

D E C E M B E R 2 0 0 9

AMAZING GRACE

NEWS BY AND FOR GRACE FELLOWSHIP - EL PASO, ILLINOIS

What is the meaning of Advent?

Advent is the beginning of the Church Year for most Christian churches in the US. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day, and ends on Christmas Eve. The word Advent means "coming" or "arrival." With joy we celebrate Christ's first advent, or arrival and with hope we anticipate Christ's return or second advent.

An advent wreath includes five candles. Often there are three purple and one pink tapered candles around the perimeter of the Advent wreath, and a tall, white candle in the center.

Purple represents repentance. Pink symbolizes joy. Christ's purity is represented by the white of the central candle

The candle lit on the first week of Advent is The Candle of Prophecy and Hope. It symbolizes the promises, or prophecies, the prophets delivered from God that foretold Christ's birth. Ancient Israel hoped for a savior for centuries. Their hope would be fulfilled in Christ.

On the second week of advent we light the Bethlehem Candle. It was in the fields outside Bethlehem where Ruth worked. She eventually married Boaz. A descendent of this union, David, tended his sheep in these fields before being anointed king. It was in Bethlehem where the prophet Micah predicted the Savior would be born some 700 years before it happened.

The third candle we call The Angels' Candle. Angels announced the coming of the long awaited Messiah. Angels will announce His coming the second time, and this time, all the world will know.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

On the fourth Sunday of Advent we light the Shepherds' Candle. The shepherds tending their sheep that holy night near Bethlehem were no ordinary shepherds. They were appointed to care for the temple flocks of sheep destined for sacrifices.

On Christmas Eve we light the fifth candle or The Christ Candle. This pure white pillar represents Christ himself who is born to save people from sin.

All Church Family Dinner
December 12th at Grace - 5:30



Set up for this event will be Friday,
December 11 at 6:00 p.m Help is
needed setting up long "firehouse" tables
and chairs. Please see Pam Fever

The Legend of Silent Night

Some consider the traditional account of the origin of Silent Night to be a legend, while others believe it to be true. Whichever you believe, the story is fascinating.....



Father Joseph Mohr into the mountains to help a stern old pastor, who at the sight of his new helper became even sterner.

At the church, the day before Christmas Eve, 1818, organist Franz Gruber arrived and discovered the

Nothing good was expected from the mountains in Oberndorf, Austria, and less was expected from pathetic Father Mohr. He was not a bright light in the diocese. He would never make a monsignor, hardly even a pastor. The bishop sent him

damaged organ. Exasperated, he pressed the keys and pumped the bellows. Not a sound! He and Father Mohr pondered, "What could be done to save Christmas?" Shyly the priest withdrew from his pocket a paper and showed him the words he had scrawled in German, "Silent Night, Holy night. All is calm. All is bright. Round yon virgin mother and child. Holy infant so tender and mild. Sleep in Heavenly Peace!"

Franz Gruber was captivated by the simplicity of the song, that told so well the wondrous story. Hastening home he fingered his violin and wrote the music so he and Father Mohr could harmonize.

Come midnight Mass, the arriving parishioners and lumber jacks, trudging through the snow, were disappointed when they heard there was no organ. No music! Sterner than usual the pastor began the Mass and delivered his Christmas sermon.

Then to everyone's surprise at the front of Church, appeared six children in colorful dress and bright red bows, flanked by Father Mohr and Franz Gruber playing his violin.

There in that little church in the mountains was heard the world premier of "Silent Night." The surprised parishioners didn't know what to think. But one glance at the angry pastor told them. After Church the departing faithful quickly bid Christmas wishes and "Good Night". No one mentioned the song. One polite lady said the children's clothes were pretty. That was all.

Perhaps the performance of Silent Night was the last straw, causing the pastor to complain to the Bishop. Whatever! By the time the snow had gone and Spring had come, and the organ repair man arrived with horse and cart, Father Mohr had long vanished like a log round the bend of the river.

Up in the choir loft, the organ man found the scrap of paper on which was written "Silent Night". He carried it out of the mountains to the world, to its cathedrals, music halls and palaces. Authorship was attributed to famous composers like Bach and Beethoven. Only later did the world learn of the humble authors.

Now all the names of other Austrian Priests and organists of the time have vanished. But the names of Father Joseph Mohr and organist Franz Gruber live on in a museum built in their honor and in the beautiful Christmas song, sung in 200 languages every Christmas around the world - "Silent Night"

Christmas Events at Grace



December 7

Meet at 1:00 at the Church of the Nazarene to carol at the nursing homes.

December 10

SPLAT and M & M Choirs sing at Heritage Manor - 3:30 p.m.

December 12

All Church Christmas Dinner - 5:30 p.m. at Grace

December 18

High School Christmas Party
McDonald's house after school

December 20

Christmas Caroling 4:30 p.m. Meet at Grace

December 24

Christmas Eve Service
6:00 p.m. Grace Fellowship

December 27th

Christmas Sunday Worship
9:00 Sunday School, 9:45 Donuts and drinks,
10:15 Worship

Note from Pam

The following is real. It is not an internet forward. It was written by a Marine my daughter knows who gave his testimony at the request of his pastor only a few days ago in Hawaii. He is originally from Decatur, IL. He has a wife and a 2-year-old daughter.

TESTIMONY OF A MARINE

Good evening Island Family Christian Church. Less than a month ago I came home from a six month deployment in Afghanistan. While I was over there, I figured some things out. This is the testimony of my time over there.

When we first got there, a chaplain was sent to speak to us. He said that even without the conflict, Afghanistan was a very inhospitable environment. With added conflict, our minds would be put to the test. I think that what he was saying was that our environment in the next six months would put us in a state of mind where we began to question ourselves and the heavens. We would feel emotions never felt before at least to the

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extent that we felt them. The last thing that he said stuck with me. If you open up your eyes and your heart, you might find something out there.

Within the first two weeks of being in Afghanistan, my vehicle struck an IED. We were thrown up in the air by the force and the fireball that flew out from under the vehicle lit up the night sky. After being slammed back down on the floor of our vehicle and determining that there were no serious injuries among us, we laughed and talked about how lucky we were. I thought to myself, maybe it's time that I get a little more serious about my faith. Not everyone was as lucky as we were that night. One of the unarmored vehicles that came out to provide security for our blast site struck another IED and sustained three serious casualties.

After this incident, it became a habit of mine to pray on every convoy. I prayed from the time that we left the wire to the time that we arrived at our destination. The words, "Please God, let us pass safely through this land without incident", became like a constant mantra. I never really felt any safer.

A month later, my team was escorting the battalion chaplain to the different bases in our area of Afghanistan so he could hold services. I attended every one of them that day. His sermon was from Psalm 139. The overall gist of Psalm 139, at least what I take from it, is written in the very first verse. "O Lord, you have searched me and you know me". Remember that.

On the way home, my vehicle struck another IED. This blast was not as violent as the first one but only because this vehicle had seat belts. It was like being blown up in a fluffy pillow. Everyone was alright. They all laughed and talked about how lucky we were. My friend looked at me and noticed that I wasn't smiling or laughing. He asked what was wrong. He really didn't understand.

In the Marine Corps we have a problem. There are armored vehicles and unarmored vehicles. We can't get enough armored vehicles and we have plenty of the unarmored ones. You really don't want to be blown up in an unarmored vehicle. I apologize for the graphic nature of my explanation. At best you lose your legs. At worst you burn alive. There are miracles though.

After my first IED, I was informed that I would be riding in an unarmored vehicle for the rest of the deployment. I not so pleasantly informed them that if I was to be the only medical provider on the team then it was a horrible idea to put me in an unarmored vehicle. Common sense prevailed and I usually was not put in an unarmored vehicle.

What my friend did not understand was that after you get blown up and your vehicle is disabled, you still have to get back to base and the vehicle you end up riding in just might be in an unarmored vehicle. He wasn't smiling after that. And yes, we rode back in unarmored vehicles.

Imagine that you know you're going to die within the next five minutes in a horrible explosion. Unless you have experienced a situation similar to this, which some of you may have, you can't. It's impossible. So there I was. I had just been blown up for the second time in a month and a half and now I was riding in an unarmored vehicle the rest of the way on a road that was littered with IEDs. I was going to die. I was alone. No one could save me. Not the person to the left of me nor the person in the vehicle in front of us.

The next feeling that assaulted me was complete and utter shame. I've done some bad things in my life and I've felt shame before but this was overwhelming. For most of my life, I've been a catholic. I attended a catholic grade school and I knew about God. I was baptized into this very church and I attended every Sunday. I knew about God. I did not know God, though. I knew that I loved Him but how can you truly love someone without knowing or having a personal relationship with them. I have never read the bible, not really. I had never sought Him on an individual and personal level. At this moment in my life, when I was certain that I was going to die, I wished that I had known him.

I immediately opened the bible and started where the chaplain had left off.

Psalm 140:1-8

Rescue me, O Lord, from evil men;

Protect me from men of violence,
who devise evil plans in their hearts

And stir up war every day.

They make their tongues as sharp as a
serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips.

Keep me, O Lord from the hands of the
wicked;

protect me from men of violence

who plan to trip my feet.

Proud men have hidden a snare for me;
they have spread out the cords of their
net

and have set traps for me along my
path.

O Lord, I say to you, "You are my God."

Hear, O Lord, my cry for mercy.

O Sovereign Lord, my strong deliverer,
who shields my head in the day of
battle—do not grant the wicked their desires,

O Lord;

do not let their plans succeed,
or they will become proud.

Reading this passage, my breath caught in my throat. God was watching over me. God knew what I needed. He knew where I was and that I was in need of him.

**GOD WAS WATCHING OVER ME.
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I continued to read until the sun went down and then I started praying. Real praying. I prayed that I would make it safely back to my family and my church. I don't know very many of you but I missed all of you. I thought about being with my family at church surrounded by wonderful people who could help me on my journey with God. That is where I wanted to be at that particular moment.

By the end of my conversation with God, I was actually thanking Him for allowing me to get blown up. I conceded the fact that had I not been subjected to this horrible experience again, I would never have realized the lack of our personal relationship. I would have continued through my life thinking that I knew God and what He wanted.

A second realization that came to me that night was that, although David pleaded for life throughout the book of psalms, physical life was not God's promise that David wrote about. If it was God's will, I would still die. Eternal life with God is the promise. I had to accept that. God's only son, Jesus, was ridiculed all his life and suffered a horrible death on the cross. Who was I to demand a death better than that?

Psalm 27:4-5

One thing that I ask of the Lord,
This is what I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord
and to seek Him in his temple.
For in the day of trouble
He will keep me safe in His dwelling;
He will hide me in the shelter of his
tabernacle
and set me high upon a rock.

Throughout the rest of my deployment, I continued to read the bible. I mostly stuck with psalms because I could relate to the material. David was a warrior surrounded by his enemies and was often, as you can see from his writings afraid and alone. God was all he had. I felt the same. Whether I was alive or my spirit was separated from my body in death, God would always be with us.

Psalm 22:11

Do not be far from me
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.

Eventually, during my reading I came across a couple passages that presented a challenge to me. One of them was

Psalm 20:7

Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the Lord our
God.

Was this a challenge from God to completely put my faith and trust in Him? To completely relinquish control of my life? Think of this passage like this. Back in the day, warriors trusted in their chariots and horses to carry them to safety from danger areas. Did I put too much faith in my armored vehicle to protect me from danger? Of course, I had a certain amount of added protection with it compared to an unarmored vehicle but I once again realized that

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if God's will was for me to die, then it would not matter what vehicle I was in. He was asking me to prove my faith. From then on, when I was told that there was no room left in the armored vehicles and I needed to ride in an unarmored vehicle, I didn't get angry like some people or like I had in the past. I left it up to God.

There are many things that I could talk about that I learned in Afghanistan but I'm sure that my time is just about up. I would just like to say that there are those in my battalion that suffered much more than I during this deployment. Nine marines and one sailor lost their life. Countless others were wounded in action. Please pray for them and their families.

At Grace we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, was born of a virgin, lived on this earth in human form, and voluntarily sacrificed His life on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins in order to re-establish our relationship with God.

May we help you get to know Jesus?



Grace Fellowship
2730 County Road 1100 N
P.O. Box 13
El Paso, IL 61738

Trenz Pruca
4321 First Street
Anytown, State ZIP

Grace Fellowship

Christmas Eve
Service
6:00 p.m. December 24

Sunday Worship
10:15 a.m.
Sunday School
9:00

*His Story
can
change
Yours*

Pastor Dan Giese's December Sermons

December 6 - "A Christmas Carol" December 20 - "A Charlie Brown Christmas"
December 13 - "It's a Wonderful Life" December 27 - "A Christmas Vacation"