

# **MERRY CHRISTMAS**

## **Advent to Epiphany**

**A Devotional Inspired by Nature: Volume 3**

**Shirley D. Andrews**



MALE PINE GROSBEAK – enjoying the attention

Alaska

*Pinicola enucleator*

Scarce

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Besides Alaska, this pine grosbeak, although scarce, can be found almost anywhere in the world. They are a member of the Finch family along with others like the crossbill, redpoll and brambling. They have erratic and irruptive wanderings, especially in winter. Mr. Piney, looking so proud, dressed in his Christmas coat, is content in this tree, exactly where God directed him today. After all, he has been chosen to be published on the cover of this new Christmas devotional! His bill is short and stubby to crack seeds, but his favorite meal is berries from the mountain ash. When he eats those, it's like us having a banana split or apple pie with ice cream for dessert! Pine grosbeaks can be found breeding in evergreen forests from eastern Asia to Scandinavia. In one country they are called "mopes," due to their tameness and slow actions. According to the Oxford dictionary, a "mope" is listless and low-spirited. Certainly not a compliment to a follower of Jesus Christ, but maybe it does describe the peaceful and calm life that the grosbeaks live among their small family and Finch friends in the conifers. One more wonderful fact about this beautiful scarlet male pine grosbeak: He is a compassionate, loving, and comforting mate when his favorite female is incubating the next generation of pine grosbeak chicks. Mr. Piney feeds mom all her meals and feeds and protects her and the new family when the "peeps" break through their shells. Bravo, Mr. Piney, for your faithful love for your beautiful family. You glorify God's greatness every day.

**"Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."**

**2 Corinthians 1: 3-4**

When was the last time you needed comforting because you just got a very sad e-mail, text or phone call? Or maybe you were sick and didn't feel like fixing a meal for the family? Or perhaps you ran out of gas while driving your car and had left your cell phone at home on the charger? Or maybe a broken bone from an unplanned fall? Sometimes trouble just follows us around with no letup! Did you stop and pray to the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort? Try it the very next time trouble comes knocking at your door. God will take care of you and give you opportunities to comfort others in their painful, sad and uncomfortable times.

**Prayer: Lord God, thank you for being my compassionate Father and my God of all comfort. I will turn to you in prayer when trouble comes my way. I love you and praise you, Lord. I want to be known as a compassionate and comforting follower of Jesus Christ, your only Son and my Savior, and like you, my Heavenly Father. Thank you for the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Who will you and I comfort together today? Who needs to hear your words of compassion, caring and comfort from the Bible? What scriptures will I use, Lord? Speak Lord, your servant is listening, in Jesus' name, Amen.**



SNAIL KITE – catching apple snails

Southern Florida

*Rostrhamus sociabilis*

Scarce and endangered

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In the United States, this soaring kite is found only in Southern Florida. There is a possible global breeding population of two million, largely in South America and the Caribbean, with only 1 percent living in the United States, and 2 percent in Mexico.

The Florida everglades population of snail kites is on the 2014 state birds watch list of birds that are endangered without conservation action. The oldest recorded snail kite was almost 15 years old and lived in Florida. The snail kite flies floppy on cupped wings, with head down searching for apple snails. However, he has captured his snail already and is dreaming of the treat he is about to devour. This is a rare photo, and we are grateful for the patience of the photographer who most likely had on his waders in the marsh.

**“Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.”**

When Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus into the temple, this happened next:

**“Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying: ‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for the glory of your people Israel.’”**

**Luke 2: 25-26, 28-32**

The snail kite was waiting for his favorite meal of apple snails. Simeon was waiting for Jesus, his Messiah, to be born in answer to his many years of prayer in the temple. How many years did this photographer wait to capture this rare photo? How long have you been waiting for some very important event to change your story or God’s story of your life? Maybe you need a miraculous healing or you are waiting for your prodigal son or daughter to return? “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” **Romans 10: 17.** These verses about Simeon waiting in prayer and believing God’s word through the Holy Spirit should bring us great hope and peace. God hears our persistent praying, our patience in daily looking for His answers, our joy when others have answered prayer and share it with us.

**Prayer: Lord God, all good gifts come down from heaven. Thank you for teaching me how to pray and wait for your answers. Forgive me when I am impatient and take control. Lord, I want to be as patient as Simeon. Praise is rising in my heart as your love invades my whole being. When in your presence every day, I will ask for more of your love, grace and the best plan for each day. I am overwhelmed that Baby Jesus was born to die a brutal death for my sin. There is no greater love, in Christ and Him crucified, Amen.**



FEMALE BELTED KINGFISHER – with catch of the day  
Duanesburg, New York

Ceryle alcyon  
Fairly common

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“Katie” Kingfisher is one confident beauty. She has an air of self-confidence as she dives headfirst into the pond looking for her fish dinner. She is much more colorful than her male partner. This is so irregular in the bird world where most males are more colorful than the female. It is hard to believe that God created nearly 100 species of kingfishers. The sexes sometimes look alike, but in most of those species the male is more colorful. Pleistocene fossils of belted kingfishers (up to 600,000 years old) have been unearthed in Florida, Virginia, Tennessee and Texas. The kingfishers are loners, with no bonding between family members. They all separate and never see each other again. The female migrates south for the winter. When the females return, the males are more than ready for that flash of the bright, rusty belt. The rusty belt could be a signal that he should welcome the visitor, rather than chasing her off. The jury is out on why God orchestrated the lives of the female and male kingfishers to be this unusual. One thing is for sure, God does not make mistakes. No further investigation is necessary!

**“One thing I ask of the Lord, this one do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.”**

**Psalm 27: 4**

The kingfishers are unusual birds in God’s plan to fill the earth with variety. They have their own peculiarities unlike so many other birds. In a way, God is reminding us that there are so many different people groups, speaking so many different languages, with different values, different customs and different belief systems. This scripture really says it all! As Christians, Psalm 27: 4 sums up what is important in a believer’s life. No matter how different we are from the rest of the world, this is what is important each and every day of our lives as we live for Christ and Him crucified.

**Prayer: Lord God, I love you more today than yesterday. As I eat, drink, sleep, work, read your word, pray and love myself and others, may I do so in your continual presence. I love to look into your beautiful face. Your voice is so delightful to my ears. Your love is always engulfing me when I take time to focus on You, God, and you alone. To be able to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life is the most precious gift a child could ever want or need. Thank you again for calling me home to your dwelling place, in Jesus’ name, Amen.**





EASTERN BLUEBIRD – on icy perch

Duanesburg, New York

*Sialia sialis*

Uncommon

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The Northeast winter weather in America is usually quite cold with slippery roads, chilling winds and snowbanks that are hard to see around. Downhill skiers, ice skaters and snowshoe travelers love this time of year. The rest of us, not so much! Sports equipment for these endeavors make for popular Christmas gifts. The rest of us may prefer a plane ticket to Florida or tickets to a Mets game in the spring! Take another look at “Fluffy Floyd” on his icy perch in this winter photo. He looks content, but it looks like he left his boots in the nest. What was he thinking? Before standing on this icy perch, one needs a double layer of heavy socks and high top boots! Not so for “Fluffy Floyd!” He must be so excited about this season of the year that he is not worried about freezing his feet or slipping off the perch. You have to admit that he is adorable! Does this photo speak to you about God’s love for His creation, for you and this tiny bluebird? Do you see the beauty in this bluebird and the beauty He has placed on the inside of you? This bluebird is just where God instinctively wanted him today, getting his picture taken on an icy perch. Are you where God wants you? Are you growing in faith and love?

**“By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; He could not be found because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”**

**Hebrews 11: 5-6**

God loves His bluebirds. How much more does He love you? He loves your family and all of His creation from the smallest to the largest. He loves all His children equally and He desires that all come to faith, that none be lost. **John 18: 9.** As you take another look at this tiny bird and his amazing beauty, does faith arise in you? Only God could make such a beautiful creature! God is glorified in the life of this precious bluebird, and through faith God is glorified in your life as well. “Draw close to God and he will draw close to you.” **James 4: 8.**

**Prayer: Lord God, Thank you for the majesty, beauty, sweetness and gentleness of your creation. Forgive me when I take you and all you have created for granted without acknowledging that there is only one True God, Creator of all life on earth and in heaven. Lord, help me grow in faith. I want to be less busy and more in tune with your Spirit. Hearing you speak to me in the stillness and quiet is my heart’s desire. I do need a fresh infilling of your Spirit regularly to be able to hear your voice. My faith and love for you are recharging. Thank you for every good and perfect gift that comes down from the Father of heavenly light. “Fluffy Floyd” is just one of the precious gifts that I will receive today, in Jesus’ name, Amen**