

## ***“I Keep Asking”***

January 2009

Hymn            “God reveal your presence”            VU 391

Scripture       Ephesians 1: 15 - 23

Prayer            Let us pray – We praise you, O God, for fresh winds of the Spirit, for warmth in the winters of our lives, for refreshment in the midst of our weary toil. Thank you, God, for the consolation of your word, the blessing of your peace, the riches of your grace. Shine on us now with the light of your presence and the power of your truth. Meet us here with a fresh revelation of the possibilities in your service. Amen.

Lesson            What’s an epiphany? – Perhaps it can be defined as a moment which rescues from the commonplace the radiance of an experience, “the enchantment of the heart.”

As we enter the New Year we could make a “book of epiphanies”. We will not want a scrapbook but a series of pictures for our “hard drive”. Like our camcorder “epiphany machine”, we open ourselves to the moment, “click” and it’s on record, an epiphany! No one epiphany tells the whole story. Even the wise men knew only a part of the story when they left the stable, but they had had an epiphany. Light had broken in their darkness and they would never be the same again.

In our scripture lesson from Paul’s letter to the people of the church in Ephesus we read of Paul’s prayers, how he keeps asking. Sometimes prayer can be like pushing a full wheelbarrow – with no wheel. At other times it’s like rushing down the rapids of a mountain river. What makes the difference? As we have read, Paul’s prayers overflow with praise and thanksgiving. Can reading or praying produce an epiphany?

Migrating Redwing Blackbirds were making a great racket. On investigating, a hundred birds materialized from one tree. One person reported, “I saw a tree, then a rush of colour, then a tree again. It was as if the leaves of the tree had been freed from a spell in the form of Redwing Blackbirds.” For that person, it was an epiphany of the wonder of God’s creation.

It is out of a number of such epiphanies that we shall build our lives into the pattern of Paul’s letter to Ephesus, “the comprehension of what is the breadth and length and depth and height of God’s love.” So that we may be filled – gradually, bit by bit, with the fullness of God.

Discussion       In small groups, talk about the following:

- one of your epiphany experiences
- a time that prayer has been difficult for you
- how you can make AOTS and/or the church more a part of your life

Prayer            Let us pray – O God, as the songs of Christmas fade, we sometimes turn away from Christ and from your call to service. Lead us back, gracious God, for life apart from you is drained of meaning. Amen

## ***“How bright is your light?”***

February 2009

Hymn            “A light is gleaming”            VU 82

Scripture        Matthew 5: 14 - 17

Prayer            Let us pray – Surprising God, whose love leads us to new experiences, help us to be open to your appearance among us and within us. Let us sense your glory in the sights and sounds of this day. Confront us with your law and the prophetic word, that our lives may more fully reflect your purposes. May your Spirit move us to speak of the light that you reveal. Amen.

Lesson            No one would have been surprised if Nelson Mandela had emerged from his years of captivity a bitter man, but instead he turned inward, examining his soul, and finding moral courage and insight. It is from him that we receive these words of encouragement:

“Our worst fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, “Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?” Actually, who are you *not* to be?

You are a child of God: your playing small doesn't serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God within us. It is not just in some of us, it is in everyone, and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Discussion        In small groups, talk about the following:

- What are we doing as an AOTS club to reflect the light of God?
- How am I as an individual brightening our world?

Prayer            Let us pray –Our God, only when we are willing to open our eyes to greatness around us do we recognize the smallness within. Lift our eyes to the hills, that we may be humbled by their strength. Direct our gaze towards strong lives around us that we may wish for change in ourselves. Above all, we pray that we may find in the brightness of Christ's own life the thin threadbare shadows of our own goodness. Thus may we give your spirit a chance to grow in us and to bring us closer to your glory. Amen

## ***“Lent”***

March 2009

Hymn            “You servants of God”            VU 342

Scripture        *“When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do what I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”*    John 13: 12 - 17

Prayer            Let us pray – Gracious God, we know Jesus was lonely and tempted and yet willing to sacrifice his life for all humankind. We often feel incapable of walking the path that he followed. Help us now, as we look again at one of the final acts of his earthly life. Accept our feeble attempts at discipleship through him, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Lesson            We are in the season of Lent. The word “Lent” comes from lengthening, as in the lengthening of days as spring approaches. The season of Lent lasts for forty days plus six Sundays and ends with Easter which was set by the Council of Nicea in 325 as the first Sunday after the first full moon of the spring equinox.

Lent has been traditionally a time of self-denial, of fasting and praying. It is also a time when we reflect on the last days of Jesus’ life on earth. It is a time when we wonder if we are really deserving of the name “Christian”. We wonder just how well we are doing in following the teachings of this man we call the Christ.

One of the most difficult of Jesus’ teachings for us to follow is one we read about in John’s gospel – the washing of feet. Many of us have allowed ourselves to almost “write off” this command of Jesus on the basis of the cultural and climatic conditions that no longer apply to modern society – especially modern Canadian society. We no longer wash people’s feet when they arrive at our door, nor do we have servants to do this for our guests. This allows us to ignore the symbolism of the story, which is service to others.

Some faith communities have experimented with foot washing, or have substituted hand washing. A bowl of water and a towel placed on a table while the story is being read can also be quite moving. We do not need to re-enact the foot washing – we need to think about what such a servant attitude means to us. The visual aid helps us realize what that act must have meant to the disciples. Here was their master, acting as their servant. We who claim to have no worldly master or mistress, and who are unlikely to be able to afford servants, find it difficult to appreciate this role reversal of Jesus.

There is no doubt that Christians are called to *serve*. Lent is a time when we can evaluate our service, seek new ways to serve, or be strengthened to continue the service we are doing.

**Discussion** In small groups, talk about ways that Christians today express their faith in action during the Lenten season. Include small actions as well as larger contributions. Be intentional in naming ways you will serve during the next few weeks.

**Prayer** Let us pray – O God, washing one another's feet seems such a small gesture of service, but sometimes it is difficult to accept this kindness from another person. Help us to know how to accept, and help us to know how to give, that we may follow the example of Jesus as one that serves. Amen.

## ***“No body now but ours”***

April 2009

Hymn            “We shall go out with hope of resurrection”            VU 586

Scripture        *“Woman,” he said, “Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”*  
*Thinking he was the gardener she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away tell me*  
*where you have put him, and I will get him.” Jesus said to her, “Mary”. She*  
*turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni”.*  
*Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the father. Go*  
*instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my father and your father,*  
*to my God and your God.’” John 20:15-17*

Prayer            Let us pray – O God, sometimes we look for you in our abandoned dreams, in the things that might have been. Today, when we take time to look, we may see your face and hear your voice in the gardener, or the grocery clerk, or other unexpected people. We may feel new life, and new hope, and new beginnings through an unknown source. Help us to know you and know what you would have us do to make Easter happen in the world today. Amen.

Lesson            It is early Easter morning and Mary Magdalene is in conversation with her risen teacher but she doesn't recognize him until he speaks. It's apparent that something has changed. Then he tells her she cannot touch him – “Do not hold on to me,” he says. She cannot continue the personal, individual relationship she used to have. She must now seek a relationship with Jesus' spiritual brothers and sisters, the beloved company behind the telling and the writing of this gospel.

Many of us have been taught that we should relate to, even worship the risen Christ. Stained glass windows and paintings portray the risen Christ, ruler of all, on a heavenly throne. Keeping Easter need not centre on worshipping the post-Easter Jesus.

As with loved ones who have entered into the mystery of life beyond death, we may still feel a strong connection to Jesus – to who he was and what he taught us. But what matters most is not what we believe about life beyond death or about the risen Christ in particular. Like Mary Magdalene, we are not to hold on to Jesus' individual being or to whatever image we may have, pre- or post-Easter, of Christ.

The risen Christ is no longer a human being, but is found in the community of all God's people, of all God's beloved creation. Easter is not about insisting on one particular version of resurrection. It is about choosing new life in our ways of acting, caring and creating together.

Our loved ones live on as we live out the best of what they have given us. So too, Christ is alive when we embody holy wisdom and compassion, when we work for peace, justice and well-being in God's beloved world, and when we sense God's presence everywhere in one another.

What should be clear is that resurrection isn't just limited to the experience of Jesus or to however we understand a life after death, but in the passing from death to life here and now. The message of resurrection and of Easter hope is that we can live fully in this life, the life we are living as AOTS men, giving of ourselves, and risking for love's sake.

The secret to practicing resurrection is in giving who we are and what we have completely, wholly away to something greater than ourselves – in escaping from the circumstances and choices that entomb us and entering into new life here and now. In life and in death, Jesus modeled this generosity and transformation for followers then and now. As we embrace resurrection as a credible and meaningful principle for living, we, like Jesus, may become more than anyone around us – or even we ourselves – could have imagined.

**Prayer-in-action**      Come together in a circle prayer where you each share where you see new life emerging in your lives or in the world around you. Before you part, share ideas about what you can do to help mend the world. Even small things count. Check in with each other from time to time, being an Easter community for each other.

**Prayer**              Let us pray – Turn us on, O God. Help us to reach out for the spirit power that Jesus promised to those who follow his way. We seek this power, yet we need the Spirit in other ways as well. We need a comforter, a teacher, an enabler, so that the power is used wisely and well, to lead us into your eternal ways of truth. Amen.

## ***“the church”***

May 2009

Hymn            “The church’s one foundation”

VU 331

Scripture        *It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don’t use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that’s how freedom grows. For everything we know about God’s word is summed up in a single sentence: **love others as you love yourself.** That’s an act of true freedom. If you bite and ravage each other, watch out – in no time at all you will be annihilating each other and where will your precious freedom be then.*

*Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads, or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every aspect of our lives. That means we will not compare ourselves with each other as if one of us were better and another worse. We have far more interesting things to do with our lives. Each of us is an original. From Galatians 5:13-15 and 25-26 in The Message*

Prayer            Let us pray – Amazing God, Creator and Confronter, open our hearts to hear your voice in unexpected times and places. Appear to us in forms we cannot deny. Challenge us in ways we cannot avoid. Lead us in paths from which we cannot turn back. Discipline us, that our self-discipline may be better informed and more consistent. Test us that we may test ourselves by the model of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen

Lesson            We’ll begin with a story – *There once was a well-respected and loved teacher named Hufis, a Sufi sheik who could do all kinds of wonderful things. But he began to hear of another sheik, Raaleh, whom travellers from the other side of Persia said could do even more wondrous things. Troubled, he set out to find her, and they met on the shores of the Persian Gulf. As it happened, it was prayer time. So Hufis took his prayer rug and flung it out on the water. Then walking across the water, he said his prayers seated on his prayer rug, floating on the water.*

*When finished, he turned to Raaleh, “Can you do that?” She took out her prayer rug and threw it into the air. Then, climbing an invisible staircase, she sat down and said her prayers, floating in the air. Upon descending, she called to Hufis: “What you and I have done today, the fishes and birds do every day. Wouldn’t it be more worthwhile if we would learn instead to treat each other as human beings?”*

In the early church, believers were received into the church by adult baptism. The sacrament itself was preceded by training and teaching. The instruction in Matthew 28:19 to “make disciples” includes both baptism and teaching or apprenticeship. Since baptism was a one-time act the words seem to emphasize the teaching ministry of the new church. We still train and prepare men and women in this teaching function when they become set apart as ordained or commissioned ministers.

Yet few people today consider teaching the most important function of a church. When it comes to calling a minister, most congregations say that the ability to preach good sermons is crucial. Those who value the place of music in worship feel that a fine music program is essential. Some say the most important thing about a church is the building itself, and suggest that serving the church means keeping the building in excellent condition. Of course, the Sunday School teachers would agree that teaching is primary in today's world where little Christian education is given in the home.

The church is teaching, preaching, music, and much, much more. If we take seriously the words of Jesus to "obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20) we will love our neighbour as ourselves, look after the sick, care for the thief, the leper, the prostitute, and turn the world upside down! All of these are possible only if the church is considered to be a "community" or "family" – a group of people working together, caring about one another, and caring about those in need outside of their community.

**Prayer-in-action**      In small groups use your imaginations to create a "perfect" church. Use your own congregation as a start and decide what changes need to be made.

After you have done this, see if there is one change your group can initiate now to help to "perfect" your church.

**Prayer**      Let us pray – Creator God, we pray for strength of spirit to be your church. Baptize us with your love that we may do your work. Guide us that we may be examples in word and in deed. Mould us into your disciples. Amen.

## *“fellowship and friendship”*

June 2009

Hymn            “Love divine, all loves excelling”            VU 333

Scripture        John 15: 9-16

Verse 15 – *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead I have called you friends, for everything I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*

Prayer            Let us pray – God, we look to you as parent of us all. May your love, your careful providing, your compassionate concern for us, your firm expectations, make us glad offspring. Open to us your vision of parenthood and make us, as you are, willing to offer ourselves to our children, through Christ our Lord. Amen

Lesson            One of the most touching of Jesus’ conversations with his disciples occurs late in his ministry when he says, “I no longer call you servants, but friends.” Deep friendships were valued in his world. Aristotle had already commented that “without friends no one would choose to live, even though he possessed all other goods.” Friendship grows out of common interests. Sydney Smith, the flamboyant English of the 1890’s was once at a dinner. When the woman next to him stated that she did not like gravy, he leapt to his feet and said to her, “Neither do I! Let us pledge a life-long friendship!” This is a facetious story, but one that illustrates that common convictions, shared interests, insights, tastes, and enjoyments determine friendship. At the heart of it is simply the enjoyment of being together, thinking, feeling, grieving, and laughing together.

The deeper the sharing, the deeper the friendship. Thomas Hughes wrote, “Blessed are they who have the gift of making friends. It involves many things, but above all the power of going out of oneself and appreciating what is noble and loving in another.” Or as Henry Ford succinctly put it, “My friend is the one who brings out the best in me.”

Being a friend means taking risks. To have a friend means to run the risk of being told things about ourselves we prefer not to hear. Proverbs has a wise saying, ‘the wounds of a friend can be trusted....’ On the other hand, there are few experiences as painful as being let down by a friend. Therefore, some would prefer not to risk it. A minister, Leslie Weatherhead noted in a sermon that a parishioner who prayed about a problem seemed to get no help until he discussed it with his friend. Weatherhead quoted him a line from Browning. “Hush, I pray you, what if this friend happens to be – God?” and adds, “He who speaks to me in the wind, cannot he speak more clearly in the vibrant tones of a friend?” Jesus would have said so.

In our friendships, God finds one of many ways to make contact with our lives. We believe that some of God’s nature is revealed through friendships; in them we see God as trustworthy, enjoyable, and committed to our good. No wonder a favourite hymn is, “What a friend we have in Jesus.”

Prayer-in-action      Examine David and Jonathon's friendship in II Samuel 1. Pray about it and examine how you can broaden your fellowship group by making friends with more of the men in your church and your community.

Prayer              Let us pray – Our God, day by day, in the deep places of our own hearts, we thank you for the gifts of life and livelihood, family and fortune. Week by week, we gather in our churches to thank you for the world in which we live and all that it contains. Month by month, in the fellowship of this group of AOTS men, we become aware of the subtle gifts of friendship, the listening ear, the shared experience, the tender yet strengthening touch, the affirmation of the group's interest and confidence, and the assurance of your presence as we meet. And so we thank you this month for the gift of friendship, the strength and confidence it brings to our lives, and the amazing assurance that you, too, are a friend. Amen.

## *“If it is to be it is up to me”*

July/August 2009

Hymn “I, the Lord of sea and sky” VU 509

Scripture Luke 10: 1-3

‘After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where He was about to go. He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.” ‘

Prayer Let us pray together – We gather to hear your call, O God of love. Speak to us in this time of fellowship and worship that we may hear your call to service and answer, “Here am I, send me.” Amen.

Reflection Do we see the work that we do each day as a part of God’s work and God’s plan? Do we see that there are many tasks that need to be undertaken to bring about justice and peace in our world? Do we name justice and peacemaking as the work of God and therefore as our work as well? God calls us to do the work that needs to be done.

In his book “If it is to be it’s up to me”, Author Thomas B. Smith tells of the powerful impact this attitude has in every area of his life. As he states in the first chapter, “An optimistic outlook on life has many advantages. It means you’re solution oriented and a possibility thinker. You look for the good. When you have a positive attitude, you’re more likely to be committed and achieve your goals and dreams.”

When we follow that message, “if it is to be, it is up to me”, as we work in our church and in our community, then we can know that we can do the work that God needs us to do.

There are many in the Bible who heard God’s call. Abraham, Samuel and Isaiah all heard it and gave the same answer, according to scripture. Isaiah heard God asking, “Whom shall I send and who will go?” They all replied, “Here I am, send me.”

In modern times, many have heard God’s call – some to be teachers, others doctors and nurses, social workers or labourers. It does not matter what the task, if it is done in a spirit of love and justice. It does not matter where the work is to be accomplished. It is our work, it is God’s work. God calls each of us to share in the coming of a world of peace and justice

Discussion What is our work at these stages in our lives?

Closing prayer Let us pray – God of call, help us to listen to your voice. Your work is our work. Our work is your work. Give us the will to follow where you lead, to reach out in love, to struggle for justice. Grant that we, with courage and daring, will stand up and be counted among your servants. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

## *“Advent Conspiracy”*

November 2009

Hymn “Sleepers awake!” VU 711

Scripture John 4: 24-26

‘For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. The woman said, “I know the messiah is coming – the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Then Jesus told her, “I AM, the one speaking to you.”’

Prayer Let us pray together – O God, as we prepare to celebrate Jesus birth, keep us from being caught up in the glitter and excess that has become so common in our consumer society. Change our thinking. Change our actions. Change our lives. Help us to become part of a conspiracy to overcome the greed and meet the need. Amen.

Reflection The season of Advent is almost upon us. Will this year’s preparation and celebration be the same as the past many years?

Everyone wants Christmas to be meaningful, but instead it becomes “Shop, Shop, Shop”, credit cards, traffic jams, to do lists, useless gifts, then off to church “Noel, Noel, Noel”. Sometimes we’re glad just to survive it.

Did you know that North Americans spend more than four hundred billion dollars on Christmas every year – EVERY YEAR?

So we ask – How did Jesus celebrate? Did he present a bottle of wine to everyone he visited? Did he bring gifts of frankincense and myrrh? No! But Jesus gave! He gave of himself, his time, his presence – he even gave himself.

What if you bought fewer gifts? And instead of buying those gifts, you gave something valuable, like your time, to your family, your friends, the lonely? And what if you used your talents to make gifts, like when you were a kid?

And remember that money you didn’t spend on gifts? What if you gave some of it away to the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lonely, those looking for the opportunity to learn?

What if we give a portion of what we would have spent on gifts to the Dondi\* project to help some of the children in Angola receive an education?

Spend less on gifts, give more presence of yourself, love like Jesus. It began with worship when Jesus was born and the shepherds and the wise men came. It begins with worship even in 2009. Worship fully, spend less, give more, love fully.

In this season of Advent you are free to worship, to live, to breathe, to give, to love, to laugh, to celebrate, to conspire. Enter the story. Be part of the Advent conspiracy.

Discussion \* The Dondi project is a fund-raising project of the Men’s ministries network, in conjunction with the M & S Fund and the National Offices of the United Church of Canada and through coordination with a sister church in Angola, to rebuild a mission school which was started by a predecessor of the United Church in Angola early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For details see [dondiproject.wordpress.com](http://dondiproject.wordpress.com).

How can we bring the men of our neighbouring United churches together to join in the fund-raising to help to bring education to more of the children in Angola?

What can we do as individuals and as a group of men?

For next meeting learn more about the Dondi project.

Closing prayer      Let us pray – O God, we would seek to love like Jesus – to give of ourselves and not just buy gifts because we always have. We ask that you be with the families in Angola to whom we are trying to bring hope for their future. Help us to understand and take action in bringing together men of our churches and our communities that we might conspire to change our mindset of excess to a mindset of filling some of the needs of others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn

“Infant Holy, Infant Lowly”

VU 58

Scripture           The birth of Jesus took place like this. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they came to the marriage bed, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. Joseph, chagrined but noble, determined to take care of things quietly so Mary would not be disgraced.

While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God’s angel spoke in the dream: “Joseph, son of David, don’t hesitate to get married. Mary’s pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God’s Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus – ‘God saves’- because he will save his people from their sins.” This would bring the prophet’s embryonic sermon to full term:

    Watch for this – a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son;

    They will name him Immanuel (Hebrew for “God is with us”)

Then Joseph woke up. He did exactly what God’s angel commanded in the dream: He married Mary. But he did not consummate the marriage until she had the baby. He named the baby Jesus.

*Matthew 1: 18-25 (The Message)*

Prayer           Let us pray – God of stable, stars, and surprises, of light and hope and new life, open our eyes and hearts to your presence in our world, forgive our obsession with property and possessions, forgive our compromises and narrowness of vision. Open us to your grace, that we might hear again the song of the angels, and respond with a song in our hearts, and in our lives. Amen

VU 63

Lesson           In preparing this devotion I looked for a hymn which mentions Joseph, I didn’t find one. Joseph is usually in the shadows of any manger scene. The earthly “father” of Jesus is always a minor figure. Joseph is something of a mystery.

What do we know of Joseph? When we first meet him he is betrothed to Mary, which means they had an engagement which could not be broken except by divorce or death but they had not had a formal wedding. I wonder what Mary told Joseph about her encounter with the angel Gabriel. Joseph could have denied fatherhood publicly, putting Mary to shame and divorcing her. But instead they kept the pregnancy to themselves. In doing so, Joseph put his own reputation as a devout man at risk. Then he experienced his strange dream. The fact Joseph took it seriously indicates his sensitivity to the Spirit.

What else do we know about the character of Joseph? Since he was a carpenter, and probably poorly paid, we know he was poor. But we also know he was proud, so he was poor only in goods. In fact, the experience of the Holy Family leading up to Jesus’ birth raises questions about where true wealth lies. Much later when Jesus would talk of persons who were “the salt of the earth” can there be any doubt that Joseph appeared in his mind.

We learn that Joseph was adventurous. It is hard to imagine what it meant to take a family from Israel to Egypt at that time in history. He undertook a perilous journey under dangerous conditions. Here we note the incredible capacity of the human spirit to

expand to meet the needs of the time. Later, Jesus, in summoning his followers to adventure, knew he had lived with a good example of this in his home.

Joseph appears to have been a strict observer of the law of God while at the same time having sympathy. He was a just man, combining rules and compassion – not a common blend. He also appears to have been a generous man. There were several children in the family, of which Jesus was the eldest. As an indication of Joseph's influence on Jesus, there are many compassionate, generous fathers in Jesus' parables.

Finally there is Joseph's sensitivity to the leading of the Spirit. Dreams are one way God has of getting us to deal with our life work, unfinished business, or business that we must begin. There is much talk in Advent of keeping the Christmas spirit alive all year long. That may be too much to hope for. What we can keep fresh is our alertness to the Spirit's bidding. Following the example of Joseph, we can burnish our receptors – attention and expectation.

*Based on material from "a time to gather" by Robert A Wallace*

**Discussion** Discuss fatherhood from the example of Joseph. Talk about examples of fathers in your life, yourself, your sons, your father, your grandfathers.

**Prayer** Let us pray – At this time, O God, help us to understand fatherhood. As AOTS men may we be good examples for others to follow. Make us givers of gifts at Christmas, O Lord. May we not hesitate to share good things that you give, our possessions, our time, our homes, and our friendship. As you have given, so may we. Amen.