

Christmas 2011

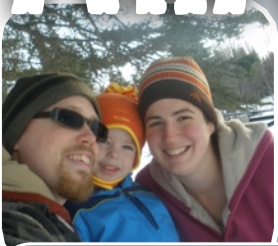
ALASKA



Standing in the Gap Ministries

A Ministry of the Black family, missionary appointees to the remote native villages of Alaska.

"And I sought for a man..."



Derek, Laura, and Elias Black

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- Ezekiel 22:30

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Christmas Greetings

"God is not dead, nor does He sleep!" Those words come from the familiar Christmas carol, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." We pray this Christmas season that you truly come face to face with our living, active God! All praise be to our King for actively drawing us into His worldwide work of redemption!

Life continues to be swell (wow, I don't know if I've ever used that word). In all seriousness, we continue to enjoy the work God gives us in our new home of Alaska. While Laura may consider this more of home (since she was born here), I too am getting to the point of considering this my home. We do definitely miss our families, but it is such a joy to experience and know God's leading in life! Our time in Soldotna continues fusing our hearts with our dear friends and brothers and sisters in Christ at Soldotna Bible Chapel. They all continue to be a huge blessing to us! Although it will be hard to leave our full-time presence here, we are looking forward to our spring transition date to the village hub of Bethel!

Recent Village Ministry Trip

Many of you received our email regarding last month's village ministry trip, and we want to thank you for your prayers! My time in two of these western Alaska villages stoked the flames of my heart for village ministry.

One particular area I was reminded of during the weekend was flexibility. Life itself and most certainly ministry requires flexibility. Now, combine these two things with remote

Alaska, and you have an interesting mix. Here's a quick example... Part of the ministry team on this trip focused on replacing a parsonage/church boiler. Much planning went into this task, but through it all, somehow the team came up short on two critical parts. So, imagine the scenario: a boiler replacement with outside subzero temperatures and 40 mph wind gusts with all the components to do the job, except two. To make a long story short, the parts were able to be ordered on the road system, placed on a cargo plane to a neighboring village, and then delivered via a snow-machine. By the way, if you can believe it, this process took place twice, because the first attempt brought the team the wrong part! Thus, after two days of work, rounding up space heaters to keep the pipes from freezing, and logistical delivery feats, the team successfully installed the new boiler. God truly reminded me of the necessity of flexibility in remote village living and ministry!

Our Support Level

Please continue praying for our support level, as we draw ever closer to our village transition date later this spring! Since our last newsletter correspondence, several individuals have partnered with us while a couple churches have increased their financial support. These support increases raise our support level approximately an additional \$500 per month. Also in the past few weeks, we've been able to present our ministry at a couple more Alaska churches. Additionally, as the new year begins, we are scheduled to

present our ministry in a few more local area churches. At this point we estimate needing an additional \$500 to \$1000 per month in our support. We appreciate your prayers that our support climbs to a sustainable level by April!

Please pray also for Laura's potential job in Bethel for later this spring. Her part-time nursing involvement not only affords us the opportunity to build relationships in the community, but it also comprises a small but necessary chunk of our overall budget. While her position seemed like a wide-open door initially, the hospital in Bethel is now not sure about their part-time needs.

We are confident, that if God wants us in Bethel this spring, He will prepare the way. He has already orchestrated circumstances by securing us an apartment as well as ministry partnerships in Bethel, so we are progressing forward in faith.

We appreciate your prayers!

Our New Baby Boy (Coming Soon)

Laura and baby are doing well, and we are getting excited about the new little one's arrival around January 25! Please continue to pray that all progresses well as we draw closer to Laura's due date.

Lastly...

We want to wish you all a very Merry, Jesus-filled, and God-glorifying Christmas!

In His Grace this Christmas,
- Derek, Laura, & Elias

Home Church: Soldotna Bible Chapel
www.soldotnabiblechapel.org

Agency: Central Missionary Clearinghouse
<http://cmc.missions.net>

www.thegapstander.com
standinginthegap@mac.com



This Christmas, God is Not Dead!

I recently read through a devotional in my YouVersion iPhone app (a little plug for a sweet app) on the Christmas carol, “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.” On Christmas day 1864, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a poem entitled “Christmas Bells,” that was later turned into our current carol by John Baptiste Calkin. The story behind the lyrics riveted my attention.

As the backstory unfolds, Longfellow and his family lived amidst early America’s civil war period. During one particularly dry and depressing season, Longfellow’s wife longed to feel the invigorating sea breeze once again (as noted in her diary). The very next day as she was cutting her daughter’s hair, she decided to preserve some of the hair with sealing wax. As a few drops of the burning wax dripped unnoticed on Mrs. Longfellow’s lap, the longed-for sea breeze came through the window, instantly igniting and quickly engulfing her flames. She ran into the next room to her husband (away from the children), where Mr. Longfellow wrapped around his wife with anything he could to dissipate the flames. Tragically, Mrs. Longfellow died the next morning and Mr. Longfellow was so severely burned, he couldn’t even attend her funeral.

The same day of the fire tragedy, the first shots fired that began the civil war. As the civil war ensued, the Longfellows’ oldest son enlisted in the war effort, apparently without the full support of his father. Around two years after Henry lost his wife, he received

word that his eldest son was severely wounded in the war.

The next year, after so much tragedy around Christmas, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned the words to what we now know of as “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.” Whether it was the hope he longed for through the loss of his wife, the continued life of his eldest son, or the prospective hope for the split nation, Longfellow seemed to redirect his attention to the hope Christmas brings.

Now, whether Longfellow was a follower of Jesus, we can’t say. But, his writings, either knowingly or unknowingly, strike a chord that beautifully resonates with Scripture and the Christmas message.

Through each verse of the song, the phrase “peace on earth, good will to men” recurs, building to what we know of as the fourth verse about God being not dead. Imagine with me for a moment all of the national and personal tragedy that Longfellow associated with Christmas and life in general. Now place your own tragedies (or those you know) in place of Longfellow’s life circumstances. Keeping those scenarios in mind, recall verse four of the song, “Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: ‘God is not dead, nor doth He sleep; The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, With peace on earth, good will to men.’”

One could insert the Jewish nation into this scenario as well. Ponder how they struggled living in light of their promised coming Messiah. For several hundred years God was silent. Nothing. No word about His

promises being fulfilled, only more oppression by countless pagan nations.

Then, through the simple story of Christmas, Jesus, God’s Salvation (Jesus’ Hebrew name literally means Salvation), broke the silence through His humble birth.

Many of us can also identify with times of seeming hopelessness, where it seems as though God is not present.

This Christmas may we reflect on the truths declared and promised in Isaiah 9:1-7! Amidst times of confusion and seeming silence from God, our God is at work. He declared through Isaiah His plan to bring peace and righteousness through a child, a son... that One being Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Several hundred years later, the fruition of Isaiah’s declaration came in the form of baby Jesus!

I pray God’s grace is upon your life! If you don’t know the Jesus of Christmas as your Savior, will you embrace Him by faith? Believers, may we take comfort this season, that our God is not dead! He has a plan, and is actively working in our lives for His glory! Glory to God in the highest!

- Safe progression and delivery of our new baby boy in January
- Our support level
- Laura’s nursing job position in Bethel later this spring
- God’s blessing as we continue ministry at our church

Prayer Corner

YOUR PART IN...

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

MISSION: REMOTE ALASKA THE GOAL: CHURCH PLANTING THE MISSIONARIES: DEREK & LAURA BLACK

SERVING UNDER: Soldotna Bible Chapel of Soldotna, AK

FINANCES HANDLED BY: Central Missionary Clearinghouse

In response to my prayerful consideration I commit to:

Please write & mail checks to:
 Central Missionary Clearinghouse
 PO Box 219228 Houston, TX 77218

One time gift of \$ _____

Monthly support of \$ _____

(e.g. “gift or support for Derek and Laura Black” on the memo line)

(Questions? - Soldotna Bible Chapel - 907-262-4865 or office@soldotnabiblechapel.org)

We want to thank you for your consideration! What an incredibly profound truth it is to be collectively on mission for the advancement of the church! (Matthew 16:13-19, Philippians 4:10-20)