

Jesus Christ: the Bridge Advent 2013

St. Paul Presbyterian Church

11 N. Park -- San Angelo, TX 76901

Devotionals by the people of St. Paul and photos by Barbara Galyean



Pictured: Oakes St. Bridge from the Celebration (Mermaid) Bridge on the Concho River

Jesus Christ is the bridge between Heaven and Earth . . .

The bridge between ourselves and others . . .

Prophecies and promised coming

Jesus Christ is the Bridge the that connects us.

Sunday,
1 December 2013
Psalm 24
Anna Margaret Anderson

The earth is the lord's and everything in it. The world and all who live in it; for he established it upon the waters.

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart. Who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.

He will receive blessing from the lord and vindication from God his Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, and who seek your face, O God of Jacob.

Lift up your heads, O you gates: be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the lord mighty in battle. Lift up your ears, O you gates: lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

Who is the King of glory? The Almighty, he is the King of Glory.

This is obviously a hymn of praise, honoring God and asking him to hear these words of adoration... When I think about the line, "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord?" I feel sure we could never ascent to God if it weren't for our Savior, Jesus. I don't know about you, but I know for myself, I couldn't be that, "clean hands and pure heart." At least not all the time. To paraphrase Paul, I try to do good, but before I know it, I have "dropped the ball". I am so glad that Jesus loves me. We can have his forgiveness and climb the holy hill with clean hands and a pure heart.

Prayer: O holy God... Why you would love us so, we will probably never understand, but because you do we can come to you with our fears and worries. So great is your love for those who but seek you. Thank you for your son and this blessed advent season. May our hearts be open to your love and may we share it with others. Amen.

Monday,
2 December 2013
2 Peter 1:3-11
Kevin, Meg, Kevin and Sage Armstrong

Jesus gave us all we need to live to grow to be like God. He gave us tools.

Add goodness to your faith. To goodness, add wisdom. To wisdom, add self control. To self control, add patience. To patience, add habit of obeying God. To habit of obeying God, add brotherly kindness. To brotherly kindness, add love.

Use the tools and grow more like Jesus. Don't use them, and you will not grow and be blind. You will forget that Jesus died for our sins.



Bridge at the giraffe enclosure at the Abilene Zoo

But if you do use them, you will grow to be like God and you will get to go Jesus' kingdom.

Tuesday
3 December 2013
Genesis 3:15
David Cooper

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel.” Genesis 3:15.

What the scripture is describing is that God will put enmity, or a deep seated hatred, between man and Satan. The context of this verse is the fall of Adam and Eve. God is speaking to the serpent who is a personification of Satan. God has told Adam before that he wants no alliance with Satan and has told both Adam and Eve how to protect themselves while in the Garden. They have disobeyed.

God draws a distinction between “your seed” (Satan’s seed) and “her Seed” (Jesus). “Her seed” refers to the humanity of Christ. This is an inference of the virgin birth. In Galatians 3:16, Jesus is referred to as “the Seed”. In speaking “He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel”, God is predicting the defeat of Satan with the coming of Christ, the Messiah. Even at this early point God is drawing the lines of battle between himself and Satan.

“...bruise your head “is a reference to the Satan’s power being crushed by the cross. Thus, God promises a solution to Adam and Eve’s sin. At the fall, Satan bruised the heel of Jesus. Sin was the cause of Christ going to the cross. At the cross, Jesus will crush Satan’s head, thus dealing Satan a fatal blow. There Christ paid for the penalty of sin fully.

“....bruise His heel” refers to the death of Christ. Whether this refers literally to the heels of Jesus pressed against the cross is debatable. Jesus was indeed bruised at the cross (Isaiah 53:10).

This passage is the prophecy of the coming of Christ, not just his birth but the prophecy of his work as well. The birth of Christ set up the possibility and ultimate sacrifice of Christ fully paying for our sins by his death on the cross.



View of the equalization channel at Twinn Buttes Reservoir

Wednesday
4 December 2013
Micah 5:2
Karen Bartholomeo

Micah 5:2 (NIV)

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

Bethlehem was small; it was very small. It was not important. She was too little to be any sort of strategic military outpost. Most inhabitants were poor farmers. God was getting ready to do something great in the town of Bethlehem. The most important person, the Savior of the world would come from it. Sometimes we think our place is too small, and we're disappointed at our meager lot. Perhaps we're in a small church, a small town, a small ministry, or a small house. Don't underestimate how greatly Jesus uses small things. Historian David Hackett Fischer points out that, compared to the great battles of history, Washington's crossing of the Delaware was a very small event. But the outcome saved the United States of America. Of all the cities of Judah, God chose this little town as the birthplace of the Messiah and as the junction of time and eternity. God chooses unlikely places as the setting, and unlikely people as the characters in His story. If your place is a small one, remember Bethlehem.

PRAYER

Pray that God will provide you with opportunities to witness of Him in "simple," unexpected places.

Thursday
5 December 2013
Isaiah 7:14
Shell Barth

Over 700 years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah warned the people of Judah and Jerusalem that their involvement of the needy would eventually bring the fire of God's divine judgement upon them. The suffering and devastation they will experience would most likely come from Assyria, whom Isaiah believed God would use as the rod of His anger. It would not be the intent of God to destroy Judah and Jerusalem, but to cleanse them of their sins. As a sign of things to come, Isaiah named one of his sons, Shear-Yashub, which means "a remnant shall return," or "a remnant shall repent and turn to God." Later, as a warning to the Judean King, Ahaz, not to seek help from Assyria in spite of a threat from Israel and Syria to dethrone him. Isaiah introduced a new sign from God. "Behold a young woman shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name, Immanuel, which means, "God is with us." Believing it was inevitable that Assyria would invade Judah, the child, in spite of the difficulties ahead, would serve as a reminder to Judah that God is with them.

It was Isaiah's hope that once God freed Judah from Assyrian rule, Immanuel would ascend to the throne and place Judah under God's rule over a faithful and righteous remnant of believers.

The similarities between Immanuel and the babe born in Bethlehem were very apparent to New Testaments writers. Jesus represented all that Isaiah hoped for in Immanuel. Jesus had total trust in God, cared for the sick, the lonely and the needy, died so that all may be cleansed of their sins and turn to God, then established God's kingdom on earth where love for God and others becomes the rule of life for the faithful.

Friday
6 December 2013
Zechariah 9:9
Lynne Springer

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!
Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you
righteous and having salvation,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey

This prophecy in the Old Testament makes us realize, once again, that God is in control and He has a plan. God knew He was sending His son to save us, He knew he was going to sacrifice His son for our many sins. If we knew the future would we change our decisions today? God knew, yet He did not change the outcome. Thanks be to God that He didn't change His mind. Rejoice! Jesus Christ is born!

Heavenly Father,
Give us the faith to
trust in You, and to
remember that You
are in control, not
us. Help us to
remember that You
have a plan, and
that you honor all
of Your promises.
Thank you for the
gift of Your son.
May we live our
lives in ways to
honor Him.

Amen



Bridge at the Lily Garden

Saturday
7 December 2013
Genesis 22:18
Elaine Beeson

...."and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves because you have obeyed my voice". Genesis 22:18

We all know all beginnings are written in the Book of Genesis. We have to really look deep into some of the verses to understand and see God's prediction of the 'coming and birth of Jesus'. This particular verse succeeds the story of God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac for testing his faith. FAITH..is the key word here that I see in my heart. Faith is believing strongly in my Christian upbringing and knowing that my God is always guiding my life according to His will.

With Abraham starting his family and increasing it for God is declaring we on earth will have the blessing of the coming of his son, Jesus. The prophecy, promise and real happening is his will for us to follow in our Christian religion.



Bridge below Pulliam Point at San Angelo State Park

I have always been taught throughout my years of being a Presbyterian that the word "predestination" was and will always be a part of my life. Now as I continue to grow seeking God's will, it helps me to be a better person.

PRAYER..God, please always give me the strength to seek your will for me to go about my life in my Christian upbringing throughout this Advent Season. Amen



Bridge leading to Sunken Gardens from near Kid's Kingdom on the Concho River

Sunday
8 December 2013
2 Samuel 7:12-13
Bryan Burrell

Being a part of a church family that does so much for people with such little resources has been an amazing journey for me. I've had a running joke for a couple of years with another church

member, when there is an activity happening and one of us is there and the other couldn't make it that "I guess I love Jesus more than you this week".

As much as we love each other, love our fellow man, try to do everything we can to make this world a better place, basically it is a grain of sand in the ocean as compared to God's love for us. He promises that he has prepared a place for us. He will build a house for us! We don't help God, God helps us in every way.

I'm thankful we worship a sovereign God that has it all under control. Thanks be to God!

Monday
9 December 2013
Genesis 49:10
Rhe Benes

Jacob's prophecy was shared with his 12 sons on his deathbed. In this prophecy Judah, the fourth son, was to be of great importance. It was foretold that Jesus would be part of Judah's lineage. Two things seem important to me in this prophecy:

1. Jacob's family were gentiles, kind of outsiders. What is special about Jacob?
2. Why was his fourth son Judah chosen for Jesus' lineage?

Jacob had many faults and spent a lot of time struggling with his faith and relationship with God. He learned to relinquish his control and trust in God. I believe this "letting go" was why Jacob was chosen. This tells us that even an imperfect person can be blessed by God no matter who they are or what has happened in their past.

Judah was far from perfect either. But, on two different occasions he saved two of his brothers, once by offering his own life for trade of his brother's. I see this as qualities



Bridge at the Bridal Path behind the Lily Garden

Jesus later possessed.

God seems to have his own plans even without us understanding why sometimes. God is all knowing. Everyday we must relinquish control of our lives, and trust in God. Most importantly God loves us all for who we are and our imperfections.

Tuesday
10 December 2013
Isaiah 9:7
Gay Box

For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called “Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

This is a prophecy about Christ and his church. The prophecy tells us of hope. God has given us the promise of peace. There will be no end in the reign of the Messiah and he will rule for all eternity. The prophecy tells us that this heavenly kingdom will be of perfect peace as it will be ruled by the prince of peace.

We have been
give the
wonderful
knowledge
that most
glorious of all
his reign will
never end.

Prayer:
Most
wonderful
heavenly
father, thank
you for
helping us
know that he
shall reign
forever and
ever. Oh what a
wonderful peace this
gives to us. Amen and Amen.



View of the Concho River (drained) from the Irving Street bridge,
looking toward Chadbourne St.

Wednesday
11 December 2013
Psalm 45:6-7
Martha Bruton

NO MATTER HOW HIGH ON THE CHAIN
OF COMMAND YOU THINK YOUR ARE,
YOU ARE NOT IMMUNE FROM BEING
UNJUSTLY PERSECUTED. WHEN YOU
HAVE THE HEAD CHIEF (GOD) IN
COMMAND ON YOUR SIDE, YOU WILL
ALWAYS BE PROTECTED AND LOVED.
DO NOT BE
AFRAID:
GOD LOVES
YOU AND
HATES THE
WICKED.



Public art beneath a downtown bridge over the Concho River

Thursday
12 December 2013
Luke 2:8-14
Eliza Sidogen

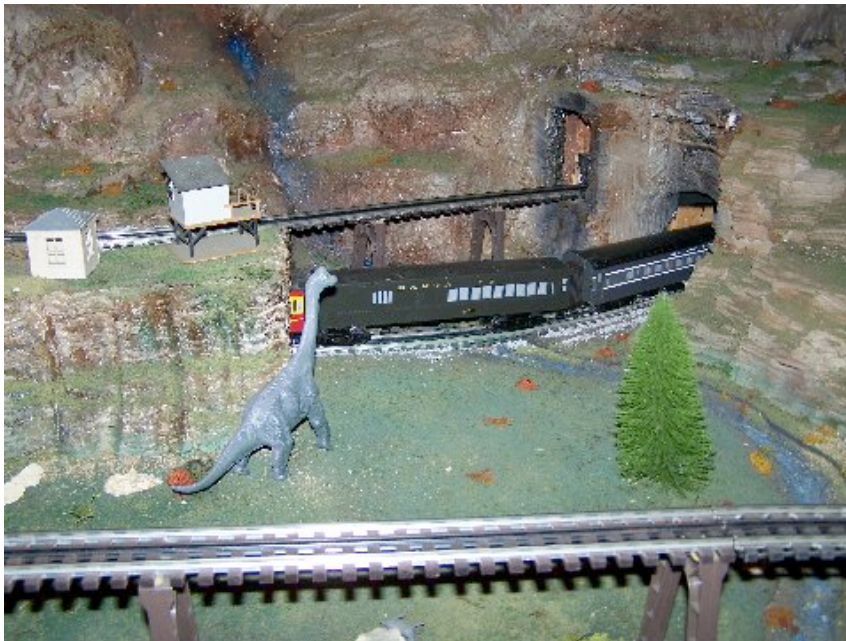


Looking toward Visitor's Center underneath Koenigheim St.

God has
sent his
only
begotten
son to
bless the
people on
Earth.
Though we
are afraid,
Christ
Jesus, our
savior shall

and will protect us. All our wrong doing and sins
shall be forgiven because of him. It brings peace
and happiness to our lives knowing that God loves
us so much he sent his only son to take our sins
away and be forgiven.

Friday
13 December 2013
Isaiah 40:3-5
Kathy Dunn



Train bridge at San Angelo's Railroad Museum

As a child, I remember taking many vacations with my family. Even then, I enjoyed the changes in scenery, the mountains and hills, and the twists and turns of the road. And really, how many of us think that the straight roads through our part of Texas and points west are more than just a little boring.

So this particular scripture has always puzzled me a bit. But in reading this passage again, I begin to see that it isn't speaking of the variations in our "road" that make life interesting. But perhaps it speaks of those things that distract us, that slow us down, or that slow God down in his attempts to reach us. What are your distractions? What is it that makes that road between you and God longer and more difficult?

Dear Lord, during this season of expectation and preparation, help us to clear the path and straighten the road that leads us to you. Amen.

Saturday
14 December 2013
Isaiah 53:3
Eryn Nichols

Christ was unassuming, He never saw himself as Royalty. He was not followed and worshipped, but He still did for others endlessly.

Heavenly Father, we pray that we never forget your grace and mercy, that we share it with others as you did. And never expect anything in return or recognition. Amen



Bridge in Junction, Texas being repaired

Sunday
15 December 2013
Deuteronomy 18:15
Bernie Coffee

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear."

Here we are waiting the arrival of our King, our Savior, and The Messiah.

We, like the people of old, are waiting.

For me – I want to make sure I don't miss Him when He comes. God inspired Moses to let us know – God has a plan, there is a Bridge. His coming was prophesied of in Moses' day. Are we listening as much as waiting?

**Prayer: Lord,
let me hear
what you are
saying, while I
am waiting.
Amen**



Bypass under construction in East San Angelo



Interior view of bridge in Junction, Texas

Monday
16 December 2013
Isaiah 11:1
Ella and Kente
Nichols

Our Lord will
come- this
promise of
HOPE for
righteousness,
wisdom and an
amazing
peace- But

the promise of
HOPE from a baby, born to a carpenter, in a stable-

How comforting it is to know that God promised His people hope many, many years ago. That Jesus would be here to walk with us, love us and teach us ALL! God and Christ are here with us THEN, NOW and ALWAYS!

Thank you God for your promise of HOPE for better times with abundant peace and love through the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. You, our Heavenly Father, love us enough to make plans for us, to assure us and to care for us. Amen-



Low water crossing at picnic area in Junction, Texas

Tuesday
17 December 2013
Isaiah 9:1-2
Gary Elmquist

“But there will be
no gloom for her
that was in anguish.
In the former time
he brought into
contempt the land
of Zebulun and the
land of Naphtali,
but in the latter
time he will make
glorious the way of
the sea, the land
beyond the Jordan,

Galilee of the nations. The people
who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep
darkness, on them has light shined.”

As we walk in our daily trials and tribulations, we walk in darkness and there seems to be no end; however, when we include the gospel in that walk and Christ into our life, we find ourselves in the light. When we turn to prayer we fill our heart with the light and the warmth that only we can receive from Christ our Lord. Our Lord is always with us no matter when we run to or from Him, He is always there to turn the light on when we forget and turn it off.

Dear Lord, fill us with your spirit and fill our heart with the light. Give us the strength to follow You and Your way that we may fulfill the love that you have for us in each other. Amen.

Wednesday
18 December 2013
Zechariah 9:9
Peggy Tharp

In this passage Zechariah calls on the people to rejoice in a new promise from God. Zechariah prophesied at a time when the people had returned to their land after a long exile. They had been hauled away to Babylon in abject defeat and now returned to try to take up their lives again under difficult circumstances. Though home again they were still vassals of a more powerful ruler and the glory days of David and Solomon were long gone. Here is the prophet telling them to rejoice because a new king is coming. Now that's good news.... until you get to the part about a humble king riding on the colt of donkey. This is not a king who will bring back the glory days. Not exactly what they had in mind.

Now we can look back with 2000 years of perspective, knowing who Jesus is, what true glory he brought, what joy and peace and salvation. But lest we get too smug about it all, let's stop to remember the times in our own lives when God promised and delivered something other than what we had in mind. Have we always been grateful for God's gifts, even whenespecially when... we get what we need instead of what we think we want?

I'd like to think that I would have seen that babe in a manger for the Son of God, the man who taught an upside down gospel for the Messiah he was, the suffering figure on the cross for the Savior he is. But I'm not sure I would have. I might have been just as blind as everyone else, waiting for something grand and glorious and missing it when it was right in front of me.



Maddy crossing a bridge on the playground at City Park

PRAYER: Father, please forgive us when we are so wrapped up in our own stuff that we miss the blessings you send us. Help us in this Advent season to stay open to your surprises and to rejoice in your quiet coming. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Thursday
19 December 2013
Psalm 2:6
William Rodriguez

God installs Jesus as King and Lord on mountain Zion, his most holiness mountain, to rule over Israel.

The scripture teaches us that our Heavenly God/Jehovah sets up his Anointed Son Jesus Christ on his Holiness mountain Zion means God's love and choice: the place of his habitation and residence where divine worship is observed and the word and ordinances of God's administered: and where the Lord distributes his blessings of grace: and which is perfection of beauty, through Christ's comeliness put upon her: and will be the joy of the whole earth. It is strongly fortified by the power and grace of God, and is immovable and impregnable, being built on Christ, the Rock of Ages: and like Zion, it is on high hill, eminent and visible: and more especially will be so when the mountain of the Lord's house is established upon the tops of the mountains. It is an Holy One, through the presence and worship of God in it, and the sanctification of his Spirit. Over the hill, the church, Christ the King of saints, and is acknowledged by them, and it is for their great safety and security, their joy, comfort, and happiness, that he is set over them. He is called by his Father "my King," because he is King of Zion -- his Anointed One, begotten Son. His first born, fellow and equal: and because he is his as King: not that he is King over him: for his Father is greater than he, as man and Mediator, or with respect to his office capacity, in which he is to be considered as King: and therefore he is rather King under him. But he is King of his setting up, and therefore called his: he has appointed him his kingdom, given him the throne of his father David: put a crown pure of gold on his head, and crowned him with glory and honor, and the scepter of righteousness in his hand, and has given him a name above every name. He did not make himself a King, nor was he made so by men: but he was set up, or "anointed" by God the Father, as the word (g) here used signifies: and may refer either to the inauguration of Christ into his kingly office, and his investiture with it from all eternity: and anointing with oil being a ceremony performed at the installment of kings into office, the phrase is used for the thing itself. Since Christ was anointed with the Holy Ghost in the human nature, at his incarnation and baptism, and especially at the time of his ascension when made or declared to be Lord and Christ: this may refer to the time when he, as the ascended Lord and King, gave gifts to men, to his apostles and qualified them in extraordinary manner to carry his Gospel into the Gentile world.

Friday
20 December 2013

Matthew 1:18-25

"God **WITH** Us"

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, **God with us**). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

God **WITH** Us ... it was prophesied and it is real ... today and everyday God is **WITH** Us.

I have heard people say that everyone is different during the holiday season and they wish it could be like that all year ... it should be. Jesus is the reason for the season but He is also our Savior who is **WITH** us everyday not just those few weeks between Thanksgiving and New Years.

How different would our lives be if we celebrated Christmas everyday?

Not the gift giving Christmas but the gift accepting CHRISTmas. God **WITH** Us ...

Let's each take this holiday cheerfulness and warmth into February, March and April ... and continue into May, then into the hot summer months and family vacations... soon fall will arrive with the slightly cooler temperatures ... and then decorations of red and green begin to appear in the stores ... WE DID IT ...we kept our holiday spirit flowing all year.

2014 will be the year we... talked **WITH** God and... walked **WITH** God... EVERYDAY.



"Jesus Christ: God **WITH** Us"

Patsy Kneller
San Angelo, Texas

Saturday
21 December 2013
Matthew 2:1-12
Jessica Gambrell

This passage of the bible is titled *Wise Men from the East* and it describes these three wise men's journey from meeting Herod to finding the young child, Jesus. When I read this passage the part that strikes me as the most profound is when it says "And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His Mother, and fell down and worshiped Him". These three men were so overcome by the spirit and the presence of the son of God that they were not even able to stand before him. They had to kneel and begin praising this young savior. This scripture reminds me of a song by Mercy Me called "I can only Imagine" because in that song the lead vocalist sings:

Surrounded by Your glory, what will my heart feel
Will I dance for You Jesus or in awe of You be still
Will I stand in Your presence or to My knees will I fall
Will I sing hallelujah, will I be able to speak at all
I can only imagine

I believe that if the wise men could hear this song they would agree that it captures the moment that they met Jesus. This passage also makes me take in how wonderful our God is and how privileged we are to be able to say that we follow Jesus. We follow a God who causes amazing miracles to happen and a God that we can not only be in awe of but a God that we can call father and friend.

During the Christmas season we all get so entangled in the "idea" of Christmas and all that it entails, I am most definitely guilty of that and I think that most of us are, but I encourage you to really take a step back and relish in the splendor of our God and be thankful for all that he has provided us and all that he has enabled us to do for the glory of his kingdom.

I also encourage you to look up the song by Mercy Me and to just listen to it with your eyes closed once maybe even twice. Then afterwards pray the prayer that becomes heavy on your heart.

Sunday
22 December 2013
Luke 2:1-7
Karen Cline

The information regarding Jesus' family lineage, the family's marital status, and the reason that the family was in Bethlehem are laid out simply in these few verses and point out the humble circumstances of the family who were about to bring



Pier at the nature center, viewing Twin Buttes across Lake Nasworthy

forth the greatest miracle to the world. These verses are well known to Christians and offer us the peace of our salvation to come through Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we can read how God meant for the world to view The Savior even though we may continue to desire a different kind of salvation that requires little of us either physically or reflectively. His humble birth was similar to many other infants of this time, but He walked among us to give a depth of grace and love that is still impossible to comprehend today.

This was His beginning and ours.

Dear Jesus, may we look at your entrance into this world of human beings and give thanks for how You provided for us to attain everlasting salvation.

Monday
23 December 2013
Luke 2:8-14
Christa Martin

In West Texas we are able to drive a short distance to be out in the country where we can see the stars in the night sky clearly. Still, we live in a world of light pollution and have no idea what it is like to experience a dark night like the shepherds must have been used to experiencing. Nighttime in those fields was no doubt filled with starry skies and moonlight. No hazy glow of streetlights to obscure the view. Can you imagine how magnificent the scene must have been when suddenly the glory of the Lord lit up the night? An angel appeared and spoke news that changed mankind forever. Naturally, the first thing the angel said was "Do not be afraid". Who would NOT be afraid?

Why did the angel bring the message of the savior's birth to the shepherds? These were some of the most ordinary, hardworking people of the day, perhaps even considered lower class in their society. I have never lived on a ranch and know very little about sheep herding. But, I grew up here in West Texas among ordinary, hard working people and I have always loved to hear stories about life on the ranch. The San Angelo Fat Stock Show and Rodeo was a highlight of the year when I was a little girl. I loved going to the show barns to see the animals. I have to confess that the smells associated with sheep and cattle always took me by surprise. I couldn't imagine having to clean up after them and tend to them. Around the time our first grand daughter was born, my daughter took a job at a feed lot, a job she really wanted to do. I worried about her working around rough, coarse men who chewed tobacco and cussed. I wanted her to get an education and work in an office. Working as a hand in a feed lot was hard, dirty work! The stories she told us were fascinating and some of the things she had to do while tending cattle seemed to me, well...disgusting. But, she also told us she felt safe because there was what I would describe as a 'code of honor' among the men she worked with. Sure, there were some rough guys, but she didn't feel afraid because most of the guys had daughters themselves and they watched out for her. She earned their respect because she wanted to work with the animals and to learn their way of life.

The message in Luke is that the angel DIDN'T come to the religious leaders of the day, nor to the most learned scholars, nor to the people who faithfully showed up each week to worship in the temple. The angel went to the people working out in the fields, those rough, smelly sheep herders who were ordinary, hardworking, just doing their job day in and day out. The message of GREAT JOY is for ALL the people. Christ our Savior has come, we do not have to be afraid.

Lord, help us to know the love of Jesus and to fully receive the meaning of His birth. As we celebrate the joy of Christmas with friends and family, remind us that each person we meet is loved by you and that we are called to watch out for each other, to love others as you love them. Amen.

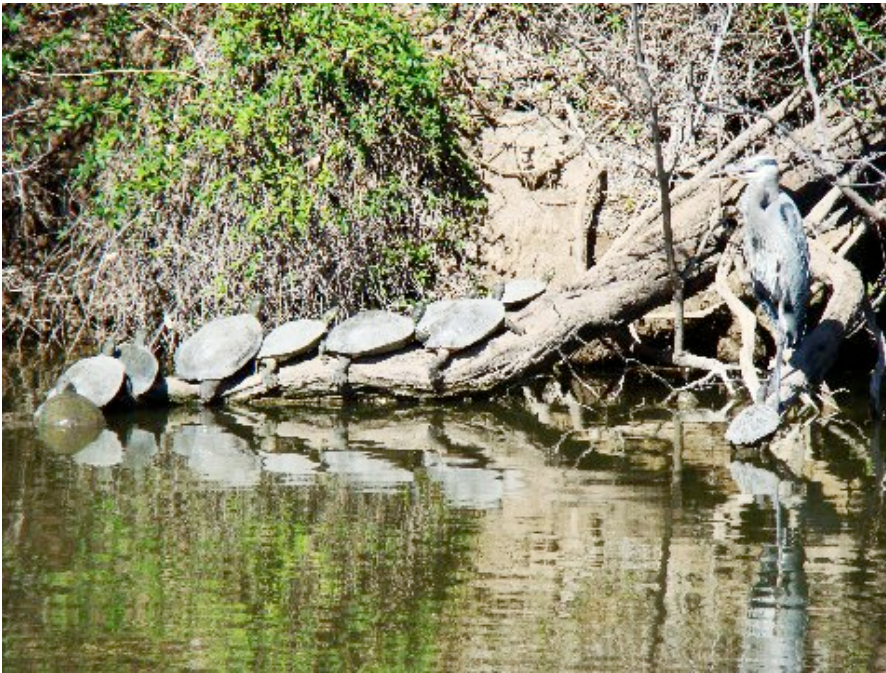
Tuesday
24 December 2013
Luke 2:15-20
Bart Teeter

I'm always at a loss as to what we're supposed to make of Mary's ponderings. What I find a little easier to ponder is the shepherds and how we can be a little more shepherd like in our own lives.

The angels, or messengers of God, appeared to the shepherds and told them the good news. They didn't even really tell the shepherds to go see the baby. They just told them the news. The shepherds decided to go. They received a message from God and they went to check it out and then they shared the good news, becoming our first evangelists. They did what we're all called to do. They spread the word. The message has remained the same for over 2000 years. Yet how often today do we fail to heed God's messengers? How often do we fail to do as the shepherds did; go check it out and tell people about it? Too often we wait for angels to appear or to hear a voice from a burning bush. We feel God has not spoken to us directly as He did the shepherds. But He has. When the angels appeared to the shepherds they also appeared to me and you. Through the gospel story we bear witness to the same events as the shepherds.

As we once again witness the Christmas miracle I pray that we have the courage of the

shepherds to not only witness this story but to share the good news with others.



Turtles sun themselves on a natural "bridge" in the Concho River

Wednesday
25 December 2013
John 1
Glenda Harbert

John 1:1-10 *“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it And the word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”*

When we talk about Jesus being a bridge – between ancient prophets and new hard-to-discern-prophets today; between young and old; between old and new; between the way we always did it before and change..... life as it was and life now.... When we talk about that Jesus-bridge, of course I hear Simon and Garunkle’s song Bridge Over Troubled Waters..... *“When you’re weary, feeling small, when tears are in your eyes, I will dry them all, like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down.”* Yet, reading John’s Gospel, I get the message that God’s Word, Jesus, is more than a bridge, much more. We believe that Jesus was Fully Divine and yet Fully Human. That kind of bridge is hard to fathom in our human, finite-ness. So Jesus is the walker-through-troubled waters, accompanying us on our journey AND our comfort, eye-dryer, respite and salvation—the very energy we find to travel and the very lightness on our way.

Google ‘Jesus as bridge’ in the Bible. In 46 seconds, I was given 146,000,000 examples of Jesus the bridge between heaven and earth; we can be a bridge to Jesus for our friends; the bridge between the present and the future; the bridge to the church; etc. I think of Jesus and I think of that baby who, like a super nova, impacted the earth and it’s never been the same. AND, I think of the man who was so much of a servant-leader, that his bridge-ness seems more like the dirty-cloaks over which the donkeys tread on Palm Sunday.

It seems to me, Jesus, the bridge, isn’t made of two by fours, but of flesh and bones and blood – the fully human one who KNOWS pain and trouble, joy and triumph, stress and frustration more than we, as humans who are walking-wounded people, could ever know. AND BECAUSE he is more FULLY HUMAN that we can be, he knows all the multitude of layers of pain we go through in our journey through earthly troubled waters. And yet, BECAUSE Jesus is also Fully Divine, the One-Who-Conquered-Death-and-Thus-Gives-Us-Humans-Hope, we know that even when we’re journeying through that dark valley, or tumultuous waters, we are not alone and that our focus on Jesus assures us we are not alone, nor will we fail. BECAUSE, the final power, conquerer and judge is our Fully-Human babe, servant-leader, God, Christ Jesus.

That Baby-Bridge called Love. That Bridging Love calling us to the kind of Love that passes our ability to understand, but that calls us to follow – over the bridge, under and around the bridge – the bridge call Jesus, the Christ.

And while we’re crossing his bridge, we are baptized in his muddy waters.

Merry Christ-mas.