

## The Path That Led: 12-24-05

My, you all are in fine voice this wonderful evening, as you should be. This is a night made for singing.

We have already sung a lot of carols, but there is another, of which I am fond, that has been playing over and over in my head for about a month. Some of you know this because I have been heard softly singing it in my own special way. Because of this many have steered clear of me. But, you, my dear friends, are captive. That carol is as follows:

In the little village of Bethlehem  
There lay a Child one day,  
And the sky was bright with a holy light  
O'er the place where Jesus lay.

Alleluja, O how the angels sang,  
Alleluja, how it rang  
And the sky was bright with a holy light  
T'was the birthday of a king.

T'was a humble birthplace  
But O how much God gave to us that day  
From the manger bed what a path has led  
What a perfect holy way.

Alleluja, O how the angels sang  
Alleluja, How it rang  
And the sky was bright with a holy light  
T'was the birthday of a King.

And, here we are to remember the birthday of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords for Christians.

But, it seems to me that we sometimes put so much emphasis on the birthday of Christ and the last few day of his life, including his death and resurrection, that we forget, "that path that led from the manger bed." That path that we are to follow for all the days of our lives as practicing Christians. This joyful evening should put our feet on that pathway once again as we move forward through the days and nights of our lives.

To use the trite old phrase, "There really is a reason for this season." It should serve as a bright and shining reminder of the way we should strive to be all year long. This time of year stirs within most of us deep feelings of love, generosity and kindness. We often look at one another through new eyes and with new senses.

We read the Christmas story together and it is as if we are back in that time and place so long ago. It's as if we cradle that newborn baby in our arms, having the advantage of knowing the amazing potential of the new life we hold. No wonder, in our story, the shepherds went away in awe and Mary quietly pondered all she knew. Every newborn has tremendous potential, but this child was and is special.

The pathway he showed us to follow was one represented by the light of the Advent candles. We lit one each Sunday throughout this past season of waiting and watching for the Christ child's appearance. Each candle carries a message that is vitally important to the way we lead our lives. Each light burns brightly in the darkness of our world and in the darkness of our souls calling us to become better people than we have been in the past. Calling us to walk more fully in the light and understanding of the ways of Christ.

So, we walk in the light of the first of our candles, that of Hope. I noted this year that the candle of Hope burns longest in our Advent wreath. Perhaps, that is because Hope stirs within us longest of all other emotions. It prods us forward when we feel there are times we must give up. It makes us keep trying to make things right in our world that we may never see made right in our lifetimes. Hope always is there even when we think it has left us.

The second of the candles we lit was that of Forgiveness. This is one of the most difficult things for us to accomplish as humans even though we have been taught that we are forgiven by God if we truly are sorry for the wrongs we have done in our lives. We are to turn around and offer the forgiveness God grants us so freely to those around us. There is no denying that we stub our toes on this quality of life most often. We sometimes cannot let go of past injuries. But, friends, let me remind you that life is terribly short and we never know when our time is up. There is no time to carry past grudges with us. This is the perfect season to offer forgiveness to ourselves and to others and to graciously accept it from those who have hurt us.

The third of our candles, the pink one, is Joy. Joy should certainly come after forgiveness and dwell in the recesses of our souls. Happiness may flit in and out of our lives but Joy is a constant. No matter how dark life may seem to be at times, we all have the ability to reach down and find the Joy that sustains us almost as steadily as Hope. That Joy has been assured us by our God, the one with whom we will spend eternity.

And, the last of the Advent candles represents Love. If we are without Love we are without life. The Love represented here is the Love for all God's creation and creatures. It is the kind of love we have for those who are easy to love and it is the kind of love we must struggle to obtain for those who provide us with a little challenge, daring us to take a chance and love them. And, we sometimes take that chance and open our hearts and souls to another. When our gift of love is returned all our Hope and Joy is fulfilled. When it is not, we learn to bind up the wound and move forward daring to love again in Hope. The greatest of these is Love, you know.

And tonight, the candle that reveals all these qualities to us was lit. The Christ candle glows in the darkness--the focus of this night and the many days that will follow. The light that came into the world and that has not been put out and will not be put out as long as it burns in our hearts and souls and as long as we carry that light of Hope, Forgiveness, Joy and Love into the world. That is why we share the light this evening. So that each of us is renewed once again in the knowledge that we are the bearers of this wonderful light in our day and age. It is up to us to light that path that led from the manger bed for all to see and discover. Amen