

Urban Christian Outreach (Ottawa)

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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 origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Isreal. 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.

Micah 5:2-5 ESV

Dear Friends in Christ,

Merry Christmas! It is indeed a merry time of year as we remember not only the birthday of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, but his promises for our salvation. Because of Christ, we can celebrate life, knowing that it is ours for eternity. What a precious, precious gift Jesus has given to us: salvation! All that is required of us is to receive this beautiful gift. When we receive his gift of salvation, we receive Jesus. When we receive Jesus, we receive peace.

When we have received this amazing free gift of salvation, death is not final. We are re-born, or born again. During this season of Advent, as we prepare our hearts and our homes to remember Jesus' birth, we are reminded that we too, can be born anew.

'Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you 'You must be born again'.

John 3:5-7 ESV

And so how do we do this? How can we be born again? We simply ask. Our Father knows the desires of our hearts. Jesus invites us to receive him, to find him, to *know* Him, not by studying Theology, but by simply taking the time to sit quietly before him- precious moments in the presence of our Saviour! By grace, we receive the desire to repent, the desire to read our Bibles, where we learn all about Him, and the desire to be born again!

When we invite Christ into our hearts, we invite love. Love wells up within us, and we begin to change. We can only do the work of Christ, through Him, through His strength, through His love in our hearts. Not ours, but His, pointing people to the One who truly loves! This is the love that we all long for: Godly love. When we invite Jesus into our lives, with His help, we can learn to love one another in Godly ways, not with the love that the world knows and gives, but with true love - the love of Christ.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 ESV

Oh that we could clear our hearts and our busy agendas this Christmas to make room for Jesus! Is this not what Christmas is all about?

How do we respond to a world that is feeling discontented and fearful; a world that is turning away from God and instead running to alcohol, street drugs, prescription drugs, sex, TV, video games, cell phones, internet and social networking sites, isolating themselves and loved ones? Bullying, the popular word for 'bad behavior' is rampant in our society. People are hurting and are reacting to their pain by projecting it onto others.

As with those who witnessed the first Christmas, we need the light of Christ to come into our broken world. God *gave* us the gift of Jesus. God *gave us* life everlasting. How can we share his gift with others? What can we bring honour and glory to Him? What can we give to the person who is lost and sitting at our

family Christmas dinner table, or to the one proficient at texting someone far away and yet unable to speak to the person in front of them? What can we give to the one who doesn't know Jesus? What can we give to the lost on the sidewalks of downtown Ottawa? Like the thief who was saved while hanging on the cross beside Jesus, there is still time to shine the light of Christ.

As our Father intentionally places the lost before us this Christmas, may we pray for authenticity in the moment, for words to intercede on their behalf and may we be reminded of our own need for compassion and grace.

Art Work

I recently met Sally, (not her real name) in a downtown coffee shop. Sally is already beginning to stress out about Christmas. She will go home again this year, but having been labeled ‘the trouble-maker’, she knows that she will be the target of shaming looks and remarks. Instead of focusing on Jesus, Sally’s family will focus on her. We have begun to pray, to ask God to go before her, to bless her siblings and her parents, and to help Sally to be a blessing to them as well. Would they welcome her more easily if her clothes were in style, and if she was clean and manicured? Would they show her more respect if she brought expensive gifts or if she had a job? Would she be celebrated for her accomplishments or would they be able to love her just the way she is? Would Sally be able to receive this love if it was forthcoming? Would she believe in her heart that she is worthy? Will she be able to forgive them?

The rich and poor meet together; the LORD is the Maker of them all.
Prov 22:2 ESV

Many of those whom we serve will spend Christmas in coffee shops and drop-in centres this year. Surrounded by others, some will feel very much alone. It will be a reminder to some that while their loved ones gather, they have not been invited. Like Jesus, they know the sting of rejection. Like Jesus, they are poor. Like Jesus, each one of them is called to be a prince or princess and to take his or her rightful place among God’s people. But how can they, if they have not heard?

Recently, while praying with a UCO client, he said, “Lord, I hope you’re doing okay!” What a beautiful prayer, right from his heart, so concerned about the state of our Lord’s heart, of His well-being! Let us all ask our Him this Christmas, ‘Lord, how are you? How can we love you, here on earth? How can we serve you in intentional and authentic ways and moments? And then let us wait for His answer, and pray for the strength to obey.

Thank you, dear friend-in-Christ, for your heart for Jesus and for his poor among us. Thank you for providing UCO with an opportunity to help those who are struggling to survive. Thank you for allowing us to continue to serve our Lord among the poor, the homeless and the marginalized. What an honour and a privilege it is to be part of Christ’s church to the poor – a church without walls, yet a church after God’s own heart. I most humbly ask that you would continue to provide for our work, as God leads you, so that we may continue to share the hope that we have found in Christ, to those who so desperately need Him. To Him be the Glory!

On behalf of all of us at UCO, our sincerest wishes to you and your loved ones for a peaceful, Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year.

‘And He shall be your peace!’
Micah 5:5

In Christ,
Jill

Jill Wilson
Executive Director
Urban Christian Outreach

