

Day Four: Luke 9:57-58

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

"Shhh... the baby is sleeping!" Have you heard (or said) those words before? Babies need their sleep, and weary parents too long for the time to sit and rock a sleeping child in a silent house – free of dishes to wash and meals to make and clothes to launder. Peace...

But that's not real life, is it? Real life is filled with ringing phones and beckoning appointments and limited days for maternity leave. We want to hold the baby, but we have other responsibilities too.

Our desire for a quiet place is so intense that you can see it in advertising. How many circulars and emails do you receive advertising quiet vacation spots? Dinners for two? A "get-away" or a cruise?

But we cannot really get away. Even if we turn off our cellphone, the bills are still there, and the clock and the calendar loom. We will soon have to return to the treadmill.

Jesus was born in a hectic, dirty, public place. Jesus was moved from place to place to escape danger. Jesus' ministry meant leaving home and stability and peace and entering into the chaos of other lives – the sick, the dying, the broken, the hateful. Jesus had no peaceful place.

Do you remember this Christmas song? "Ah, dearest Jesus, holy child, make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled within my heart, that it may be a quiet chamber kept for Thee."

We would offer Jesus a quiet place, but we have none to give. Instead, it is Jesus who offers peace to us. Perhaps this verse is more fitting: "I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky and stay by my cradle till morning is nigh."

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I see your stable in the soft light of my Christmas tree, but you had no such quiet home. Lord, let me find my peace in you. Make your home with me. Amen.*

These devotions help us to think ahead about the Bible verses we will read in worship next week. They are written weekly by Pastor Don Neuendorf. You can learn more about our worship or our church at stpaulannarbor.org

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

Devotions on week's readings for 12.20.15 Advent 4c

Day One: Micah 5:2-5a

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days... And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.

My father started our family business in Elwood, Indiana. It's a town of 8,000 that is "famous" as the birthplace of Wendell Wilkie.

What's that? You don't remember who Wendell Wilkie was? Neither do most of the people of Elwood, and Wilkie hasn't helped them much lately.

Small towns try hard to be famous. Hart (pop. 2,000) is the Asparagus Capital of Michigan. Fairmount, Indiana (pop. 2,900) is the birthplace of James Dean, so they call themselves "the Birthplace of

Cool." Perhaps they get a bit more traffic as a result, but that is all.

And so it was with Bethlehem, a small town whose name means "house of bread," they were famous as the birthplace of King David. But what had David done for them lately?

We long for significance, but even when we get our "15 minutes of fame" it really amounts to nothing. Bethlehem's blessing is not because their name is known. Their blessing is that the one who was born there also blessed those who lived there then, and those who live there today.

"And he shall be their peace," Malachi said. The people of Bethlehem have not always had peace, and neither have we. But all those to whom Jesus was born have been given peace no matter where we are. Not because "Jesus was here," but because Jesus IS here today!

Prayer: *Dear Lord Jesus, I do not live in Bethlehem, or anyplace that will be important in 100 years. But you live in me. Dwell in my heart forever, Lord, and let me know my significance is in you. Amen.*

Day Two: Hebrews 10:5-10

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure... And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

The concept of sacrifice might be one of the hardest things for people to understand in our Christian faith. But a child in Jesus' day, and for most of the history of the world, grew up with the experience of sacrifice and death.

There were no grocery stores with neat, clean packages of meat in a cooler. Meat was sold in the market, and it was often butchered there too. So the smell and sight of blood and the presence of death were a part of daily life.

Killing was a public act not just for food, but also for crimes that we would consider minor today. And every child knew that a wrong step, an act of rebellion, a cut that became infected, a cough, or a fever could be the door to death.

We know Paul's words in Romans that "the wages of sin is death." But other believers have known death more personally. They knew the price of even a small mistake.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews quotes Psalm 40, "sacrifices and offerings you have not desired." But just like in the psalm, one has come who will at last obey God's will, not to offer more animals as a token of repentance, but to offer the ultimate sacrifice as a true payment for sin.

Our images of Jesus' coming into the world are filled with our own ideas of motherhood, peace, and joy. Mary and Joseph brought forth a baby in the midst of a bloody and death filled world. But Jesus brought true joy because he offered the end of death, once and for all.

Prayer: *Dearest Jesus, my world seems clean and antiseptic, on the surface. But below the veneer of modern life is the same bloody battle against sin. Lord, you have paid a price in blood for me. Lead me to place myself, body and soul, into your hands. Amen.*

Day Three: Luke 1:39-45

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."

Here are two women, both recently pregnant, and both pregnancies were a miraculous surprise. Elizabeth became pregnant in her old age. Mary became pregnant even though she was still a virgin. And now Mary goes to visit Elizabeth.

It's a familiar scene. Many expectant moms do the same. It's nice to compare notes with someone going through an experience like yours. But in this case most other moms could not relate. Only these two women could understand what it meant to bear a child at God's command, a child destined to change the world.

Mary and Elizabeth must have become very close. But not only them, their children also would be closely connected. Jesus and his cousin John shared a single purpose. John was to prepare the way for Jesus. And Jesus was to reveal the great plan of God to defeat sin and rescue us from death.

Do you have a good friend, someone who has shared your life's experiences? That's a great gift from God. But do you have an even closer friend – maybe not a person that you "hang out" with, not someone with whom you share a hobby – but do you share a life purpose of serving Jesus with anyone?

I hope that this is what you share with all your brothers and sisters in Jesus. Even though we may be distant, we share what Jesus and John shared – the same purpose for our life.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, I thank you for my friends, but I pray that you give me also partners. Let me serve with others in the greatest purpose ever given, to bring your kingdom of light into the world of darkness. Amen.*