

Psalm 51:15, “OPEN YOUR MOUTH.” (Advent III) ‘20

With all our heart we praise You, O gracious God, for all Your goodness to us. Amen.

In Jesus' Name, dear friends:

Eight-year-old Nina brought home her report card from school. Her marks were very good mostly A's and a couple of B's. However, her teacher had written across the bottom: “Nina is a smart, little girl, but she has one fault. She talks too much in school. I have an idea. I am going to try which I think may break her of the habit.” Nina's dad signed her report card -- writing a note on the back. “Please let me know if your idea works on Nina, because I'd like to try it on her mother.”

Despite Nina and her mother's loquaciousness, talking is still one of the best ways to communicate. It is faster than a letter and more reliable than an email. Because you can immediately correct any misunderstanding. And you don't have to wait a couple of days for a response.

“Happy Holidays!” someone says. “Merry Christmas!” you say in return, maybe to someone with whom you would not exchange such pleasantries any other time of the year. Christmas is a time like no other to communicate whether it be in person or by phone or on “Facebook.” But to do so -- you must “OPEN YOUR MOUTH.”

1.) To share Memories. Christmas is a time for sharing -- not just *having* memories (as important as that is) but *sharing* them. Some of your Christmas traditions probably go back so far that it's almost impossible to determine when they began. Still, it might be worth a try. Most decorations have a story to tell as well, stories about great grandmother's hand stitched Christmas tree skirt, grandmother's aluminum Christmas tree (with its rotating color wheel), grandfather's hand-carved nativity set, mother's miniature village, father's train, sister's “Hallmark” ornament collection, brother's “Lego” Santa's workshop and of course, the ornaments made by the kids (when they were younger).

Some Christmas memories involve loved ones who are no longer with us to join in the celebration. They too deserve to be remembered and those precious memories shared.

At the very first Christmas, the shepherds shared what they had experienced, what God's great love brought to pass in their lives --

“a Savior...born.” (Luke 2:11) Do you suppose they shared those memories a year later? Five? Ten? This year make a concerted effort to share your memories. “OPEN YOUR MOUTH”

2.) To taste and see. Perhaps one of the reasons for the popularity of Christmas is that it stimulates our senses: lights -- to dazzle our eyes; pine scent -- to tickle our noses; a roaring fire -- to warm our bones; carols -- to charm our ears and then, of course, let's not forget our MOUTH.

“Wait till you taste this!” someone says excitedly. Are there some things you taste only at Christmas time? Grandma's chestnut dressing, candied yams, a cranberry “Jell-O” salad, fruitcake, plum pudding, mincemeat tarts, date bread, peanut brittle, Christmas cookies and eggnog that are served only at this time of year? You may not have thought that the invitation to “OPEN YOUR MOUTH” would include eating and drinking, but it most certainly does. So “OPEN YOUR MOUTH” to enjoy these seasonal delights.

The place where Jesus was born as named “Bethlehem” which means “House of Bread.” (Luke 2:4) Apparently, things to smell and taste and savor are part of the celebration from the very beginning.

“Taste and see that the Lord is good,” the Bible invites us. (Psalm 34:8) It also reminds us that the reason Jesus was born among us was “so that by God's grace He might taste death for everyone,” drinking the cup of suffering to the very bottom. (Hebrews 2:9) Jesus tasted “death” so that you and I might taste only perfect joy, perfect love and eternal pleasure. No wonder heaven is so often pictured as a banquet.

3.) To sing out. “Glory to God in the highest,” the angels sang aloud that first Christmas Eve. (Luke 2:14) Did the shepherds join them? It's one thing to *listen* to the songs of the season (and a good thing, too) quite another to become a *participant* in letting “the good news of great joy” be heard. (Luke 2:10) Ever since that song-filled night, the people of God have echoed the angels' song with songs of our own. The Christmas story in the Bible is full of songs. Mary opened her MOUTH and sang, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.” (Luke 1:46) And when old Zechariah's voice returned, he too broke forth in praise: “Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has visited us and prepared redemption for His people.” (Luke 1:68) In the temple, Simeon took the Christ Child “into his arms and praised God.” (Luke 2:28) At every turn, the

open, loving heart of God resulted in OPEN MOUTHS on the part of God's people. And now it's our turn. Sing out! Put your whole heart in it and let the music flow...at home...in the car...at family gatherings...caroling in the neighborhood...at church. OPEN YOUR MOUTH to “declare (God's) praise” for sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to free us from sin and death. (Ps. 51:15)

4.) To say, “Thank you!” How good it is to receive things! Many or few, those who took the time to choose and prepare, to wrap and deliver, did something that gladdens our hearts and brightens our lives. Surely, they deserved to be thanked for their kindness. Write or text a “Thank you” or make that phone call and let those special people know how much you love and appreciate them.

And surely God deserves to be thanked as well.

The late Dr. John Nathaniel Rosen was a psychiatrist in New York City, specializing in patients with catatonic schizophrenia. Normally doctors remain separate and aloof from their patients. But Dr. Rosen moved into the wards with them. He placed his bed among their beds. He lived the life they must live. Day by day, he shared it with his patients. If they didn't talk, he wouldn't talk either. It was as if he understood what was happening. He also did something else. He would put his arms around them and hugged them. He held those unattractive, unlovable, sometimes incontinent persons and loved them back into life. Often, the first words they spoke were simply, “Thank you.”

This is what the Christ did for us at Christmas. He moved into the ward with us. He placed His bed among our beds. Those who were there, those who saw Him and were in turn touched, healed, forgiven and restored to life by Him. The first word they had to say was “Thank you.”

Sometimes our children need to be reminded to say, “Thank you” at Christmas. Sometimes all of God's children need that reminder too. Christmas is our time to say, “Thank you.”

OPEN YOUR MOUTH to share memories, to offer and enjoy Christmas treats, to sing God's “praise” and to say, “Thank you” to Him for His gifts of forgiveness, salvation, family and friends. These are four ways to make our words -- count. And *they* do! Amen.