

# *All My Children*

*Mary said, "My soul magnifies the LORD,  
and my spirit rejoices in God the Savior . . .  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
(Luke 1:46-48)*

A sermon by Siegfried S. Johnson on the Third Sunday of Advent, **December 16, 2018**  
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Christ of the Hills UMC, 700 Balearic Drive, Hot Springs Village, Arkansas 71909

My 2018 Advent sermon series is borrowing for its titles and themes some of television history's best recognized daytime dramas. These became known as *Soap Operas* due to the origins of this genre on the radio in the 30s and on television in the 50s and 60s when the market audience was primarily housewives, the advertisers being household products such as Proctor and Gamble, a company rightly claiming, "*Proctor and Gamble put the 'soap' in Soap Operas.*"

We began our journey by emerging from *Dark Shadows* at *The Edge of Night*, a call to gather at the light of a single candle just beginning to shine on the Advent wreath. Isaiah's prophecy of launched us upon our Advent journey, "*The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and to those living in a land of deep darkness, a light has dawned,*" and we heard Paul's call to "*awake from sleep, for the night is far gone, the day is near.*"

That first candle offers hope to those in darkness, but where to go from there? The Second Sunday of Advent offers a second candle, which illuminates a path. With the second candle, a way is declared. Isaiah prophesied of one showing the way, and Mark sees John the Baptist as that "*voice crying out in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord.*"

Having started out upon the way, following our journey around the wreath, *As the World Turns* seemed apt as a symbol of our journey to *Another World*. We will arrive at our Advent destination on Christmas Eve, when with the shepherds in the fields surrounding Bethlehem we will see the glory of Lord shine, the "*Guiding Light*" which will lead us to Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus. With the shepherds we will worship the long-awaited Messiah, Emmanuel, *God with us*, celebrating that God has entered the *Days of Our Lives* with *One Life to Live*.

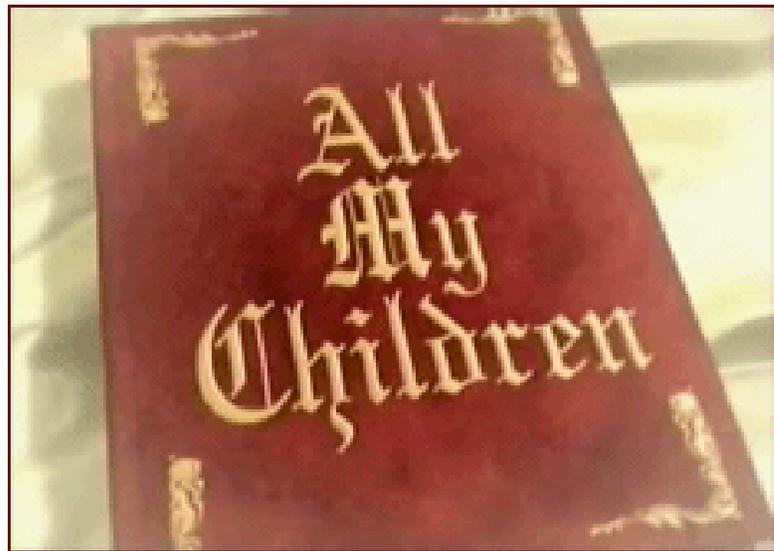
What is it about daytime dramas rendering their titles so exquisitely Advent-friendly, effortlessly matching soap titles with Advent themes? It's because "*Each episode ends with a promise that the storyline is to be continued,*" which is true of Advent, a sequential countdown with each Sunday ending with a promise that another candle will be lit the following week.

Daytime dramas reflect real life in at least this, the absolute daily-ness of life. These dramas, unlike evening prime time shows which may complete 20 or 25 episodes a year, accumulate thousands upon thousands of episodes, adding up "*like sands in the hourglass.*"

Today, focusing as we have on Mary's Magnificat, "*surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,*" I find *All My Children* to offer a beautiful theme matching Mary's words. All of God's children -- *The Bold and the Beautiful*, *The Young and the Restless* -- all of God's children on a *Search for Tomorrow*.

How can this be so easy! I think of the shows on primetime television that Sherry and I follow. The CSIs and the NCISs, *Elementary*, *Magnum PI*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *Seal Team*, *SWAT*. Those titles wouldn't work for a single sermon, much less an entire series!

*All My Children* aired on ABC for 41 years, from 1970 to 2011, accumulating nearly 11,000 episodes and is perhaps best known for Susan Lucci starring as Erica Kane, one of daytime television's most popular characters. *TV Guide* named her *Daytime's Leading Lady* and she reached the pinnacle as the highest paid actor in daytime television. In a departure from societal norms at the time, *All My Children* reached an audience in the mid-70s that was estimated to be 30% male. I wasn't surprised to discover that bit of trivia, as I was one of those men watching AMC for about a year after college.



With the Third Sunday of Advent the circle begins wrap, to enclose, to draw us together as a family. Today we find ourselves to have company on our journey, as if all are included in a book of life, a history of the church that is our family history.

Mary's Magnificat, span the ages in an embrace of "*All My Children.*" "*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior . . . Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed.*" Her words of praise are offered in the context of family. "*He has remembered his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.*" The magnificat points to the faith's family tree.

After the angel announced to Mary that she was to bear the Messiah, she set out from Nazareth to her cousin Elizabeth's home in a Judean town in the hill country. In our reading from Luke's gospel we learn of Mary's arrival at the home of Elizabeth. "*When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting the child in my womb leaped for joy.'*"

Ein Kerem (Hebrew = *Spring of the Vineyard*) is a quaint town nestled in the hills five miles from ancient Jerusalem. It is the traditional home of Mary's cousin Elizabeth, where John the Baptist was born. The Church of the Visitation there commemorates the Magnificat. This statue of Mary and Elizabeth coming together, each bearing their child, is the garden of the church. What you see on the wall are some of the fifty panels translating the Magnificat into different languages. I love to gather my groups at the English version and have one of our pilgrims read the Magnificat. It's not unusual to have other groups nearby reading, perhaps, Korean or Russian or another language. Yes, surely all generations, and all languages – shall call her blessed! Mary's Magnificat gathers God's children into a redemptive circle, into a family. It is the Mother of God's moment to speak to all her children.



On Thursday it occurred to me to post on Facebook if any had Family Bibles they might wish to share on my post. I was amazed by the quick responses of about fifty of my friends, several from our church and many from past congregations, telling stories and/or posting pictures of their Bibles.

A member of my former church in Little Rock was first to respond, having the Bible of her great, great-grandparents including an inserted genealogy stretching back to the American Revolution and records for the family pew at Bruton Parish in Williamsburg. Those were the days of pew tax to secure your place in the sanctuary.

The wife of one of my former associate pastors in Mountain Home writes that she has a family Bible with five generations recorded. Many responded with mention of 3 to 6 generations. Our own Earl and Geri Wilde have Earl's great-grandfather's Welsh Bible dated to 1845. Betty and Kirk McKee have the Kirk Family Bible dating to 1880.

One former member from Warren writes that her grandmother's Bible is open on the buffet and that from 1872 – 1970s it kept the generations which number now number 6, but she wants to get to work on recording the 7<sup>th</sup> generation.

A colleague of mine in Conway writes that he had his grandmother's Family Bible and it is precious to him because he knows she read from it every day and her fingers had pressed every page of that Bible. He also cherishes his dad's little metal covered New Testament he had during World War 2, with some passages marked that were important to him.

Another from Mountain Home writes of an enormous 30 pound bible from 1850 that is being

restored in Winchester, Virginia at a book bindery. There are six generations recorded and she says that the early handwriting is splendid and that she can't wait to see it when they pick it up next week on their Christmas trip to see family for the holidays.

Finally, our own Murph and Fred Tetley brought several precious Bibles to my office. One is their grandmother's German text which is enormous and fragile. Another Bible was a special gift to their grandfather, Methodist Circuit Rider pastor W. A. Tetley, given to him by his wife 85 years ago on Christmas Day, 1933. It is beautifully inscribed by her with a message of love and thanksgiving for sharing his life and ministry.

A couple of years ago I led a funeral service for Aunt Delores, Sherry's aunt, but I have known them as Uncle Junior and Aunt Dolores for forty-six years, since Sherry and I began dating during my Senior Year in High School, 1972. The funeral was at First United Methodist Church in Marianna, their home throughout most of their 66 years of marriage prior to her passing. I want to tell you about a most unusual ending of my meditation at that funeral. Just before I was ready to leave my office in LR for the drive to east Arkansas, Priscilla, Aunt Dolores' daughter and so, Sherry's first cousin, called my cell and asked if they could do something special, and if I would help keep it a surprise.

For many years, this family would gather at Priscilla's home in Cabot for Sunday lunch after church. (Sherry and I just spent Thanksgiving Day there only a few weeks ago, with some fifty family members). Priscilla is a dance instructor, and nothing would thrill Aunt Dolores more on those Sunday-after-church gatherings than when her 17 great-grandchildren, most gathered there each week, would perform skits and dancing on Sunday afternoon, filling the home with joy. It was an "*All My Children*" moment at Priscilla's home each Sunday.

What Priscilla wanted to do at the end of the meditation, unknown to Uncle, was to have these great-grandchildren come in a parade of touching tributes of love for their great grandmother as one strummed Amazing Grace on a guitar for background music. With brief poetry and personal words they expressed eulogies of love in the language of children.

Then, parade finished, these kids walked encircled their great-grandfather who was seated, not in a pew but in a special chair they had brought into the front, encircling him, hugging him, in a human wreath of love. "*All My Children*," indeed.

Let's remember this holiday season that not all have such families. Not all are encircled by love and encouragement and joy. Christmas can be hard of those who are alone, those who have recently suffered loss or life-altering circumstances. Let us be conscious of every opportunity to be a candle of light and love to someone in need this Christmas season.

Amen, and Merry Christmas!