

DECEMBER 18, 2022, LUM SUNDAY DEVOTIONAL
MY THIRD 2022 CHRISTMAS GIFT: "A GIFT CARD TO THE BAKERY"

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: FROM JOHN 6

35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

BLESSED THOUGHTS: "THE BEST CHRISTMAS BAKING OF ALL"

I really am amazed at how different Grade Seven is for my grandson than it was for me in 1955-1956. Recently, Theo had to make a video (in French) showing how to bake banana muffins! Not only did he show this video to his class on an I-pad, but it was also posted on Facebook. Right there you have four things no one in my Grade Seven class knew anything about: baking banana muffins, speaking French, shooting videos, or Facebook's popularity!

What we did have, though, was holiday baking, which in my family meant Grandma's sugar cookies, which I helped her cut out in Christmas shapes. Later on, Christmas baking also meant my Mother-in-law's Norwegian Christmas bread (which made the best toast ever), as well as my special favorite, mince tarts (thank you, Margaret Lindgren!), yet perhaps best of all are all those baked miracles my wife rolls out every year. No one beats Nana's baking, and the grandchildren love helping her (I get to clean up the kitchen).

Yet how many know the real "bakery" connection to Christmas? Royal David's City, Bethlehem (now a tourist destination) is a city in the central West Bank, Palestine, about 10 km (6.2 miles) south of Jerusalem. Its population is approximately 25,000, majority Muslim but with a significant number of Palestinian Christians as well. Its *name literally means "house of bread" or "bakery."* Now, everyone knows all about the traditional Carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," but a more modern Christmas song focuses on "The House of Bread" imagery.

*Within your walls, the Bread of life rests His lowly head
With His truth, the hunger of our spirit will be fed In Bethlehem
Bethlehem, thou Bethlehem House of Bread*

*To your doors the ancient words of prophecy have led
Call the weary pilgrim in, the banquet feast is spread
In Bethlehem Honor stands upon your name
How beautiful, how right This Child, the Bread of life
Should grace your gates tonight Bethlehem, thou Bethlehem House of Bread*

*Your heritage is woven with a single golden thread
Shining through the centuries, our hungry hearts have sped
To the child of Bethlehem Honor stands upon your name
How beautiful, how right This child, the Bread of life*

*Should grace your gates tonight Bethlehem, thou Bethlehem
House of bread Bethlehem, thou Bethlehem House of bread*

[Bethlehem, House of Bread by Annie Moses Band, from their album, "This Glorious Christmas."]

And so, this is why I pray that all of us will receive another wonderful Christmas 2022 present, what I call a Gift Certificate to God's Bakery, where all of us who hunger for peace, love, meaning, and life will find all these and more in Jesus Christ, the True Bread from Heaven!

But, remember, the real treat of all our Christmas baking comes when we share it together with loved ones, and so I also pray that all of us this holiday season will experience just that: the joy of the Christmas Eucharist, the satisfaction of volunteering in a holiday food bank or Christmas Cheer hamper, or even just a cheerful coffee hour with fellow saints.

And as we think about all those holiday meals, *we hope to enjoy this year, here's a lovely poem by a wonderful old preacher, William Henry Harrison Murray (1840–1904), who also founded a church camping movement. His poem is called, "TOUCH HANDS." It's especially meaningful to those who miss loved ones at our holiday tables at this time of year.*

*Ah friends, dear friends, As years go on and heads get gray,
How fast the guests do go! Touch hands, touch hands With those that stay.
Strong hands to weak, Old hands to young, around the Christmas board touch hands.
The false forget, the foe forgive, For every guest will go And every fire burn low
And cabin empty stand.
Forget, forgive, For who may say that Christmas day
May ever come to host or guest again. Touch hands!*

—written by Pastor Barry Bence