

Grace, guidance and gratitude

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. --Philippians 1:3-5 (second lesson, second Sunday in Advent 2009)

St. Paul greeted the church at Philippi with blessing and obvious delight at the work of the Spirit in their midst. As I visit the Lutheran congregations, agencies and leaders of the church in Southeastern Pennsylvania throughout the year, I feel similar delight when I see how God's plan and purpose is being accomplished among us and through us -- even in spite of us!



In this season of Advent and Christmas, as we remember the miraculous gift of the coming of Christ into our midst, let us remember and appreciate the ways Christ continues to come to us, to be with us, and to bless us for God's earthly mission. In my daily devotions during the Advent and Christmas seasons, I will try to remember and embrace three free gifts of the Holy Spirit -- **grace, guidance and gratitude.**

As we pray, meditate, read the scriptures and reflect on our daily routines, let us **live into the gift of grace.** How would our days take shape if we were reminded each day to live out what we believe? That God became flesh to reconcile us, and the whole world through Jesus Christ? That this is a free and unmerited gift to be accepted and lived in *this world* and the next? St. Paul wrote to the community of faith at Philippi, **"I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ."** (Phil. 1:6) We can each

rest in the assurance that the good work that God has begun in us -- and in the world -- will be completed in His time and for His purpose.

This season of waiting for and receiving God's most amazing gift is an opportunity to remember to **look for the gift of guidance.** The Holy Spirit promises to guide us daily and give us opportunities to serve God and to proclaim Christ. The apostle praised the Philippians because of their **"sharing in the gospel from the first day until now."** (Phil. 1:5) In your work and play, in your congregation and in your home, the Spirit will guide you to share the gospel in the ordinary occasions of life, if you are open and receptive to the Spirit's calling.

In this time of giving and receiving, I urge you to **let the gift of gratitude overflow.** We are truly a blessed people, and we are constantly surrounded by the signs of God's presence and abundance. Even in the midst of hardship and distress we can be confident of the unfailing love of Jesus Christ, and we are strengthened daily by His grace. Be grateful for all blessings, the little and the small, so that your gratitude will overflow and spread blessings all around you.

And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:9-11)

This is my Christmas prayer for the people of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod: That we may experience God's grace more fully; that the Spirit's guidance will lead us to confidently proclaim Christ in word and deed; and that we will rejoice with gratitude for the blessings we have been given. May our love for God and neighbor overflow as Christ strengthens and blesses us, and draws us more deeply into the Father's purpose.

In Christ,
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Bishop