



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

2nd Sunday of Christmas (A,B,C) – Ephesians 1:3-14

Focus: *Christmas Blessings*

word of life

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.” Ephesians 1:3 (NRSV)

Read Ephesians 1:3-14

Christmas Blessings! For the twelve days following December 25, the church celebrates the birth of Jesus and the blessings given to us by God through him. The twelve days of Christmas and all of our lives are intended for praise as we give thanks to God who performs mighty acts through and with Jesus born to Mary in Bethlehem.

1. *What traditions do you associate with the days following Christmas--the twelve days of Christmas?*
2. *How many of these traditions actually have something to do with the gift of Jesus Christ to the world?*

The author of Ephesians asserts that God’s intended plan for humanity from the beginning of creation is to praise God. This plan was *predetermined* for the Gentiles living in Ephesus and others as well. “[God] destined us for adoption as [God’s] children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of [God’s] will, to the praise of [God’s] glorious grace that [God] freely lavished on us.” (Ephesians 1:5 NRSV) This theme is repeated: “In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of [God] who accomplishes all things according to [God’s] counsel and will...” (Ephesians 1:11 NRSV)

3. *How does that make you feel to know you are pre-destined to praise God?*
4. *Do you feel like you are spiritually wired to praise God? Explain your answer*

Jews and Gentiles are pre-destined to be adopted as children by God for God’s purpose. Thus, the real gift of Christmas is not the one found under the Christmas tree with a big red bow. The real gift of Christmas is the gift of God’s grace extended in Jesus Christ, a gift sealed in our baptism. We are adopted by God and extended an inheritance beyond our human words and comprehension. God chooses to lavish love upon us.

5. *Describe God’s blessing extended to us through Christ.*
6. *How do you feel blessed because of God’s action in Christ?*

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...” (Ephesians 1:3 NRSV) Blessed be God because of the multitude of ways God has blessed us. “In [Christ] you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people to the praise of [God’s] glory.” (Ephesians 1:13 NRSV)

Modeled after the liturgy found in the first century Jewish synagogue, this passage overflows with words of blessing and praise. Blessed be God. Again and again, we are to bless God, for it has been by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit that we have been united in Christ, God’s beloved.

7. *What features of this passage remind you of a hymn?*
8. *How do you feel blessed because of God’s action in Christ?*

word among us

The Smith family seemed to be out of sync with the rest of the world. Instead of putting up their Christmas tree the day after Thanksgiving and then taking it down the day after Christmas, they would wait until just before December 25th to put it up, and then they would enjoy it throughout the twelve days of Christmas. They insisted on sending Christmas cards to their friends and family after December 25. On most years, they had a Twelfth Night party on January 5 as they took down their tree and prepared for Epiphany (the day to commemorate the visit of the wise men to Jesus) on January 6.

The Smiths were not just being countercultural; this pattern was part of their spiritual discipline. Some years ago, they re-discovered Advent. During the four weeks proceeding Christmas, they resisted all the marketing frenzy and guarded their time for additional prayer. While their friends seemed to be headed for exhaustion, they were calm.

They used Advent to clean out some closets. It gave them joy to give their unworn clothing to those in need. They intentionally tried to identify the ways they might have crowded Christ out of their lives, and they re-prioritized to keep Christ central.

Thus, when December 25 arrived, they were ready to celebrate the gift of Christ given to them by God. What a Christmas gift! Blessed be God!

1. *What is worth noting about the Smith story?*
2. *Reflect back on your Advent and Christmas. What were the highlights?*
3. *How might you change your pattern for the next Advent and Christmas season in order to shape it around the blessing of God given in Jesus?*

faith practice in daily life

Proclaim the Good News of God in Christ through word and deed

Blessed be God! No matter how great the presents discovered under your Christmas tree were, they are unmatched by the gifts given by God in Christ Jesus.

Blessed be God! It has been God's plan from the beginning to adopt us to be God's own children through Jesus Christ. God delights and takes pleasure in this adoption and in our connection to God's own beloved—Jesus Christ.

Blessed be God! We have been marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit in our baptism. This seal gives us confidence to proceed with life—doing our best to bless God with every breath of our being, trusting in the forgiveness of our sins.

4. *What does it mean to you to hourly and daily bless God?*
5. *How might your life become a hymn of praise to God?*

Prayer

Blessed be God! Blessed be the One who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing. Blessed be the One who has adopted us. Blessed be the One who has predestined us to give praise. Amen

last word

Adopt the mantra “Blessed be God!”

See how many times you might weave those words into your thoughts and words.

Daily Faith Practices

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