

Focus Christmas Devotion – A 2020 LOOK

Christmas is hands down my favorite holiday. And among the reasons why are: Familiar Christmas carols that remind me of singing around the piano while Mom played and my Daddy sang with his deep voice, often joking and laughing, (Dad's name – Singing "The First 'Lowell') because of the fragrance of orange peel on my fingertips, as oranges were always an extra treat in my stocking. Because of Jule Kage which is a Norwegian sweet bread laced with cardamom and mixed with a sugary yeast and milk mixture, (I have to make now *without* the extra nuts & bolts!) that I can just smell rising on the stove while my Mom was mixing up batch after batch of Christmas cookies. Because it's a time of planning meals and presents for the ones I love, and over all because it's the story of Jesus, when He gave up His heavenly throne and came to earth. Because He was willing to be laid in a hard, stone manger in all the harshness of humanity, as a little helpless baby and to be Immanuel, God with us!

Christmas 2020 somehow has become pivotal in ways beyond that which this holiday has ever been before in our lifetime. Not because the reason or meaning has changed but because this time in history that we currently live has given us many reasons to literally stop, or at least slow down, and to look UP *to* who God is, to realize He looks at us and for us to look AROUND *at* who we are in relationship with Him.

So that is what we are going to do together for a few moments, and you have a page for notes and take-aways to hopefully help you *look to* Jesus, *to be looked at* by God, to look at Jesus, and for Jesus more intentionally through these weeks leading up to Christmas – and beyond!

You're really joining me on a retrospective journey of looking back on this year at the word God gave to my heart – my Selah word for this year of 2020. The word LOOK. I've chuckled that this is the word God put on my heart, since we often refer to hindsight being 20/20. And the year 2020 isn't one we really want to spend a lot of time in

hindsight. But LOOK is the word, nonetheless, so, let's open our eyes and our spiritual spectacles and take a 2020 look at what God reveals about Jesus and us.

First let's consider why we need to **LOOK TO Jesus**. In my mind, this is a **looking UP** to who He is.

1 Timothy 3:16 describes Jesus and why we need to constantly fix our eyes on Him. Why do we look TO Jesus?

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

So, here's the revelation!

He was

Manifested in the flesh,

Vindicated by the Spirit,

Seen by angels,

Proclaimed among the nations,

Believed on in the world,

Taken up in glory.

All that we need on this earth was provided by who Jesus is and what He did when He came to this earth.

He was *manifested* – made known – in the flesh to free us from our sin. From **Hebrews 10:7**, when Jesus came, He said to God, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book....and in **v. 10**, "by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

He was *vindicated* – proven to be right and justified – by His own Spirit. And He sent His Spirit after Himself to be your Wonderful Counselor as He promised in **John 14:16-17** to "give you another

Helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth." Jesus' Spirit vindicated Jesus and resides with us while we wait for His return.

He was seen by angels as proof to His heavenly glory. **Luke 2:13-14** reminds us and we can imagine how they looked at Jesus' glory!

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased! And those angels prompted the shepherds to go and LOOK! Vs. 15, "When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

He was and IS *proclaimed* among the nations. WE will soon have the privilege to study the book of Colossians in which we find these words. **Colossians 1:23** says, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." Jesus is proclaimed among the nations.

He was *believed* on in the world. **John 3:16** keeps us looking at Him. "For God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life, everlasting life." For our God SO LOVED the world – that whoever believes would not perish. He was believed on in the world.

And finally

He was *taken up* in glory. The final blow to any unbelief and any unbeliever was Jesus being taken up to heaven. **Luke 24:51** declares, "While He blessed them, He departed from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God." Which is how and why we're gathered now, to bless and rejoice in God!

Micah 7:7 gives us more perspective on why we look up to Jesus. "But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me." This is a prayer for our hearts to

grow 20/20 vision upward. But as for me, in other words, by the choice of my heart and mind in Christ Jesus, I will look to the LORD! With looking comes waiting. I will wait for the God of my salvation. Why? Because it's worth waiting on the One who has given you and me eternal salvation. A moment of looking up and waiting on God, of being still and gazing at the glory of our Triune God is worth far more than spinning in many directions and losing eternal perspective. It's fun to watch my little grandson chase his shadow, but after a while, when he has spun and spun, we have to reach out and steady him so that he doesn't fall from the twirling of his body. Unlike his free-wheeling spins, when a dancer is disciplined, she has trained her eyes to be fixed on a focal point, to spot as she spins so that coming out of the spin keeps her eyes fixed. That is what first looking up to Jesus and keeping our eyes on Him as our focal point does while we are in such a time as this.

And guess what the result of looking up is? It's like spiritual spa for your face!!! 😊

Psalm 34:5 tells us, "Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed." By looking up to Jesus, our soul wrinkles are turned to radiance, the shames of our hearts are smoothed and erased by His redeeming love and restoring hope!

And as we look up to Jesus, we realize that He is looking down on us.

Psalm 33:13-15 describes, "The LORD looks down from heaven; He sees all the children of man; from where He sits enthroned He looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, He who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds." Only a few verses before that, we find these words of instruction as God looks down upon us, "Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him!" As he looks on us as the inhabitants of this world, how can we do anything with that knowledge but to stand in awe of Him. We look up to His glory. He looks down to His children. This looking is all knowing, all seeing, all-encompassing from our God.

And then **Psalm 27:13-14** gives us another instance of looking and waiting in the same snapshot. "I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!" I happen to LOVE exclamation marks, and these two verses are punctuated by exclamations!!

In looking, we find God's goodness in the land of the living! That is encouraging for the darkness of these days. God's goodness prevails, and we're told to take courage. Shades of "Be strong and courageous. The LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." Wherever you LOOK, there He is. Wherever He looks, there you are. We are never out of God's sight. He alone bathes us in His goodness and gives us courage to look at Jesus with confidence no matter what our circumstances! (Exclamation point!) 😊

And this brings us to a place where we **LOOK FOR Jesus**.

Colossians 3:1-4 gives us the focal point for how to live and where to look, combining the vertical perspective of our eyes looking up and the horizontal plain of walking vibrantly in His way, the looking at where we're going. "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." Although the words are not precisely to "look" for Jesus, we hear the looking language of seeking things that are above, setting our minds on things above, an inward looking at Jesus with our thoughts and living our lives hidden with Christ in God. This gives us the ability to live with complete trust in Jesus, knowing the power of His Holy Spirit that works within us. Finding the power of His Holy Spirit dwelling within our very souls.

And **Ephesians 3:20-21** is a focal point for my soul. Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory in the

church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” It is the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us that gives us the power to look forward, to pray in full trust, and to know that He will work for the good of His church – that He works in and through us for His good and His glory! (Example of Mom – supposed to be WA-state bound but plans were altered; God’s way and Mom’s confirmation) As we look for Jesus, we find Him in the very ways He works daily through our lives. We need to surrender and let Him go to work, give Him our souls and energy, and watch Him in wonder!

A verse that literally startled me last week is where I would like us to linger in looking at Jesus – looking up to our LORD of lords and King of kings, who rules over, in, and through all! We find these words in **Isaiah 33:5-6** “The LORD is exalted, for He dwells on high; He will fill Zion with justice and righteousness, and He will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is Zion’s treasure.”

The word that captured my eyes, that I looked at with wonder, is **stability**. We talked about spinning without focus. And then the counter of spinning with our eyes fixed on a solid focal point. As we look up, look at and look for Jesus, He fills us with justice and righteousness, and, you know what? He IS our stability. He is the stability of your times, of my times, of our times now and forever! He lavishes us with an abundance of salvation – not just a little but overflowing salvation. So that when our eyes get off the mark, His saving grace unspins our minds, un-twirls our hearts, and He forgives us. When we get our gazes off of Him, gives us His face to find and reestablish Him as our focal point. Because His looking gaze never leaves us. He showers us with an abundance of His wisdom – wisdom that is from heaven – the throne from which He came to be our Immanuel and on which He sits until He comes to take us home gives us His wisdom that is pure, peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Wisdom that woos us to continue looking at and for the goodness in His constant gaze.

And then our looking knowledge of who He is, of fearing Him uncovers the treasure He is.

The treasure we have been gifted to share with those we love, and those He will put in our paths to love. Isn't this the looking for which our hearts long? An eternal looking for how we are able to more abundantly proclaim His beautiful Name!

Look TO Jesus who is God with us; He is looking down upon you constantly with lavish love and forgiveness and His gaze holds you fast.

Look FOR Jesus, who is constantly in your view, and who pulls your heart and mind back to His focal point if and when you begin to spin. He is in ALL the circumstances of your 2020 vision, and especially during this Holy Season ahead. And as you look, remember that our LORD is the stability of our times.

Let's pray together

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Look *TO* Jesus:

1 Timothy 3:16

Manifested – Luke 2:13-14

Vindicated – Hebrews 10:7, 10

Seen – John 14:16-17

Proclaimed – Colossians 1:23

Believed – John 3:16

Taken Up – Luke 24:51

Micah 7:7

Psalms 34:5

Psalms 33:13-15

Psalms 27:13-14

Look FOR Jesus:

Colossians 3:1-4

Ephesians 3:20-21

Isaiah 33:5-6

How is your heart prompted to **LOOK to** and **for Jesus** today and in the Advent season ahead? In your prayers? And in practical ways?

What **scripture** especially prods your heart, mind, and soul to **LOOK to and for Jesus** more fully and confidently, and how will you prayerfully apply this scripture during your holiday break?