

December 2000

John Jay has been on my mind for several days. I'm in New York where his life-size portrait dominates the meeting hall of the American Bible Society.

Jay was the second president of the ABS (1821-1828) after having served as the first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court (1789-1798). That's interesting in view of ongoing litigation and especially today's Bush and Gore presentations to the Supreme Court. John Jay's life reminds us that there are still judges who use their intellectual gifts to interpret the laws of man and at the same time have hearts motivated by the Word of God.

We pray in Jesus' name, our Father, that You be involved as You know best in decisions rendered by our courts. Especially help Christian judges to be faithful to Your Word as they strive to apply the laws of our nation impartially. Amen.

The Meyer Minute for December 4, 2000

Keyword: The Coming Lord

I felt out of my element last week when some friends took me to dinner on the top of the World Trade Center in New York. Although the view was spectacular, everything seemed so small, even insignificant. The Statue of Liberty, for example, seemed only an inch tall from my perspective way up on the 106th floor.

After dinner, down on the street, I felt back in real life. Impatient motorists blowing horns...as if that would make a difference! Business execs on cell phones. Are they confirming some

appointment or saying, "I won't be home until late?" I see a young woman in the crowd, crying. "Why?" I wonder. A beggar asks for a handout. Down here, not up on the 106th, is real life.

God sits high but looks low. Advent has begun. Advent is not about preparing for December 25th, nothing Christian about that. No, this is Advent's message: the lofty Lord coming - present tense - the lofty Lord coming down to where you live. Most of the time we don't feel on top of the world; we're down on our own streets, trying to cope with whatever comes our way. Advent's Good News: God sits high but looks low. "I see you!"

"Come down, O Love divine; Seek out this soul of mine, and visit it with Your own ardor glowing. O Comforter, draw near; Within my heart appear and kindle it, Your holy flame bestowing." Amen.

The Meyer Minute for December 6, 2000

Keyword: Ho, Ho, Ho!

Today, says the church's calendar, is the day of St. Nicholas, aka Santa Claus. Pastor Richard Bucher wrote:

"Very little factual information is actually known about this most popular saint. In the words of (scholar Francis) Weiser, 'there is scarcely any definite historical fact known about him except that he was bishop of Myra in Asia Minor; that he was cast into exile and prison during the persecution of Emperor Diocletian and released by Constantine the great; that he died in Myra about 350....'

"The Feast of St. Nicholas on December

6 has been observed with great enthusiasm throughout Medieval Europe over the centuries. This enthusiasm was due to the many legends that had grown up around Nicholas: that he had distributed gifts to the poor at night through their windows, had fasted while a baby, had helped dowerless maidens, saved a city from famine, had aided a ship in distress, etc."

Not everything about the modern Santa Claus has a Christian origin but this does remind us -- and it lets us tell our children and grandchildren -- that the original "Santa" was a follower of Jesus. Have you seen the small ceramic sculpture of Santa kneeling at the Savior's crib? That gets it right. Ho, ho, ho! With St. Nicholas, come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

Heavenly Father, thank You for all the saints, today for St. Nicholas. Help me recall his devotion to the Savior every time I see a modern, commercialized Santa. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Meyer Minute for December 8, 2000

Keyword: Anger

John Lennon was murdered 20 years ago today, the act of a demented man. In the stresses of your life, how do you deal with your anger?

**"Anger is an experience that occurs when a goal, value, or expectation that I have chosen has been blocked or when my sense of personal worth is threatened. This experience involves emotions, physiology, and cognitive processes and expresses itself toward self, others, or the environment."
(Glenn Taylor and Rod Wilson, "Helping Angry People," Baker, 1997; p. 71f.)**

So when you feel irritation, rage, anger, check yourself. What value, what goal, what expectation of yours is being threatened? And is it God's will being blocked in this situation or are you ticked because your selfish will is not being satisfied?

In a 1970 interview John Lennon looked ahead. "I hope we're a nice old couple living off the coast of Ireland or something like that, looking back at our scrapbooks of madness." He became a victim of madness. Will you today take the energies that could be directed into crazed anger and direct them to good for others?

Wow, Lord! I'm a mix of emotions and thought! Spirit of God, come to me in the Word, teach me to examine my anger and to direct those energies toward the accomplishment of Your will. Amen.

The Meyer Minute for December 11, 2000

Keyword: Forgive

The four Gospels are not "biography," as we understand that word. They are rather accounts focused on the suffering and death of the One they present as the bringer of Good News. Advent's theme is Jesus' coming - present tense - a coming that brings you forgiveness from His passion and lays on you the tough task of forgiving anyone who has wronged you.

"We're mistaken if we think Jesus' teaching was namby-pamby, some weak attempt to make the world "sweeter." He came to shed light on the terrible force we turn loose in the world when we retaliate, and the cost we pay personally when we insist we cannot forgive."

"The physical costs of unforgiveness may include hypertension, chronic headaches, high blood pressure, cardiovascular ailments, and gastrointestinal disorders, to name just a handful. Because negative emotions have a depressive effect and can suppress immune function, unforgiveness may even have an indirect link to major and severe disorders like rheumatoid arthritis and cancer."

"It's time to consider the great cost we're paying when we don't learn what Jesus came to teach about the miracle of forgiving." ("When You Can't Say, 'I Forgive You,' Grace Ketterman and David Hazard, Navpress, 2000; p. 31f.)

Our Father who art in heaven, forgive us our trespasses and give us the willpower to forgive those who trespass against us. Amen.

The Meyer Minute for December 13, 2000

Keyword: Ten Commandments

- I. Thou shalt feel obligated to blanket the world with Christmas cards like snowflakes falling on earth.**
- II. Thou shalt deny the Child's simple Stable by striving to impress guests with thy splendidly decorated house.**
- III. Thou shalt not be like the Shepherds and show up in the same old holiday clothes.**
- IV. Thou shalt think thyself one of the Wise Men by searching far and wide for unique gifts.**
- V. Thou shalt blow Thy budget in a vain attempt at holiday cheer, imagining that it will then go well with thee.**
- VI. Thou shalt measure thyself more by Martha Stewart than by the God who welcomes you as you are.**
- VII. Thou shalt so stress thyself that thou becomest a Scrooge to thy loved**

ones.

VIII. Thou shalt be so busy that thou hast not time to sit by thy Christmas tree and ponder as did the virgin mother Mary.

IX. Thou shalt so exhaust thyself that thou more desirest crashing on the 26th than worshipping on the 25th.

X. Thou shalt forget the Reason for the season.

Lord, give me courage to leave some things undone. Amen.

The Meyer Minute for December 15, 2000

Keyword: Realistic

No riots. No civil war. A peaceful transfer of power. Realistically, you and I can say, "Thank You, Lord," now that election 2000 is over.

OK, but let's not be naïve. "The sharks have already begun to swarm," says one observer about political life after the election. That, too, is realistic.

What are you going to do about it in the next years? You can be "undecided"... and complacent... about politics and government. Or you can be informed and involved, even when that proves to be discouraging. Realistically, Christian friend, this second option is for you. After all, isn't your faith supposed to lead you to do good works? Check it out in Ephesians 2:8-10.

Jesus says, "In this world you have trouble. Take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Lord, let Your Good News in Jesus Christ be my eternal refuge but also my present inspiration to be informed and involved, to make a real difference in

my community and country. Amen.

**The Meyer Minute for December 18,
2000**

Keyword: Believe

"Mom, Dad...uh...uh... I'm pregnant but don't worry, it's OK."

"You're WHAT? No, it's not OK, not by any stretch."

"No, it really is!"

"Who is it? Wait 'til I get my hands on that...."

"Dad, Mom, it's God. I haven't slept with anyone. God did it."

"Mary, are you crazy? How in the world do you expect us to believe that???"

I don't know if a conversation like that happened, but the Bible does give us hints that some folks in town didn't believe Mary's story. In fact, one anti-Christian tradition says she had made herself available to a Roman soldier. But no, the conception was miraculous and Mary did believe the angel's amazing announcement.

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the One to be born will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35)

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." (Luke 1:38)

Heavenly Father, help me this week before Christmas to follow the example of the virgin mother of our Savior and hear Your words and, even when they seem amazing, to believe Your words. Amen.

The Meyer Minute for December 19,

2000

Keyword: Concentrate!

"For All the Saints" is a four volume devotional anthology that I regularly use. When I came across the following quotation from the late Robert D. Hershey, I thought you might find it timely.

"(Not that many) shopping days 'till Christmas. That, dear God, is bad news. It's not just the shopping, but everything else too: getting presents, buying cards, writing, mailing, baking, meals, parties. Can it be, Lord, that I'm working on the wrong things? Help me to concentrate on the right thing: the good news of Your coming again into this darkened world with light and hope. After all, getting ready for Christmas shouldn't mean pressure and weariness at all, but quiet minds and hearts spilling over with joy. Amen."

**P.S. I believe these books are still available from The American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, P.O. Box 327, Delhi, N.Y.13753-0327. Have a good day!
"Concentrate on the right thing."**

The Meyer Minute for December 20, 2000

Keyword: Heroes

What if we had more men like this?

**He let faith guide his major life decisions (see Matthew 1:19).
He stood by his wife when she was going through a tough time (see Matthew 1:20, 24-25).
He became a refugee rather than expose her son to danger (see Matthew 2:14).
He seemed ready to settle in the big**

city so that her son would benefit (see Matthew 2:19-22).

He regularly led his family to worship (see Luke 2:41).

He seems to have died early, perhaps when the son was a teenager or in his early 20's (see John 19:26-27).

He was Joseph, "stepfather" to Jesus and husband to the Virgin Mary. What would happen today if more husbands and fathers demonstrated these qualities of Joseph, commitment to faith and family, even to the point of personal sacrifice?

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

Jesus, we pray for more heroes. Because Your presence makes for a holy family, help today's husbands and fathers sanctify their families by demonstrating Your presence in their lives. Amen.

**The Meyer Minute for December 22,
2000**

Keyword: Merry Christmas!

"In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree...." So where was Caesar Augustus when St. Luke wrote the familiar words of the Christmas story? The great emperor had been dead for over 50 years. Sic transit gloria mundi, so passes the glory of this world.

I wish you and your loved ones a Merry Christmas and I hope that this weekend will quiet your hearts, that you will experience again the peace that comes from knowing God is with you, God is for you. From great emperors down to the little things in our own lives, all will come and go... all except the Eternal One, "Immanuel," God with us. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

**Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled
Within my heart that it may be
A quiet chamber kept for Thee. Amen.**

**The Meyer Minute for December 27,
2000**

Keyword: Ponder

Quiet time.

**After a 90 mile journey on foot or
donkey while she was pregnant,
After giving birth in a strange place...
After unexpected visitors...
After Lord only knows what else...
After all that, Mary grabbed some quiet
time.**

**"Mary kept all these things and
pondered them in her heart" (Luke
2:19)**

**Why don't you take some quiet time in
these down days between the
holidays? With the Book open, ponder
the ultimate questions of life.**

**Jesus said, "My mother and my
brothers are those who hear God's
word and put it into practice" (Luke
8:21).**

**Another time He said, "Blessed are
those who hear the word of God and
obey it" (Luke 11:28)**

**So don't just do something! Sit
there...and ponder.**

**God! I don't have to work all the time.
This quiet time between the holidays
isn't wasted if I do what Mary did and
ponder what You are doing in my life.
Amen.**

**Another Meyer Minute for December
27, 2000**

Keyword: Peace

"I think that's sickening," said my

daughter about yesterday's shooting spree near Boston. 7 killed...the day after we celebrated the birth of the Prince of Peace!

Sounds like bait and switch. "Peace on earth," teased the angels. Now senseless slaughter. Even Christians have to admit that it doesn't fit.

Long ago the church acknowledged the contradiction. On December 26th the church commemorates Stephen, the first martyr (Acts 7:54-59). On the 28th it remembers the "Holy Innocents," those infants killed by King Herod in his rage to eliminate the Christ child (Matthew 2:16). Celebrate Christmas, the church decided long ago, but then remember murderous reality.

Where's the resolution? When the infant Jesus was presented at the temple in Jerusalem, old Simeon said, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35). Simeon suggested no quick peace and Jesus Himself said that His peace is different than the world's (John 14:27). His cross is the resolution, giving us the present peace of forgiveness but also calling us to imitate Christ and struggle in hope against evil. That's what St. Stephen was about and, obvious after yesterday, that's what we need to be about also.

Spirit of God, comfort the victims of violence. Teach us what is good and right and inspire us to pursue it, whatever the cost, just as St. Stephen did. In Jesus' name. Amen.
