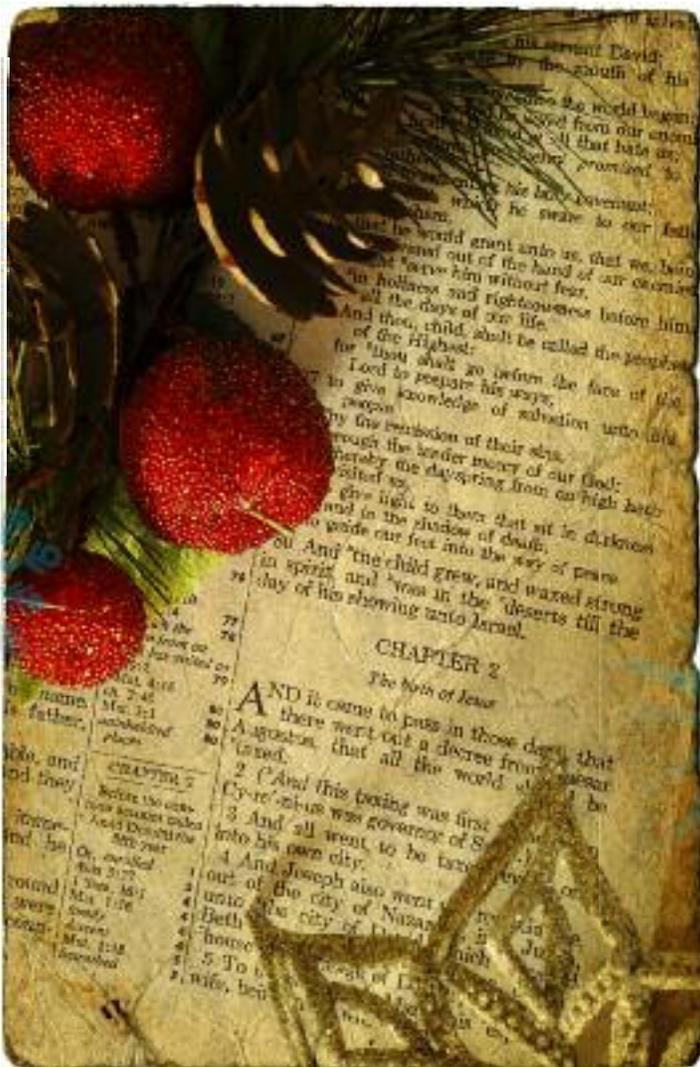
If we fall asleep, don't worry: 'Little children are as pleasing to their parents when they sleep as when they are awake' (St. Therese de Lisieux). Rouse yourselves to listen and know that He will speak to you in ways that you can receive; 'I know my sheep; my sheep know Me. My sheep hear my voice' (John 10: 14-27). Meditate on choice bits of Scripture, savor His words like sips of fine wine. He loves us in quiet as He tends to our deepest needs.

Contemplative prayer helps us to be a good gift to others. That matters during the holidays when we have more occasions

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I wait for His whispers."



"Prayer is the means by which we can repair all that is broken"

Ps. 38:9

All my longings lie open before you, Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you.

than usual to offer our gift. Consider:

1. One of the first things that arise in your brief times of quiet is the realization of sin. It may be the shame of your sin—did we say too much or too little? Did someone provoke desires of disdain, envy, lust, or bitterness? Offer these quickly to God for purification. Perhaps we recall the sting of another's sin. Release him or her to Jesus so we can get on with the business of being a gift. The enemy will use holiday-'inspired' memories to shut us down. In His Presence, 'All our desires lie open before You, O God' (Psalm 38:9). Instead of introspecting, act decisively at the Cross so that desires for another's good might prevail over childish patterns.

2. I realize that some conflicts, especially related to family, are huge and cannot be resolved in one prayerful surrender. It is a matter of many surrenders in which we allow the wound to be washed by His blood and water over and over again. In the same prayer, we offer up the offending party again and forgive him or her yet again, as many times as it takes until you are no longer under his or her domination. Such healing is a function of quiet surrender to the Crucified. "Prayer is the means by which we can repair all that is broken," says St. Teresa of Avila.



3. As we wait before Jesus, He is sensitizing us to the needs of others. Quietening our souls and unloading our hearts are a gift to others; we are preparing ourselves for them. I love Isaiah's words when he says: 'The Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He awakens me morning by morning, awakens my ears to listen like one being taught' (Isa 50:4).

4. In quiet, we can listen for the healing word on behalf of another. What a great gift to offer such an encouraging word on Christmas! I find that

even if I have not received such a gift in quiet, it may come as I go to my friend or family member. In response to my prayer, the word springs up like a small fountain and waters the weary one. Spring up, o well!

5. Sometimes, our quiet moments are designed just to create space in our hearts for persons who we know require more grace for us. We ask God to expand our hearts, to grant us a share in His generous spirit for that one who provokes an ugly stinginess in us. Instead, may we manifest Jesus.

Bless you this Christmas. Through prayer, may we welcome Jesus and extend generously the gift He has made us for others. 🙏

“Meditate on choice bits of Scripture,

savor His words like sips of fine wine
He loves us in quiet as He tends to our deepest needs.”

HEB. 4:11

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

Purification

How The Word has Become “Flesh” For Us

BY ANN ARMSTRONG

“From the fullness of his grace we all have received one blessing after another....grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” John 1:16, 17

Our team was meeting to pray for one another and make plans for our Living Waters group. We set up several stations around the church and began to listen for what God had for each one.

I looked around the room at those receiving prayer. Two male team members were praying for the coordinator. As I watched and waited, I sensed God bringing to mind this verse for him (see above) one that I had been meditating on. I knew he was facing several challenging circumstances in his life

and ministry. I waited some more, not wanting to share primarily from what had blessed and spoken to me.

God continued to impress upon me the fullness of His grace and provision, spoken of by St. John. I believed this was a word of hope and truth from Him for this leader. Since the Lord had been blessing me with the same verse, I said something like, ‘I know this is something God has been speaking to me.’ I shared what I sensed from the Lord, asking for the daily measure

of His grace and truth to bring peace and rest to my friend.

He listened and received these words and the prayer. Those of us praying saw God’s peace come as the leader was reminded again of His presence. He shared how the verse and prayer helped him to trust God to bring His best, according to His timing. 🙏

Ann is the director of intercession for Desert Stream Ministries

BY BECKY TURNER

Last spring I was on the team for the Leadership Training; during that week, there are many opportunities to listening in prayer for oneself and for others. As I was preparing for our time together, I enjoyed being in the presence of Our Lord—listening and asking Him to bless the training through His dwelling with the team and the participants. We hope and pray that each person meets Jesus very personally.

As I was praying, I felt like there was a block to my heart. I was not sure why but I gave the Lord permission to show me and asked that we would grow closer through the training. We gathered as leaders the day before for fellowship and prayer. One of the prayer warriors had a picture for me of a boulder that was not allowing God to go deeper. I asked the Lord to show me what “it” was but again I did not get a clear idea. The week was beautiful

and the Lord met many folks in profound ways.

My most powerful experience came after the forgiveness teaching. I was praying about who I needed to forgive. To my surprise, I heard His still small voice say: ‘What about Me?’ Slowly, I realized that I had been harboring unforgiveness toward the Lord. I was horrified. My pride in telling the Lord what He should be doing in certain situations in my life was keeping me from completely surrendering

to my Creator. I was praying “Thy will be done” but I was not living it. The block cracked. When it did, grace and mercy poured in. I felt His loving arms around me. I am grateful to the Lord for speaking to me and for continuing to woo me as His most precious daughter. 🙏

Becky is the volunteer coordinator for Desert Stream Ministries. She has a heart for ministering to family and friends of those with same-sex attractions.

“The birth of the baby Jesus stands as the most significant event in all history,

because it has meant the pouring into a sick world the healing medicine of love which has transformed all manner of hearts for almost two thousand years.”

George Matthew Adams

BY DANIEL DELGADO

RELEASING

I was ministering in Mexico City at a Living Waters Leaders Training. I received a picture for a participant in the small group. He was sitting in a room strapped to a chair and it was as if the roof was going to cave in. It was the only room in the house that was on fire. I saw his family outside along with a big fire truck trying to put the fire out.

He confirmed the vision and was visibly shaken. We walked into the house and up to the room and sat with him in the fear. I affirmed that we the small group were with him and we invited the Lord to come into his despair and loneliness. It was here that we were able to mediate the love of God so this man would know that he was loved and accepted.

There was an earthquake in Mexico when he was a little boy. He

was left in the house and the family did not come to find him. The man recalls finding his way out of the house. He said that his abandonment had become the big joke in his family.

This encounter shifted the way he viewed the heart of Our Heavenly Father. It was moving for everyone in the group because we knew God was releasing life through this healing word. 🙏

Daniel is an intern at Desert Stream Ministries. His heart is particularly drawn to minister to Spanish speaking people.

“The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.”

C.S. Lewis

You have shaken the land

and torn it open;

mend its fractures, for it is quaking.

Psalm 60:2



REV. 4:8

“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, which was and is and is to come.”

“There is no
name so sweet
on earth,
**no name so
sweet in
heaven,**
the name,
before His
wondrous birth,
to Christ the
Savior given.”

George W. Bethune

John 1:14

*“The Word became flesh
and made his dwelling
among us. We have seen
his glory, the glory of the
one and only Son, who
came from the Father,
full of grace and truth.”*

BY DEAN GREER

Early on in my ministry training I was given an opportunity to serve on a prayer team at a Desert Stream conference. I had some entry-level experience on my church's prayer team but hadn't served for very long in Living Waters. There was still much to learn and I was eager, if not doubtful.

Ministry time came and I was directed to a middle-aged woman who was standing stoically, waiting for the Lord to meet her. My first thought was, “Isn't there another middle-aged woman on the team who should pray with her?” Of course there was not.

I stood with her, placed my hand delicately on her shoulder and said to myself, “Come, Holy Spirit, come!” She opened her eyes to see who was praying for her and I interpreted disappointment in her glance. Immediately the accuser began dissolving any crumb of confidence I had. It didn't help that the invitation to come forward was vague, a call to ‘receive whatever the Lord might have for you!’ This gave me no direction as to how to pray so I was left with nothing but, “Come, Holy Spirit, come!”

After about 15 seconds of silence I saw a picture. A bare hand reached down into the ground and started turning the soil. That was it.

I noticed the woman was still stoic, as she expressed no emotion other than discomfort. My discomfort became noticeable as well. I asked her if God was showing her anything and she shook her head.

I had nothing else to offer, so said, “I saw a picture of a hand reaching down into the ground and turning the soil—does that mean anything to you?” She immediately said, “No”.

We stood there together for a few more minutes and tears began to lightly roll down her cheeks, which lead to immense sobbing and her sitting on the ground. I sat with her a bit

longer and when she was comforted I asked: “What was God telling you?”

She said, “I came tonight after asking the Lord to help me deal with my sexual abuse. I have never spoken of my abuse to anyone. I told God that I could never tell anyone, unless He convinced me of an open door.’ She went on to say, “I was abused by my grandfather in the garden behind his house. Ever since, any garden-like area provoked immense fear in me. With that picture, God told me that he was re-tilling the soil in order to purify and redeem the garden He created me for. He wants to meet with me in His garden.”

Dean is the Living Waters US Coordinator.



BY MAITÉ RODRIGUEZ

Last November during our training I was going through a difficult season. I could feel a division in my heart between two “goods”: a call to free sexual and relational captives and my heart’s desire for a contemplative life in a religious community.

As I was meditating, the Lord gave me a picture that surprised me and brought balm to my heart. I saw an infected and deep wound in me and how salt had been put in the wound, which made it hurt more. God showed me that I had to keep the wound clean with the help of my Church and the Living Waters community. He also said that it was not going to heal completely: that it would remain an ‘open wound’. As difficult as the picture was, it was soothing

to me and brought peace in the midst of my inner turmoil.

As I continue to meditate on this picture, the Lord continues to reveal more of its meaning. He showed me the reality that I was going to continue to live in tension. You may think this picture is not hopeful or enlightening but for me it was just what I needed! I had been raising my fist at God, wanting my will and not seeing His will. In my pain, He wanted me to lean on Him.

I see pictures for participants in our groups but usually I don’t see pictures for myself. This memory of listening prayer helps me when the toils and disappointments in life come: it reminds me to keep my wound clean and to depend on Him—the Truth, the Light, and the Life. 🙏

Maite is the coordinator of Aguas Vivas, the arm of Desert Stream for Spanish speakers.

BY CINDY DEL HIERRO

At just the right time God comes, and often in ways I wouldn’t consider! I awoke one morning in the Philippines on our last day of the leadership training; I spent time praying just before dawn. While in the dark I enjoyed my time with the Lord and I thanked him for his goodness toward us all.

Tiptoeing into the bathroom, I turned the light on to look in the mirror and...Holy cow! A cavernous crease curved across my face! I had slept on my travel pillow that has piping around the edges, which left the beautiful dent. I laughed out loud and said, “Well now, isn’t this pretty?!”

Still in the glow of my time with the Lord, I wandered out onto the terrace and took in the glorious sunrise. Without any warning, tears began falling from my eyes. ‘What! Why am I crying?’ I felt no clear emotion, only tears. Curious, I asked the Lord what was happening and instantly I had a memory from my childhood.

I was sitting with my grandmother in the rocking chair. As

I stared up at her beautiful, wrinkled, olive skin, I yearned to be just like her. I wanted to have her wrinkles! I loved her simplicity and purity. I remember often trying to fold and crinkle my skin to be creased like hers. With that memory, I realized instantly that I did want the good gift of the true feminine. That desire came from knowing her. Although we never shared a deep connection, she embodied the genuine dignity of womanhood.

That providential wrinkle in time unveiled the truth that I have always esteemed the incomparable presence of authentic woman. That is a treasure I’ve longed to pass on to my loved ones. Jesus spoke to me that morning saying: “This is my gift to you from the Philippines.” 🙏

Cindy is a Desert Stream Ministries and, along with her husband Jude, direct Confluence Ministries in Denver.



“He was created of a mother whom He Created. He was carried by the hands that he formed. He cried in the manger

in wordless infancy. He, the Word, without whom all human eloquence is mute.”

St. Augustine

LK. 2:15

“Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

BY BRIAN BARLOW

COMFORT

It has been said that love and pain go together, for a time at least. To know love you must know pain. It was His story and such it is with our lives. This truth offered little comfort to me growing up in a small Midwest farm community. One of four boys, I was the third of four boys borne to hardworking and loving parents. Even though my folks cared deeply for their boys, they could not always protect us from life's cruelties.

I was sensitive, artistic and loved the outdoors; however, I always seemed to be challenged when it came to relating to my gender. I had some trauma early on in life that I would later come to understand was sexual abuse. Coupled with relentless teasing from my oldest brother, a solid masculine identity seemed to be out of reach as I grew up.

Fortunately, I met Jesus at a young age. I came to rely on His mercy and grace in the years to come as my need for male affirmation became sexualized. His mercy brought me to loving believers who committed to walking with me as He exposed the areas that needed His presence.

One of the most impactful experiences was during a Living Waters Leadership Training several years ago. I was with a group of men who understood the intricate balance of love and pain, and the grief that results. The door to deep 'living waters' often comes through grieving.

In my small group, for the first time, I was asked straight away to share about my childhood abuse. As I shared, these men

listened and the fragile box in which I carefully packed these memories broke. The tears came gushing out in sobs. I was surprised at what happened next. One by one these men started to cry with me, including the leader. I had never grieved over the loss created by my abuse and sin let alone had anyone

else cry with me. This was Holy Ground in my healing journey and a tremendous gift from the Father. 🙏

Brian is the Living Waters Coordinator for Southern California.



Mission Statement

Based on the biblical foundations of compassion, integrity, and dependence on God,

Desert Stream Ministries proclaims to the world the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

We equip the body of Christ to minister healing to the sexually and relationally broken, through healing groups and leadership training for the local church.

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 - Desert Stream Press**
Annette Comiskey
 - Living Waters USA Coordinator**
Dean Greer
 - Director of Intercession**
Ann Armstrong
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