

Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens

On this holy night, mentally drop all of the burdens you are carrying at the side of the newborn's cradle. Imagine

streams of light coming from heaven, surrounding you with grace.

Day 26 | Thursday, Dec. 24 The light of grace

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" — Luke 2:1–14

I will never forget the Christmas Eve when I saw with my own eyes a multitude of the heavenly host. No, I wasn't hitting the eggnog early. These angels weren't like the ones described in Luke, illuminated with the Lord's glory shining upon them. These angels were disguised as weathered farmers with bad knees and calloused hands. The evening worship service had just ended, and I made my way to the front door to wish the faithful filing out into the frigid night air

a "Merry Christmas." When I got to the door, I let out a groan. The outdoor light was not working, making the already hazardous snow-slicked, creaky wooden stairs of the old rural church even more menacing. I looked back toward the narthex. Those getting on their coats were mostly seniors with mobility issues. How were they ever going to get safely down those darkened stairs? That's when my unassuming angels appeared by my side. They knew the worried look of their pastor all too well. They quickly assessed the situation and came up with a solution. They would escort each person down the stairs and to their cars. Those with walkers or canes were told to wait. Their cars would be retrieved for them and waiting right at the door. It was a church valet service that I had never thought of before, and it would be a ministry that would continue for the elderly congregation that winter. As I watched the band of angels working, I couldn't help but think this illustration of Christmas was better than the one I had used in my sermon. "Now THIS IS Christmas," I thought silently.

Howard Thurman wrote, "The true meaning of Christmas is expressed in the sharing of one's graces in the world in which it is so easy to become calloused, insensitive and hard. Once this spirit becomes part of our lives, every day is Christmas, and every night is freighted with anticipations of the dawning of fresh, and perhaps holy, adventure."

That night, in a struggling rural church I witnessed that grace, for there was light shining more brightly than any electric light could shine. It was the light of grace coming from angels disguised as farmers with bad knees and calloused hands — a holy adventure was about to begin.

Pray

God of Christmas grace, your love is breaking through the dark night of my soul with a divine light that not only illuminates hope in my life, but



*also chases away my fears and gives me courage
once again. I couldn't have asked for a better gift
ever in my life than the gift of Jesus, your Son.
May my Christ light that has been rekindled shine
brightly now and forever. In Jesus' name I pray.
Amen.*

Go deeper

Light a candle. That is all. A simple act that can transform your life and your world. Light a candle of joy, hope, courage, peace, grace and love. A blessed Christmas season begins!

From the author

My friends, our journey is not over. We will continue celebrating Christ's birth through the season of Christmas. Our "12 Days of Christ

mas" devotional begins tomorrow, Dec. 25, as we "light" Howard Thurman's candle of love.

— *Blessings*, Donna Frischknecht Jackson