

## **CHRISTMAS: RECEIVING GOD'S GIFT OF LOVE**

**Second Sunday after Christmas**

**January 3, 2010**

**Jeremiah 31:7-14 or Sirach 24:1-12**

**Psalm 147:12-20 or Wisdom of Solomon 10:15-21**

**Ephesians 1:3-14**

**John 1: [1-9] 10-18**

### **The Lord is Our Hope and Redeemer**

Today is the second Sunday after Christmas. The New Year has dawned on us, and it is a time that beckons us to reflect and look back at 2009. We look forward to 2010 with anticipation and hope. At the beginning of a new year, we tend to be in a more reflective mood, focusing on the passage of time, and what we do with time as we consider plans for the new year. We can rejoice in God's mercies and be assured in the hope and joy he provides.

The prophet Jeremiah announces the reunion and restoration of the kingdoms of Israel. The people are going to be united with God. "I am like a father to Israel," says God. (Jeremiah 31:9, *GNT*). So, as we journey into this New Year, remember these words of hope; for with God all things are possible. We are to become messengers of hope to our loved ones, friends, and neighbors, as well as to the whole world.

The prologue of John's Gospel, "In the beginning the Word already existed" (John 1:1, *GNT*), dramatizes that Jesus, God Incarnate, is with us, has always been with us, and will always be with us. Jesus is the light shining in the darkness. John continues, "Some, however, did receive him and believed in him; so he gave them the right to become God's children." (John 1:12, *GNT*). This clearly states our adoption as God's children through Christ. This divine adoption is our invitation to unearned grace, a remarkable acceptance and an eternal inheritance in the communion of the saints.

These passages give a new message of hope. It shows a God who makes the first move, always in our direction, and it demands a response from us as well. We have a God who doesn't just want to engage in our lives during the "holidays," but who wants to walk through life with us in the routine, the struggles, and the not-so-good days as well.

God still calls us today. How will we respond? Through the coming of Christ, the prophecy of deliverance is fulfilled. Make room at the inn of your heart for Jesus Christ. He is our hope and redeemer!

This week's Reflection was prepared by Tenny Thomas, a Ph.D. candidate at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary in New York City and who serves as a consultant for the American Bible Society in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Kenya** – With thanks to God for the completion of the Lukakamega-Lutirichi and Common Language Kikamba Bible translations, for the release of audio Scriptures in Lukakamega-Lutirichi and Oluluyia, for the launch and distribution of the Somali Bible, and for the planned launches of the Logooli, Pokoot, and Lubukusu Bibles, and with prayers for the planned translation projects for the deaf and for speakers of Teso, for the planned translation of a Children’s Bible in the Somali and Maimai languages, and for peace in Somalia; **Tanzania** – With thanks to God for the distribution of 5,000 Maasai Bibles, for the *Faith Comes By Hearing* and *Good Samaritan* programs, and for the launch of the Datooga and Kihehe New Testaments, and with prayers for the publication of the Sukuma Bible, the launch of the Kinyiramba New Testament, and church involvement in literacy programs; **Uganda** – With thanks to God for the translation and printing of the interconfessional Runyoro/Rutooro Bible, the completion of the Runyankore/Rukiga DC Bible revision, and the production of *David 1 & 2* comics in nine local languages, and with prayers for continued financial support for all existing projects; **Rwanda** – With prayers for work on the Kinyarwanda Study Bible and that pastors find it helpful in their daily work, and with prayers for the Bible Society’s staff and board members and that they receive God’s wisdom as they serve the Christian community; **Burundi** – With thanks to God for close collaboration with the Churches, and with prayers for the publication of the revised Yera Bible, for the completion of the Catholic Kirundi translation, and for the Kirundi Study Bible project, and with prayers for peace and stability in the country during the general elections planned for this year.

**Activity Corner:** “New Beginnings” Commitment Cards

Supplies needed: Bible; 3” x 5” index cards (or pieces of paper); drawing paper and crayons for young children; pens or pencils; basket (or bowl).

Read together Ephesians 1:3-14. Discuss what it means to be chosen by God. What inheritance have we received? Ask everyone to write on one side of their card, A NEW BEGINNING AS A CHILD OF GOD. Invite everyone to think about how they will live as children of God and to write their thoughts on the reverse side of the card. Young children may be encouraged to draw a picture. Encourage everyone to keep their card in a place that will remind them throughout the year of their commitment to live for God. Conclude with a prayer that focuses on hopes for the new year and thanksgiving for God’s steadfast love.