



LANCASTER BIBLE COLLEGE

CAPITAL SEMINARY & GRADUATE SCHOOL



31
DAY
ADVENT
Devotional



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— December 2019 —

Every Christmas, my family displays our crèche with its exquisite representations of the Virgin Mary, the infant king in His manger bed, Joseph attending nearby, the shepherds and their sheep, and, at a distance, the wise men who arrive later. Together, we read the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2, and the account of our Savior's birth.

“A decree went out from Caesar Augustus. Joseph and Mary went up Galilee to Bethlehem to be registered, and while they were there, “...she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:7)

This matter-of-fact account stated in the simplest of terms is truly the greatest story ever told. The angels appeared and proclaimed, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:11) No ordinary baby, this child was Immanuel, God with us. (Matthew 1:23) Jesus Christ, fully God, who became man for our salvation.

May this collection of Advent devotionals from the faculty of Lancaster Bible College | Capital Seminary & Graduate School enrich your Christmas celebration, affirming the good news of the gospel, the foundational truths of the Word of God, and the wonder of the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

- Peter W. Teague, EdD
President

DECEMBER 1

It is Always Advent

By Anjanette Bender, JD
Assistant Professor, Business Administration Department



Psalm 27:14

“They’ll be here soon,” my mother would reassure me. I remember as a child waiting for my parents’ closest friends to arrive for their annual Christmas visit. These evenings with them were joy filled, and I admit it helped that they always came bearing great gifts. The candles were lit, the table was set, the aroma of a much anticipated meal filled our home. My sister and I would peer out the windows, looking for car lights, waiting for long shadows to appear on the sidewalk. We remembered the laughter and fun of the past and were eager for the time we would spend together, just as soon as that doorbell would ring. Oh the waiting, the restlessness, the anticipation.

I think it is fair to say that most of us prefer to skip the waiting. Whether it’s for dinner or houseguests or test results or a child’s heart to change or resolution to that nagging issue, we would rather not sit in the waiting space. Yet, here we are, a people called to wait. Interestingly, the Psalmist does not instruct us to wait for good news or solutions or joy. Rather, he charges us to wait upon the LORD – not an event - but on the LORD Himself. With strength and courage in our hearts, we are to wait for an encounter with the eye-opening, ever-redeeming, constantly loving God, right there in our restlessness.

We are a people called to a posture of waiting, not just during Advent, this season of expectancy and preparation, but always. We are to live in the posture of courageously waiting for Christ to be born in the exact moment that we are in, waiting for His presence, His voice, His love and His direction to be revealed, for Him be born anew in our hearts, to change us.

We always look for the car lights, eagerly await the doorbell to ring, while remembering His face, His voice, His faithfulness and eagerly seeking Him right where we are, even when - and especially when - it takes strength and courage. He will always meet us when we seek Him, while we wait, because it is always Advent.

PRAYER: Father, forgive us for our restlessness and impatience in the times of waiting. We confess these to you while hoping that you will shorten the waiting time. Thus, our repentance is short lived. Instead, cause us to truly wait on you, on your strength, your lovingkindness, and your perfect plan. Amen.

DECEMBER 2

Courage to Intervene

By Bob Dodson, EdD

Professor, Education Department



Joshua 1:9

In the centuries before Jesus was born, pagans would celebrate the winter solstice as a time to honor the coming of the light. During Advent, we celebrate the coming of Jesus, the coming of the Light of the world (John 8:12). As the Light, Jesus came to intervene in the darkness to change the course of humanity as they knew it. No doubt He did this in love, but Jesus called people to courageously follow Him...no matter how light or dark the path appeared.

This last part seems to scare people. For many of us, it's hard to talk with people in our sphere of influence about the Gospel. We become timid, don't initiate or follow through despite knowing Jesus is with us and calls us to be courageous. I'm assuming I'm not the only one to admit that it is hard to be the Light of Jesus to our neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family. Proclaiming Jesus takes us out of our comfort zone, but perhaps it shouldn't. John tells us that Jesus is the only one who can move us from dark to light (John 1:9-13). With this in mind, can we not simply be His instrument? If we truly allow Jesus to live through us and allow His strength to take over, to let us be His instrument, then perhaps, just perhaps, this can take away the fear factor. This is a constant decision each of us has to grapple with every day.

I am reminded of a quote from Winston Churchill: "Fear is a reaction. Courage is a decision." To fear is to succumb; to be courageous is to take a stand. If Jesus came to walk this Earth and intervene through the darkness, then perhaps we can take a nod from Churchill and choose courage rather than fear; courage to minister to others, serve them, love them...to be Jesus to them. And by God's grace, He will allow us to be an instrument of change in the course of their lives. He has called for us to courageously intervene through the darkness.

It's wonderful to celebrate Jesus' coming during the season of Advent. However, I dare us to take celebration to the next level, to follow Jesus' leading in courageously intervening by bringing light to the darkness. Who in your sphere of influence needs to know the Light of the World?

Go and intervene in Jesus' name.

PRAYER: Lord, please forgive my fear and hesitations. Fill me with gratitude for my salvation that fuels the boldness to share so others will know the Savior who came at Christmas. In His precious name, Amen.

DECEMBER 3

The Lord Will Take Care of Us, as He Always Has

By Freeman M. Chakara, PsyD, ABPPcn
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Micah 5:1–7

One would think that the calamity surrounding Israel in the time of Christ demanded a cosmic display of God's strength and might against His enemies, and yet only a few saw that actually occur. We, as Christians, sometimes expect that God owes some manifestation of power against those who cause us stress and grief. Surprisingly, His response to Israel was that out of a humble little town, shrouded in ignominy and oblivion, will rise the Messiah – the ultimate ruler of Israel. The promise in Micah was issued hundreds of years before ultimate fulfillment, and when Christ was finally born, people did not always appreciate Him as such. To the few who initially recognized Him, He reminded them that such a revelation was not brought about by flesh and blood. The little town of Bethlehem gave us a King whose mission was to liberate us from the captivity of sin.

During this Advent period, it would be quite reassuring to ponder all the seemingly insignificant ways by which the Lord has worked in our lives to bring about His plan. Better yet, we could contemplate the small coincidences He may be using in our lives to carry out His will for our families and those we encounter. Some of us are surrounded by grieving and troubled coworkers and friends for whom Christmas is a reminder of their distress. Could it be that something as simple as a kind prayer or words of encouragement could be just what the Lord uses to bring about His plans in that colleague's life?

May our hearts be sensitive to simple opportunities and events that come about for us in this potentially stressful season. From all angles, Bethlehem could not have been associated with the pomp and circumstance befitting a ruler, yet that is precisely where the Lord elected to raise the Savior of his people. The same is true for us. After all, it is simply the humble and nongrandiose things in our lives that God frequently uses to work out His plans.

PRAYER: Gracious Father, our humble lives are simple ones, just as those who lived in Bethlehem so long ago. Forgive us when we desire to see the grandiose rather than the plain. Show us how we can be a simple friend or kind neighbor to those in need during this season. Help me to be your spokesperson expressing your love and salvation. Amen.

DECEMBER 4

Past, Present and Future

By Paul Thorlakson, DMA

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Luke 7:28–35

Advent is a time to reflect backward as well as forward. We often focus on the prophecies, people and events that set the stage for the main event; when Christ broke through the heavens to bring redemption to this weary world. In Luke 7:28-35, Jesus is referring to the prophet, John the Baptist, and his divinely appointed role in preparing the way for His earthly ministry.

Throughout my life, I have become keenly aware of the way God has placed people in my path who have helped to prepare me. About a decade ago, a persistent dark cloud seemed to intrude into every area of my world. It was debilitating. One Saturday morning, the oppressiveness of that cloud was especially intense and troubling. At about 10 a.m. in a remarkably miraculously instantaneous way, that cloud seemed to pass, and the sun began to peek through. Two days later, I received an email from a friend, who I had not been in contact with for a long time. He wrote that God had laid it on his heart to pray for me on that same Saturday morning. I was absolutely stunned and grateful for my friend's spiritual sensitivity.

As a person who has been called to ministry and academic leadership, I am aware that I build on the legacy of other leaders who have preceded me. That inspires humility and gratitude, fully realizing that there are times when I have been able to reap what others have labored to sow. Furthermore, there is reassurance that the heavy slogging of my work, when results seem slow at coming, God could be using me to prepare the way for others. At the end of the day, God demands one thing...faithfulness, the ultimate legacy of Christ-centered leadership.

As I reflect on these two illustrations from my life, I am reminded of the need to recognize that we live and work within a continuum of the past, present, and future. We can be thankful for all those who have prepared the way for us and hopeful in the knowledge that we play a part in laying the groundwork for others. We will be able to do that if our hearts are open and sensitive like those who heard John's call to repentance and were ready to follow Christ.

PRAYER: Gracious Father, thank you for those who have gone on before me, prepared the way for me, and laid the path for my steps. Cause my own steps to be carefully laid for those who come behind me. Amen.

DECEMBER 5
Lament in Advent

By Diane Dick, PhD
Professor, Education Department



Psalm 88

ADVENT! CHRISTMAS! Most people look forward with great anticipation to this blessed season of celebration, but for some it is a very difficult season. Perhaps you or someone you know has had an alarming diagnosis, or has lost a family member, or has experienced a broken relationship, or has lost all joy in living.

I remember years ago when my husband and I received a daunting diagnosis on our only son—autism and seizure disorder. It was in November, and I had no desire to celebrate Advent or Christmas. I did not really want to hear the story of Jesus being born, or the shepherds abiding, or the wise men coming from the east. We were grieving our child's condition, and any thought of celebration or future celebrations was out of the question. I was in a stage of lament.

We do not, as believers, talk or use the word – lament, but in Psalm 88, the psalmist writes a song about suffering and affliction. In fact, this Psalm seems to be the darkest and saddest chapter of the entire book. How do we celebrate when we feel like this? After all, if God is not going to listen to me, then why should I celebrate His Son's coming to earth in the form of a baby?

Here is the point where I had to stop and realize that just because God is silent from time to time does not mean He does not love me, hear me, or answer my pleas for help (Psalm 88:1, 2). He sent His Son to die for us and to save us – that is the real meaning of Advent and Christmas, and He does not mind our laments.

After much lamenting to God, He answered our prayers for our son. No, he was not healed, but through this difficult process, we have been taught so much about our Heavenly Father. Now when we read Advent passages, our son recognizes the story of Jesus's birth, and I am confident that he knows the joy of Christmas. So, we can once again approach Advent and Christmas with great enthusiasm and confidence about the birth of our Savior and the knowledge that one day we will spend eternity, healed and whole, praising our Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER: Gracious Father, your awareness of our lamenting is a comfort when we are in the midst of that season. Thank you for your compassion, understanding and peace for that season, and the strength to take up the next day. Keep us remembering your sovereignty while we lament. Amen.

DECEMBER 6
Comfort Ye

By Rachel Sidebothom, MME
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Isaiah 40

As a musician, specifically as an oboist, I am often called upon to play for George Fredrich Handel's "Messiah" during the Christmas season. This oratorio, composed by Handel in 1741 (setting the libretto by Charles Jennens), is one of the few works in our canon of Western music that speaks truth directly from Scripture and tells of the complete work of Christ! The first part centers on Old Testament prophecies of the coming of the Savior and presents Christ's birth, while the second and third parts portray the passion, death, and resurrection of our Savior, and the coming judgment day of Christ, giving hope to those who are found in Him. The text for "Messiah" is straight from God's Word. You might be most familiar with "Hallelujah" or "Worthy is the Lamb," two of the glorious pieces in this oratorio, which lead us in profound and joyful worship of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

But one of my favorite moments of the "Messiah" is in contrast to those powerful, stirring pieces and arrives soon after we play the "Sinfony" or overture. The first words sung in this masterful work are "Comfort Ye." Have you ever considered the power in this simple truth that sets up the rest of the Gospel presented in this work? Isaiah 40:1-3, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak, ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned...."

What a hope-giving and joy-filled peace these truths give us! Our war with sin has already been won! Our iniquity is pardoned! And, as Isaiah continues in chapter 40 and Handel presents in the "Messiah," the glory of our God will be revealed! I find my soul resting and settling as I listen to those resounding truths sung by a powerful voice each time I perform Handel's Messiah. God is speaking comfort and hope to each of us in this Advent season. In the hustle and bustle, rest in His finished work on our behalf.

PRAYER: Father in Heaven, thank you for the promise of your comfort in the promise of Jesus as our Messiah. His coming then and the promise of His return comfort my heart. Help me to rest in that when the days of stress or turmoil bring havoc to my soul. Amen.

DECEMBER 7

Small and Secret

By Shanika Churchville, MEd

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2 Corinthians 4:16

I spend much of my days with students in the process of writing. They often find it slow, tedious, not immediately gratifying. They want to produce pages and papers and often have to settle for word by word. I try to offer words of comfort: “Writing is a spiritual discipline. When you write, you not only engage in a humbling discipline of details, you imitate the slow, secret, consistent work God does every day.” They aren’t always convinced.

Being immersed in writing has given me a great context in which to ponder the slow, incremental way in which God often works. He did not send his Son to us fully grown, in a blaze of glory. Rather, he planted the salvation of the world in Mary’s womb to develop cell by cell. Our Messiah grew inch by inch. Picture him over the years – he grew taller, his voice deepened, he outgrew his sandals. God committed Himself to the unhurried and unglamorous process of developing the Light of the world from embryo to fully man.

The Bible is full of analogies comparing the spiritual life to the slow, hidden, and laborious. Consider its many plant metaphors: the seed dies in the secrecy of the soil to raise new life (John 12:24); the tree reaches its long roots deep to meet water (Psalm 1:3); the tiny, unassuming mustard seed eventually bursts into a large and glorious tree (Mark 4:30–32).

At this time of year, on the cusp of the old, leaning into the new, we often yearn for sudden and dramatic transformation – pounds lost, miles run, unruly children miraculously transformed. Of course, we serve a God of miracles, a God who transforms. Yet, so much of what God does is hidden, tiny, daily and in secret. The God of the universe is also, to borrow the words of novelist Arundhati Roy, the “God of small things.” As we celebrate God’s faithfulness in the big things, let us also praise Him for the slow and daily renewal He works in our hearts, in secret, with great grace and love.

PRAYER: Oh, Heavenly Father, your wisdom in sending your Son to grow and develop is overwhelming. Forgive us for wanting results to occur quickly and without a process. Show me the small steps to walk slowly as I grow in my life with you. Help me to find your steps to be the best ones for me. Amen.

DECEMBER 8

When You Walk Through the Waters

By Vickie Byler EdD

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Isaiah 43:2

The shepherds who heard the angels announcing Christ's birth had remarkable responsibilities. Caring for their sheep serves a reminder of a familiar passage in Isaiah. In researching the role of the shepherd with his sheep, we can see these parallels.

First, sheep are born followers. Even if harm is ahead, sheep will blindly follow to their death. If sheep fall on their backs, this could be fatal. Blood cannot flow to their legs, and if a shepherd does not act quickly, the sheep will die. Sheep cannot swim due to the wool coat that absorbs water, and as a result are instinctively afraid of water. The shepherd is aware of this and seeks to find quiet waters for the sheep to drink. When a shepherd must have sheep cross the water, he goes ahead of them. The sheep closest to him jump right in and cross with ease. Those further back are more hesitant but follow in the path of others. Those in the back must be pushed into the water by the dogs who are helping. Some are carried down the river with the waters, but the shepherd is watching from the other side and steps in to rescue them.

As Isaiah 43:2 states "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you..." When the trials of life or the raging storms come, if we stay close to the shepherd and trust in His leading, we can jump right in the water and cross safely. Sometimes we are in the middle of the herd and hesitate, but then we follow the shepherd to safety. Sadly, at times, we have been at the back of the herd and are being pulled by the raging waters, but we are seen by the shepherd who pulls us to safety. This verse does not say "if we pass..." Rather it says, "when we pass through the waters" He will be with us. We can trust that we will not be swept over, but we must stay close to Him.

PRAYER: Gentle, good and kind Shepherd, thank you for your care and watchful eye on me. Forgive my self-reliance, and teach me to trust you for each step of the way. Remind me of your presence, and draw me closer to yourself so I can hear your voice and know your plans for me. Amen.

DECEMBER 9

Glory to God in the Lowest

By Ryan Shenk, MA

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Isaiah 9:6–7

We gravitate to the brilliant visual displays in Scripture of the glory of God. Mount Sinai, the dedication of Solomon's temple, Isaiah's vision of Jehovah's throne room, Jesus' birthday choir of angels, the vision of a New Jerusalem, and others set the standard in our imaginations as we try to grasp the concept of the glory of the Most High. In our cultural psyche, wealth, power, and all things grandiose are instilled as markers that set people and organizations apart from the rest.

Jesus, the pinnacle of God's self-revelation, points us in exactly the opposite direction. Christmas challenges us with a reversal of nearly everything we thought we knew about God. Our position in history allows us to look back on the manger and strain to understand that the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature lay in a manger before a poor couple and a motley group of low-wage workers. Somehow, we must learn that there is a fuller picture of God's glory in the stable that night than in a smoke-filled temple dedication.

God's way of sending Jesus tells us at least as much as the fact of it. What if the humility surrounding God's entrance into history is not the exception but the rule? The angels who filled the sky above the stable gave no indication that the glory of God was limited by present circumstances. We are tempted to keep as much distance between self and suffering as possible, yet God emphatically moves toward the places and people most marginalized. Let us move against the grain of our society, and even our own instincts, and seek the glory of God in humility and solidarity with the oppressed, overlooked, and suffering people in our midst.

PRAYER: Glorious Lord Jesus, you are the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature. You uphold the universe by the word of your power. And, amid this, you died for us, offering yourself as a sacrifice for my sin. I am humbled and grateful for your sovereignty and sacrifice. Amen.

DECEMBER 10

A Humble Pause for Praise

By Krissi Castor, MAM

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Luke 1:46-55

Pausing at a nativity scene encircled by evergreens, we tend to regard the figurines as characters in a fairy tale told by Fontanini. However, they were real people fulfilling a holy plan, and Mary, the young maiden, was brave and obedient. God's commission cost her a great deal in reputation and likely relationships. Carrying Emmanuel would entail constant looking over her shoulder and fighting the instinct to explain and to defend. Still, when the angel appeared and declared that she was God's chosen vessel to bring forth His promise to Israel, Mary surrendered the life she had anticipated and somehow responded with humble praise: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant" (Luke 1:46-48 ESV).

Though we will not bear the Christ-child as Mary did, we may still grow weary in receiving the holy appointments He has given to each of us. How can we remain in a posture of praise when we feel crushed by the weight of other's expectations, personal agendas, public opinions, hopes deferred, and uncertain times? In a compelling book titled "Humility", Andrew Murray states: "Pride must die in you or nothing in heaven can live in you." He also says that "humility is the displacement of self by the enthronement of God... the highest glory of the creature is being only a vessel to receive and enjoy and show forth the glory of God." So, how might we receive God's appointments with joy, thanksgiving, and, yes, even praise?

Our Lord and Savior chose to come from humble beginnings. Mary recalled all that God had done for His people, and she glorified Him by humbly welcoming heaven's life in her. May we not pass too quickly by the nativity scene this Christmas season but instead be moved to humble praise of Christ our King, realizing that He is also mindful of our states, and "his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation" (Luke 1:50).

PRAYER: Lord and Savior, Christ our King, we come in humility before you and thank you for your willingness to come and declare to an ungrateful people your gift of redemption. Our sins are ever before us, as we approach you on your sacred throne. Help us to be willing vessels to be used by you for your glory and for your name to be praised. Amen.

DECEMBER 11

I Ponder Just Like Mary

By Jessica Whitmore, MA

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Luke 2:19

Mary's pondering really hit home with me around Christmas 2002. I was pregnant with our first son, Aidan. My husband, Keith, and I should have been full of joy and excitement. Instead we were trusting God as we discussed and made life and death decisions for our unborn son.

Aidan was diagnosed in utero with Patau Syndrome (trisomy 13) in September of that year. The prognosis for this rare genetic syndrome is not good. For three months I carried him hoping and trusting and yet knowing what the outcome could be. Options were given. Life, whatever the outcome, was chosen.

Aidan was born on Dec. 27, 2002. He took his last breath just less than five hours later while in my arms with my husband by our side. It was on this day and the days since where I have found myself relating to Mary. She kept so much in her heart. She pondered so much. All while life continued to swirl around her. Just as it had for me.

In pondering, I've had to trust God even more. I had to trust during the two pregnancies after Aidan. I continue to trust as we raise our two healthy boys, ages 11 and 15. I've had to trust in other situations that hurt my heart and challenge my faith. I've trusted because I know life can be hard and sometimes make no sense. I've trusted more because that day of initial pondering changed me and Christmas forever.

I'm certain it changed Mary on that day of pondering so many Christmases ago. Mary knew the outcome. She pondered. She trusted. I knew the prognosis. I pondered. I trusted. I continue to ponder. I continue to trust. I trust a God who hasn't let me down yet, who has walked with me each step and who ties it all together in ways I can't even imagine or expect. All while I ponder and trust. Just like Mary.

PRAYER: Loving Father, I confess that sometimes I forget to trust, or even choose not to trust. Forgive this hurting and doubting heart. Help me to relinquish my questions, doubts and fears, to your strong and wise ways, so that you can be praised and honored in all you do. Amen.

DECEMBER 12

Peace on Earth

By Esther Zimmerman, MEd

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Revelation 21:1–6

For several weeks each year, the media churns out songs, films, pictures and dreams of an “ideal Christmas” where everyone is happy, every wish is granted, and anything is possible. For some, it’s a lot of fun. For others, it’s a cruel reminder that all is not well in their worlds.

Henry Longfellow felt this tension keenly during America’s Civil War as he wrote the following words:

“There is no peace on earth,” I said; “For hate is strong, and mocks the song of peace on earth, good-will to men!”

I heard this carol sung for the first time just a few days after returning home from a war-torn region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The words resonated deeply as I sat in church surrounded by Christmas sweaters, decorations and happy smiles. My time with Christians who were suffering intensely had shaken me to my core. However, Longfellow’s next words were a powerful defense of Christmas:

“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.”

As believers in Jesus Christ, there is a depth to our Christmas celebrations that the world cannot hope to imitate. The world is NOT the way it is supposed to be – that’s why there is Christmas. In the incarnation, God Himself entered our broken world as a human baby – to redeem, restore, and reconcile all things to Himself, to proclaim a true and lasting peace on earth that will someday be fully realized.

The trappings of Christmas can be a lot of fun, but the true joy of Christmas is found in Jesus, our hope of redemption.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, we acknowledge that you are the redeemer of this world, this world that so desperately needs you. It is your peace that passes all understanding and can override the tumult that humans sometimes experience. We offer praise and celebration for this redemption. Amen.

DECEMBER 13

The Son of the Invisible God

By E. Penny Clawson, EdD
Professor Emeritus



Hebrews 5:7–9; Colossians 1:15–17, 19, 20

The season of Advent and Christmas is a perfect time to reflect on the incarnation of Jesus, the unique act of God becoming man, human, a baby. What a mystery this is when we consider that an omnipotent God relinquished the power of being God to become helpless, needing to grow and be taken care of, dependent on others. He left the relationship with His Heavenly Father, to have a relationship with His earthly father, Joseph. He went from never needing anything such as food, water, shelter, rest, or clothing to become a man needing all of those and eventually being denied these at times in His life. What a contrast!

The author of Hebrews adds to this conundrum: “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” (Hebrews 5:7-9)

Paul declares the deity of the Incarnated Christ this way: “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together...” (Colossians 1:15-17, 19-20)

God, made flesh, to become the sacrifice for our sins, the sacrifice that was once for all, never needing to be offered again! When we sing “from a cradle to a cross,” do we fully understand the depth of these words? Have you and I considered the life Jesus lived on this earth anticipating that day of ultimate sacrifice?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we confess we do not understand the relationship of you with your Son, but we are so very grateful for the very act of His incarnation. Without His perfect life on earth, His perfect sacrifice on the cross, there would be no salvation. We are humbled to be counted among those whose sins have been atoned. With deep gratitude, we say, Amen.

DECEMBER 14

Borrowed Manger, Borrowed Tomb

By Mark Farnham, PhD

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2 Corinthians 8:9, Luke 2:6-7

Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus was born in a borrowed stable (or more likely, cave) and placed in a borrowed manger? Then, at the end of His life, He was buried in a borrowed tomb. In other words, His mission to redeem the world by perfectly fulfilling the law of God and dying in our place would not be distracted by a focus on wealth. He did all this in a state of humiliation and relative poverty. How different from the stories of so many founders of other religions who were born or lived in wealth!

When we look at the American church today, however, we so often see a love for celebrity, success, and displays of power. Increasingly, so-called ministers of the gospel hobnob with the wealthy and influential while dressing, driving and living in luxury unimaginable by most Christians for the last 2,000 years. Even more tragically, this gospel of prosperity has been exported to the poorest places on earth, especially the African continent. Those who can barely feed their families are promised wealth on earth if they would give what little they have to “God’s work” of prospering them.

The true spirit of Christianity and Christmas is the spirit of the borrowed manger and the borrowed tomb. This world is not our home, so we dare not let the love of money and luxury creep into our hearts if we want to remain truly Christian. We ought to be content with what God gives us and invest it for eternal purposes regardless of the amount. As one ancient reminds us, “He who has God and nothing else, has more than he who has everything but God.”

PRAYER: Gracious Father, forgive my desire for wealth and funding to use for my own comfort and pleasure. Remind me of the poverty your Son experienced during His years on earth. Teach me to be content with what I have and to share with those who have not. In this season when we tend to overspend, help me to be careful and intentional with my funds, so that you will be honored with my dollars and cents. Amen.

DECEMBER 15

A Redeemer from the Most Unlikely of Places

By Michael J. Freeman, EdD

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Ruth 1–4

If you haven't read the book of Ruth in a while, I would encourage you to set this devotional aside for the 15 minutes it takes to read its four chapters and reacquaint yourself with this story. It will be time well spent.

It is set in the rebellious time of the Judges, where “everyone did what was right in their own eyes,” (Judges 21:25). Sound familiar? Ruth is a story of deep loss, deep love, deep humility, and deep faith.

At the end of chapter 3, Ruth has already asked Boaz to be her redeemer... an honor she has every right to claim. Now, with this request made, she goes home to wait. Boaz has promised to return. She knows his character and trusts that he will do what he promises. Her fate is entirely in his hands.

However, her waiting was not in vain. Through Ruth, God hints at the larger plan of redemption He has in store. God takes this gentile woman, weds her to the son of a Canaanite prostitute, and draws them into the family line of both King David and of Christ Himself (Matthew 1:5).

God seems to have always intended redemption to extend beyond the borders of the Jewish people. What good news for those of us now grafted into His family.

We are Ruth...the Church is Ruth, waiting for our redeemer to return to claim us as His own. Like the citizens of Bethlehem, this world too is watching us while we wait. How we act during this time of waiting says as much about our faith in our Redeemer and our belief about His trustworthiness as it does about our own character.

Our Redeemer can be trusted; His word is law. God has provided a way to redeem our lives and add them to His story. We too can point to a redeemer from the most unlikely of places...our testimony is how we wait for His return.

PRAYER: Lord, our redemption came through a line of generations planned by you, and my redemption is part of that plan. Thank you for that plan and provision. Forgive my heart of ingratitude and apathy. Draw me to my Savior in new ways during this Advent season so I might worship you with new vigor. Amen.

DECEMBER 16
Fragile Treasure

By Ryan Geesaman, MS

Assistant Professor & Chair, Communication & Media Arts Department



2 Corinthians 4:7

Paul writes, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us” (NIV). I find this verse comforting. It’s comforting to know that God has placed a treasure inside me. It’s comforting to know that I can’t take credit for that treasure. It’s clear that God understands that I am fragile, not unlike a vessel made of dirt. Some days I’m dirtier and more cracked than others, but I will remain fragile until God redeems this mortal body of mine. And that’s okay.

At the same time, this passage holds a certain weight of responsibility. I carry the treasure of the gospel, of knowing Christ, and of the Holy Spirit. My fragility does not preclude me from this responsibility and privilege. In the same way a clay jar is meant to carry something and then pour it out, I am not meant to hold onto this treasure inside of me. I’m meant to share it, and God is able to use my frailty to show the power in that treasure. Later in 2 Corinthians 12:9 Paul tells us that God’s “power works best in weakness.” We are instruments of that power so that God can be glorified, but it requires something of us: a willingness to be used.

As we approach Christmas, I am reminded of how Jesus showed us an example of this balance between fragility and power. He came to the earth with the exterior of a vulnerable, human child, but He showed us what it looks like to carry the full power of God. As Christians, following His example, may the power and love of Christ pour out of us, His broken vessels.

PRAYER: Father, you are the potter, and I am but the clay, molded and shaped by you, and then chipped and sometimes broken. But regardless of the outside, the inside holds a precious treasure, your Spirit! May this Spirit abide deep within and flow out during this season when so many need to know the Christ of our redemption. Amen.

DECEMBER 17

Mary's Deep Thoughts

By Julia Hershey, MEd

Assistant Professor & Chair, Education Department



Proverbs 31:15–21

Amidst the action of the angels filling the night sky to proclaim the birth of Christ and the shepherds arriving in the stable to see the baby in swaddling clothes, Luke captures the quiet, still action of Mary. Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart (Luke 2:19). Mary is sitting in the middle of the shepherds' storytelling of what they had just experienced in the fields. She is perhaps holding her son, the Creator of all things. She is not saying a word, but listening, smiling, thinking, reflecting.

This posture of Mary is significant since through the God-breathed inspiration of the Bible, every detail included matters. Luke records that Mary pondered the things that she had treasured up in her heart. The word pondered is *sumballo* meaning to take many things and bring them together. Mary had many things to ponder – an angel visitation, a baby inside her who was God, the raised eye of her neighbors, birth in a barn, not to mention how this baby would save the people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

In her finite mind, she could not bring these discrete, perhaps obscure, pieces together. How did they make sense? Yet she pondered them and knew who could – God. She had rehearsed His might and faithfulness in her song of praise (Luke 1:46-55). She knew her God, believing He is faithful and sovereign. So even in the midst of seemingly non-sensical circumstances and pieces that did not fit together, she turned her eyes and entered into the mystery, wonder, and awe of her Creator who could do all things and hold all things together (Colossians 1:17).

Perhaps this Christmas season we need to see with fresh eyes how God throughout history has held together the pieces of our lives. Taking the words of the hymn, *we ponder anew what the Almighty can do*.

PRAYER: Almighty God, forgive our rushing about that crowds out the time to ponder. Cause us to be still and ponder, consider, and reflect on all that you have done in our lives. We seek to honor you as the Almighty One who does amazing things, both large and small, to show us your love, might, and grace. Thank you for revealing yourself in these ways. Amen.

DECEMBER 18

Never Settle for a Knockoff

By Kevin Gushiken, PhD

*Assistant Professor and Coordinator of PhD Leadership Program,
Church & Ministry Leadership*



Matthew 1:23

One Christmas, my daughter indicated she would love some winter boots. The boots she wanted were brown with fur lining on the inside. She was interested in something like the popular UGG boots. Knowing that his sister really wanted some boots, my son bought a pair for her that were inexpensive, in his price range, that looked like UGG boots. They look great. They seemed to be well-constructed. They were perfect. She loved them.

The only problem is that they did not hold up. They started to break down immediately. I called the company to explain the problem. Graciously, they sent out another pair. Yet, as you can guess, this pair also began to break down. So, I learned my lesson: do not buy a knockoff.

Christmas reminds me of this struggle. It lends itself to a lot of knockoffs. On Christmas morning, we open up the box. We get that perfect present. Yet, after a few months, the joy wears off, and the gift becomes simply another item we own. Or, we can't wait to get some time off. Life is busy. Work is stressful. You long to wake up at 8:00 instead of 5:30. Joy...until you get that email reminding you of some family issue that is frustrating you. Knockoffs are fleeting yet we chase after them.

Matthew 1:23 states, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call him Immanuel (which means 'God with us')." God shows himself to us in Christ. God is present with us in Christ. Christ is the only truly satisfying pursuit. All that is good and perfect can be found *only* in the person of Christ. What we receive in Jesus is not a knockoff but a legitimate, transforming joy from the one who created it, God. This Christmas pursue that which is true, perfect, and lasting – Christ Jesus.

PRAYER: Father, we confess that often we replace you with knock offs and regret that deeply. Forgive our lack of discernment and restore our hearts with the joy that comes with knowing Jesus. Fill my heart with that true and lasting joy. Amen.

DECEMBER 19

“In the Beginning was the Word . . .”

By Gordon Gregory, DTh

Professor, Bible & Theology Department



John 1:1–18

The opening of John 1 would have spoken to a broad audience. For the Jews, John's opening words would take them back to Genesis 1 where God creates through speaking. For the Greeks, those same words would cause them to think of the divine *logos*: the mind or thoughts of the gods. John would have had both groups hooked.

But for both groups there was an unexpected twist in John's introduction. For the Jews, this comes in the following phrases of verse 1 where the Word is differentiated from God yet seen as equal to God. This would have offended their monotheistic sensibilities. Then in verse 14, the idea that God became human would also cause them to cry “Blasphemy!” For the Greeks, verse 14 would have also caused major problems. Greek philosophy saw the body as the prison house for the soul and they were seeking escape from the body.

For the Jews the incarnation is blasphemy; for the Greeks it is foolishness. But for the Christian, whether Jew or Greek, it is the greatest means by which we can know God (see verses 14 & 18) and the means by which Jesus can take the sins of the world upon Himself. Both of these are true because Jesus is fully God. Christ being fully human also makes it possible for Him to be our representative and substitute to secure our salvation through His death and resurrection.

Down through history, the incarnation has been misunderstood, misrepresented, and mocked, but it stands at the center of the Christian faith. It is one of the doctrines that makes Christianity unique among the world's religions. Let us celebrate this core doctrine as we remember God the Son taking on our humanity!

PRAYER: Almighty Lord, your incarnation is the unique characteristic that distinguishes you to the world. We are so grateful for this selfless act that brought you to the earth as our Savior. We praise you and honor you for this very act that allowed you to suffer for our sake. Amen.

DECEMBER 20
Carbon Copies

By Ryan M. Kuehner, PhD

Associate Professor & Chair, Counseling & Social Work Department



Luke 6:40b

Remember the days of Carbon Copies? Me neither! No, I'm not referring to the "cc" in an email, but rather the best copying technique in the world prior to the invention of the photographic printer in the 1970s. Feel free to watch a YouTube video of this time-intensive process.

After deeper inquiry, I realized that humans (composed of 18% Carbon) have been making "Carbon Copies" for thousands of years. In fact, you and I continue this process and will do so until God calls us home.

Of course, I am referring to modeling/observational learning. Despite Charles Barkley's famous declaration in 1993, "I am not a role model. Just because I can dunk a basketball doesn't mean I should raise your kids," we are clearly all role models/teachers. Let us first look at the words of our perfect teacher, Jesus Christ in Luke 6:40b: "But everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher."

While Christ needs to be the teacher from whom we learn, God has also provided human instruments to be educators. As Paul declared in I Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." Sadly, since each person on the planet is a teacher, many of us have "learned" from unhealthy models. We ourselves have inadvertently modeled unhealth to those under our direct or indirect tutelage. In fact, it is not possible to model Christ to others if we do not sit in His classroom and receive the Holy Spirit's permeating behavioral guidance.

May it be our daily prayer that God, by the Holy Spirit's outworking, make us "Carbon Copies" of Christ given our pivotal and perpetual role as teachers to everyone in our sphere of influence. May the Lord also reveal to us the ways in which our past and present earthly teachers have shaped us in unhealthy ways.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, forgive us for our poor behaviors that others see and follow. Draw us close to yourself, so that our lives model a healthy, godly life, allowing others to see you in us. In this season, help us to be carbon copies of the Savior. Amen.

DECEMBER 21

Stand Firm and Listen

By Thomas Randolph, MS

Assistant Professor & Chair, Health & Physical Education Department



Isaiah 28:23

In this season with its many voices, it is easy to get sidetracked, discouraged, and confused. However, if we keep God's voice as the standard in our lives, we will be able to accomplish the will of God and have victory. In the account of David and Goliath, (1 Samuel 17) David faced many distracting, negative, and disheartening voices speaking into him. David didn't let this shake him, and he was still able to overcome and find victory because God's voice in him was his measuring rod or standard. Even when his brother, in verse 28b, spoke the voice of insults calling David conceited and wicked, David remained strong. Despite the harsh and cruel words of his brother, David did not falter in his faith. No, his emotions did not take over because he paid attention to God's voice. David knew the truth of who he was in God

In contrast there was the voice of the enemy, Goliath, speaking fear and intimidation. Goliath stood on the hill with his massive size and thunderous voice, taunting and shouting. But David knew God as a God of victory, not defeat. That voice of fear and intimidation could not crumble David's confidence in the Lord. In addition, there was the voice of inability spoken by Saul in verse 33. Here, King Saul is telling David that Goliath is clever and capable, strong and trained, and advanced in skill. Saul attempts to deter David. David held onto his confidence in God to give him the power to fight the enemy and win.

With David it was voice after voice relentlessly attacking him, but instead he decided to listen to another voice: the voice that set the standard for his life and held the ultimate control and authority over his choices. He listened to God's voice and that made all the difference. Isaiah reminds us to listen to that voice of the Lord, "Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say."

Prayer: Ever present Lord, cause my ear to be inclined to your voice. Block out the distracting and deterring voices that shout in this busy season. Speak softly and clearly; make my ears sensitive to your words; and remind me of your protection and wisdom. Amen.

DECEMBER 22

Time of Uncertainty

By Amanda Zuschmidt, MEd

Assistant Professor, Health & Physical Education Department



Proverbs 3:5–6

During this Advent season, I am reminded of when I was pregnant with my son Owen ten years ago in December of 2009. On a routine prenatal check-up, I was rushed to the hospital where I was told that I had preeclampsia at only 24 weeks and that they would do everything possible to keep my growing baby inside as long as possible.

Days later after being under heavy medication that was not working, I remember the team of high-risk OBGYN's running me down to surgery. All I could think about was Proverbs 3:5–6 which says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.”

I often wonder if the feelings I felt those days leading up to the birth of my son and afterwards were like those of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She was a virgin giving birth to a baby who was to be the son of the living God. She had little to no idea of what was to come, if Joseph would stay with her, how her family would react and the reaction of those who knew she was not yet married. I imagine her fear was very real, as was mine ten years ago.

I am certain that God gave Mary the same strength to overcome her fear that he gave me on January 3, 2010 when my son was born weighing only 14 ounces and 10 inches long. That foundational verse in Proverbs is forever marked on my mind when I think back to that night of great uncertainty and distress. I am so grateful for the truth and comfort of God's Word in our time of need. In this season of Advent, may you be comforted by the peace and love of our Heavenly Father.

PRAYER: Dearest Father, you are a trustworthy God and a loving Father. That combination causes me to offer worship mixed with gratitude for who you are and the salvation you offered through your own Son. My heart is overcome with love and thanksgiving. Amen.

DECEMBER 23

The Yoking Mule

By Sophia A. Ogunlana, EdD, LCPC, LPC

Assistant Professor, Counseling & Social Work Department



Matthew 11:28–30

One beautiful day last summer, my family and I went on a farm tour in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania area. An Amish family showed us their gardens, shared their culture, and let our children feed their animals.

As the mother brought us to the mules, she explained their training process. A yoke is tied around the neck of the younger mule and connected to the older mule. Thus, the younger mule is connected to the older mule throughout the day to observe and imitate the older mule. This shadowing continues for months until the two are synced.

Our guide explained that consistently connecting the yoke between the two mules is key. The yoke must be strong to provide balance and support to bear the weight of what the mules transport. Like the older mule, Jesus is always there to walk alongside us to carry our burdens. So many times, we try to be superheroes, barely juggling life responsibilities, leading to feeling burnt out, anxious, and depressed. We often forfeit the Lord's offer to take His yoke upon us and to learn from Him. He knows the daily struggles and gives us a safe place to rest.

PRAYER: Eternal Lord, thank you for your yoke and that you carry it with me. Forgive my independent efforts rather than allowing you to share the load. Show me again, that you are ever present carrying my burdens. Amen.

DECEMBER 24

While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks

By Sam Harbin, DMin

Professor & Chair, Bible & Theology Department



Luke 2:8–11

They were just ordinary shepherds doing their ordinary jobs on an ordinary night near the sleepy hamlet of Bethlehem. Nothing remarkable about this night. Nothing remarkable about these common laborers, the “normal Joes” of the Judean culture. They’re just normal guys doing their normal job on an otherwise normal night in a very normal place.

But this is not just a normal night. This is the night that God has chosen to invade human history. This is the night the Messiah will arrive in fulfillment of the covenant promises. A short distance away, secure in Jerusalem’s halls of power, the politically connected, religiously elite slumber. These are the insiders, the scripture experts, the curators of the ancient promises. Surely, they will be the first to hear the glorious good news!

But the blessed announcement does not echo through the halls of power, at least not first. It’s out over those Judean hillsides that the angelic delegation shatters the stillness of that ordinary night. As the shepherds are recovering from near cardiac arrest, they hear the amazing words, “For to you...One has been born who is Savior, Messiah, Lord” (the only place in our New Testament where all three titles are used together to describe Jesus). This is the promised King, come to sit on David’s throne – yet He’ll be found laying in a feed trough! And for whom has He come? Common shepherds. Ordinary sinners. Average guys.

The shepherds quickly discern the significance of what they were hearing and seeing: God’s extraordinary saving love has come to ordinary sinners in the most unremarkable setting. The message is clear: God’s salvation is for everyone, including ordinary people - like us! It’s a message the shepherds investigate, validate, and then immediately communicate to others. Can we do any less?

PRAYER: Majestic Lord, your majesty was proclaimed to simple Joes, just like me, and I am humbled. If I had been among those shepherds, I too would have been overwhelmed. Forgive me for not being overwhelmed by your majesty today! You are as majestic today as you were on that Christmas night so long ago. I worship your majesty and shout a loud “Amen!”

DECEMBER 25
Faith and Deeds

By Peter W. Teague, EdD
President



Matthew 1:18–25; 2:13–23; Luke 2

Today we celebrate God's love for us demonstrated in sending His Son, Jesus Christ into the world that we might live through Him (1 John 4.9). Over 2,000 years ago, this salvation plan was enacted in time when God entrusted an ordinary betrothed couple, Mary and Joseph, with the birth, care, and nurture of the Son of God.

In Matthew 1:18-25 we find that Mary was pregnant before the proper time, implying an act of adultery. Joseph, "being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame," decided to divorce her privately. But before doing so, an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream informing him the child was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and was indeed the promised Messiah. Probably recalling prophetic words about a virgin bearing a son called Immanuel, Joseph believed the angel and married Mary, keeping her a virgin until the birth of Jesus.

Reading further, we find Joseph protecting Jesus from death, keeping the Mosaic laws of circumcision and purification, and traveling to Jerusalem every year to observe Passover. He apparently died before Jesus began his public ministry at age 30, but his role in redemptive history is highly significant as he faithfully provided guardianship and godly nurture for Jesus in his earthly home.

Even though he played a central role, not one word from Joseph's lips is recorded in scripture. His actions, however, speak volumes of an honorable man who believed God and lived by faith. The best gift we can give this Christmas and every day is to love God by loving others in both word and deed.

God sent His Son, the Living Word, to provide the perfect, final solution for our deadly sin problem. Gift of all gifts, may we, like Joseph, embrace Him with undying faith and deeds of love.

PRAYER: Thank you Lord, for this perfect gift, the Living Word, your Son. I am amazed at your provision of salvation through your Son. Help me to embrace this gift with gratitude and expressions of this heartfelt emotion. Amen.

DECEMBER 26

The People Who Wait

By Geoffrey Reiter, PhD

Assistant Professor, Arts & Sciences Department



Luke 2:22–38

I've always been interested in the people the Bible doesn't name. During his presentation at the Temple, Jesus is met by two elderly Jewish prophets, Simeon and Anna. These two faithful believers waited their whole long lives just to see this baby who wouldn't fulfill his Messianic role until long after their deaths. Their words are significant, but what I find even more fascinating is who they represent.

In Luke's Gospel, this man and this woman stand in for the countless generations of God-fearing Israelites who anonymously kept the faith before Jesus' birth. Between the closing of the Old Testament canon and the Incarnation, centuries pass. We have no direct biblical record of these centuries or the people who lived in them. Yet across those ages, men and women were serving God faithfully in anticipation of Christ and the deliverance inherent in the promise of His coming.

When we look at Scripture, we find its pages filled with people who wait faithfully with no obvious sign of fulfillment, people who "did not receive what was promised" (Hebrews 11:39). In the Old Testament, in order for the Exodus to have occurred, thousands upon thousands of Hebrews had to wait and serve God in Egypt, passing down the faith. And that exodus is only a shadow of the greater salvation that Jesus, the greater Prophet will bring with Him. Simeon knows how blessed he is even just to have a glimpse of the Savior, at which he exclaims that he can "depart in peace." He knows that most who came before him never even got such a glimpse.

How difficult do we find it to wait in our culture? From our food to our entertainment to our social media, we want everything available right away. And in our Christianity, we may be tempted to seek out a similar instant gratification, to struggle in serving or worshiping when we aren't experiencing obvious results or blessings or feelings of joy. How convicting it is to remember how many believers before the first century never even got to know the story of salvation in God's Son that we take for granted. Like Simeon and Anna, they served and waited...and that was enough.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, your plan through the ages required many to wait in silence, not hurry nor fret. Forgive my relentless pursuit of gratification. Stir within me a spirit of stillness, contentedness, and peace as I wait. Teach me the joy of waiting. Amen.

DECEMBER 27

King Alfred's War Song

By Kim Melton, MACC

Assistant Professor, Business Administration Department



John 8:31–32

As we prepared for battle, I was glad to be among the other young soldiers in the rear of King Alfred's army. At the top of the hill, as far as my eye could see was King Guthrum and the Great Heathen Army of Vikings. I could hear the veterans exclaim "there must be four heathens for every one of us." Alfred ordered the attack, and as the lines moved forward, a familiar chant arose:

*When the enemy comes in a'roarin' like a flood,
Coveting the kingdom and hungering for blood,
The Lord will raise a standard up and lead his people,
The Lord of Host will go before defeating every foe, defeating every foe.*

As each row of soldiers stepped off, they picked up the chant and by the time I begin to move forward we were shouting "For the Lord is our defense, Jesus defend us." The noise of sword and shield clashing was deafening. Occasionally, I could hear "For the Lord is our defense." Suddenly, I was standing on top of the hill. Guthrum was running. We knew victory was ours as Alfred began to chant "Some trust in Chariots...but we will depend on the name of Christ Our Lord."

This was the vision I spun for my daughter as we memorized "King Alfred's War Song," a poem of deliverance attributed to King Alfred the Great. The "Song" draws heavily from verses of deliverance in Psalms 20, 91, and 144. Alfred, a godly man, understood the power of the Word on the heart.

Now we come to the time of the year that we celebrate the Word becoming flesh, the incarnation of the psalms of deliverance. Because the Word became flesh we have been delivered from death and the bondage of sin. The written and Incarnate Word are truth; truth that makes us free and makes us into the image of Christ. During the Christmas season, and all year, give thanks for the deliverance provided by the transforming power of the written and Incarnate Word.

PRAYER: Lord, speak to each of us, and may your Word abide with us until it has wrought in us your holy will. Amen.

DECEMBER 28

Light in a Dark World

By Martin Sauer, MBA

Assistant Professor & Chair, Business Administration Department



Matthew 4:14–16

I remember getting my first flashlight. It was Christmas day, and when I opened the package, I thought I had gotten the greatest gift in the world as it opened an entirely new world. I can now send Morse Code messages at night to my best friend; I will never be lost at night and, to top it all off, now I can read when put to bed. If I pulled the blankets over my head, no one could see me. You can imagine what happened. While I thought I was in this hidden environment, the light escaped. Soon my parents took the flashlight during bedtime.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 4:14–16 “You are the light of the world – like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.” When we come to Him, we become that light to the world. But, what does this light look like to the world?

As our relationship develops with Christ, we learn to trust Him with everything. So, for me at work, I learned not to get upset when our company reorganized after bad results; I apologized when I messed up; I took the blame for mistakes; and I did not play games to try to get ahead. But these were just things I did as I tried to follow Jesus’ example. I was never sure if my colleagues noticed. Later it became clearer to me when a coworker who saw me as a bit of a rival, approached me and asked me to pray for his wife who had just been diagnosed with cancer. Why did he come to me? Because he saw the light and recognized its source.

So, just like me under my blanket, as we follow the example of Christ in our lives, His light will flow out of us in ways we may not even notice, but the world certainly will.

PRAYER: Lord, how often I shade the light or cover it completely. Please forgive these selfish moments. In this season of lights, help my light to be pure, unobscured, and lead others to the source of it all, you. Amen.

DECEMBER 29

Christmas is the Answer to Our Broken Expectations

By Daniel R. Spanjer, PhD

Professor & Chair, Arts & Sciences Department



Matthew 11:2–27

While this world ignores the true meaning of Christmas, we know that it is a celebration of creation's King come in a humble manger. And although we unabashedly make this claim, we often wrestle with our own expectations of Him. If that baby was the King, then why do Christians still suffer in a world that hates Him? As we grapple with our own expectations this Christmas, we may find ourselves sharing in John the Baptist's pained inquiry in Matthew 11:2, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" John was the first to herald the King, whose faith in Christ birthed our own. And yet John wanted a different Messiah than the one preaching and healing people in local cities while he languished in prison.

The problem with Christmas, it seems, is not its King but our broken expectations. Our fears and anxieties result from our desire to have a king like other nations (I Samuel 8:5) instead of having our expectations shaped by our King. After Jesus replies to John, He goes on to confirm His power and status – "all things have been handed over to me by my father" (Matthew 11:27). While John tried to understand Christ by looking first at his prison, Jesus' statement challenged John to first have faith in His kingship. Jesus may not be the Messiah we want because He is the One who changes our wants. He is both the King who came to set daughter against mother and the gentle shepherd who would not break the bruised reed. He is the Judge who tells the harlot to sin no more and the one who shields her from judgment. He is the Creator with unlimited power, who suffered execution by a puny Roman prefect. This Christmas may Christ break our petrified expectations with the beauty, wonder, and glory that are His alone.

PRAYER: We come before you, Mighty Lord, acknowledging that our expectations are sometimes so very wrong. We confess that you are the Lord of all and desire to reveal yourself in special ways so that we can know for sure it is you. Open our eyes and ears to your wonder and glory. Amen.

DECEMBER 30

An Invitation and Herod the Great

By Rick Rhoads, DMin

Professor & Chair, Church & Ministry Leadership Department



Matthew 2:1–18

It was a beautiful day along the Mediterranean coast and the first time I was about to see the great city of Caesarea Maritima. Caesarea, located in the modern land of Israel, was an ancient port city built by Herod the Great during his 33-year reign over the land of Judaea. Not long after arriving, I found myself standing in a 4,000-seat Roman theatre overlooking the crystal blue Sea. To say I was speechless would be an understatement! Thinking I had seen it all, I was shocked to realize this was just the tip of the iceberg as to what Herod the Great had built.

Over the coming days I would see, touch, and walk beside Herod's Palace... his swimming pool built into the Mediterranean Sea...his Temple Mount in Jerusalem providing the foundation for the second Temple...his primary palace known as the Herodian...and his desert palace escape known as Masada. To say each of these engineering feats demonstrate power is an understatement.

Over the years I have gained great insights on the power and dominance of Herod. Yet, this past April I was caught off guard by a peculiar and unique invitation. Upon entering the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, our guide looked at me and asked, "would you like to see the Cave of the Holy Innocents?" Honestly, I had no idea what he was talking about. He looked back at me and said, "The cave where all the baby boys under two were discarded after being killed by Herod the Great's soldiers."

Upon descending, before my very eyes were the skeletons of hundreds of infants. It was in this place where the invitation to faith struck me. Faith to believe in Jesus over Herod. Faith to believe in the baby laying in a manger over the King in his Palace. Faith to believe in a boy born from commoners over a King who had great might and power. Herod the Great was power. History ascribes Herod to be one of the world's greatest builders. And yet, it is in this shadow of dominance and power that the Messiah was born.

PRAYER: Dear Father, I pray that during this Christmas season, you will draw me closer to the understanding of your grand invitation to faith. May my eyes be opened, faith deepened, and a new sense of the simple truths of Christ's birth be renewed. Amen.

DECEMBER 31

Christ, The Hope of Glory

By Clint Banz, ThM

Associate Professor, Director of Library Services



Luke 1:46, 47, 49, 54, 55

When Mary heard the Holy Spirit-inspired greeting of Elizabeth, her cousin, she erupted in a psalm of praise to God from the depths of her soul. In this utterance, she declared her unqualified confidence in her Sovereign God.

Mary was not the first person in the Bible to declare her hope in God. She joins a host of believers who declared their implicit trust in God and who then experienced the confidence that believing His promises produced. She believed what had been revealed to her by the angel and was then supported by the Spirit-filled testimony of Elizabeth: namely, that her son would be the fulfillment of God promises.

Many who speak about hope today refer to something that is uncertain. Christian hope as taught in the Bible, however, is neither uncertain nor ambiguous. Rather it is a personal, confident expectation that we can be certain about, since it is a promise from our Sovereign God.

In the scriptures, hope often includes the idea of actively waiting. Waiting is something we find very difficult in our fast-paced, performance-oriented existence. Yet it is this kind of waiting that enables one to endure hardness, bear difficulty, and not be overwhelmed by temporal disappointments. Mary had hope, yet she would still have to endure many difficulties that Simeon described as a “sword” piercing “your own soul also” (Luke 2:35).

The birth of Jesus as the Messiah gave people hope. His teachings and His works confirmed that hope. While the cross seemed at first to contradict that hope, it eventually became the basis for that unique hope that in His death we died; therefore, in His resurrection, we have been raised to live as a new people of God *in Christ* – a people who now are forgiven, reconciled to God.

During this Christmas season, it is entirely appropriate for us to join Mary and the host of others to declare our confidence and hope in our great God, for “he who is mighty has done great things” for us!

PRAYER: Father, during this holy Christmas season, help us remember and reflect on your promises fulfilled in Christ Jesus; renew our hearts to rest with complete confidence in them. Amen.



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LBC | Capital is a premier academic institution offering a full range of collegiate programming from non-credit biblical enrichment courses, to bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs. Since 1933, the college has prepared both traditional students and adult learners to proclaim Christ by serving Him in the church and society. Our graduates are geographically and culturally diverse, serving as leaders in society and ministry worldwide.

Accredited through the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and the Association for Biblical Higher Education Commission on Accreditation, the college is also approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Association of Christian Schools International. LBC | Capital is approved to operate in Pennsylvania, Florida, Maryland and Tennessee. For more information, please visit lbc.edu



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