

2022

Advent
DEVOTIONALS



First Baptist Church
of New Bern

An Advent Gift for You

During the last two years we have asked family and friends of First Baptist Church of New Bern to write devotions based upon the daily revised common lectionary readings during the season of advent. This year, we decided to give folks more flexibility to choose a favorite hymn or scripture instead of being restricted to the lectionary readings. We think it worked! What makes this special is that these devotions were written by one of our church family. To God be the Glory!

Once again, we share this introduction of Advent:

Advent is the first season in the church calendar. Since the 7th century A.D., Christians have included this celebration in their preparation for Christmas Day.

Beginning four Sundays before Christmas, its purpose is twofold: first, it prepares us for the celebration of the birth of Christ and second, it reminds us that we are eagerly waiting for Jesus' return in glory.

The word "advent" originates from the Latin word *advenio* which means *coming to*. Advent is the time when we focus on Christ coming to the world. Throughout history, the Israelites anticipated the coming of their Messiah. In the Old Testament, over 400 scriptures and prophecies outline His birth, life, death, resurrection, and return. God had a plan to redeem His people. He declared His plan to His prophets over the centuries and is fulfilling His Word even now.

"Prepare the way of the Lord" serves as a main theme of this season. As we get ready for Christmas, we should not neglect to prepare our lives for Jesus, who came as "the light of the world." His light penetrated a dark world, which allowed all to see their Messiah, and the hope of their future.

Today we need to be prepared for the coming of Christ. Learning more about what the Bible reveals about Christ's return will enable us to understand the possible significance of world events.

Christian Education Committee

Catherine Alligood

Jo Ann Banks

Allyson Blalock

Mallory Compton

Amy Price

John Rausch, Devotion Editor

Lee Ann Smith, Sunday School Director

Kerry Peeler, Associate Pastor

CCLI # 724141

November 27

Love Came Down

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

-John 3:16

Love came down at Christmas

Love all lovely, love divine

Love was born at Christmas

Star and angels gave the sign.

-Christina Rosseti

That's really what it's all about, isn't it?

Paul, who was 4 ½ years old at the time, said to his mother, "Momma, I love Christmas almost as much as I love you." His mom said, "Well, tell me Paul, what you love about Christmas." And Paul answered, "I love the lights. I love the presents, and Mom, there's one more thing and you are going to like this best... most of all I love the Baby Jesus."

Paul was right. His mom did like that best, because she had taught him and his sister that Jesus is the reason for the season. Indeed so! He is God's gift to the world... the gift of the Savior... a gift money can't buy.

Socrates taught for 40 years,

Plato for 50,

Aristotle for 40,

And Jesus for only 3.

Yet the influence of Christ's 3-year ministry infinitely transcends the impact left by the combined 130 years of teaching of these greatest philosophers of all antiquity.

- Jesus painted no pictures, yet the finest paintings of Raphael, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci received their inspiration from Him.
- Jesus wrote no poetry, but Dante, Milton, and scores of the world's greatest poets were inspired by Him.
- Jesus composed no music; still Haydn, Handel, Beethoven, Bach, and Mendelssohn reached their highest perfection of melody in the hymns, symphonies, and oratorios they composed in his praise.

Every sphere of human greatness has been enriched by this humble carpenter of Nazareth.

Love Came Down...God with Us...The gift of Christ... no question about it...that is the best Christmas gift of all! Let's celebrate that Good News throughout the seasons of Advent and Christmas here at First Baptist Church!

Pastor Seagle

November 28

Titles of Christ - Isaiah 9:6

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Four specific titles were given describing the attributes they could expect of their coming Messiah-King. In the Old Testament, names were a commentary on one's character or the very essence of one's being, and this verse gives us insights into the very Son of God Himself.

"Wonderful" is defined as something extraordinary, astounding, or incomprehensible causing great amazement. Jesus was wonderful in every sense of the word. He was wonderful in His teaching, His character, and His life.

A "counselor" is trained to listen to people and give them advice about their problems. A good counselor will listen, empathize, and point the way to healing while perfectly balancing grace and truth. In Jesus, we have a Counselor who promises to never leave nor forsake us and to guide us into all truth. Having come to earth as the very personification of divine wisdom, how foolish we would be not to seek His counsel.

The title "Mighty God" speaks of Messiah's heroic nature and sovereign might. "Mighty God" means "all powerful" and describes divine omnipotence. Jesus Christ is God and He is "Mighty God."

As "Wonderful", He is beyond human understanding, as "Counselor", He has all knowledge, and as the "Mighty God", He has all power. God's mighty power is available today through His Son Jesus Christ. Whatever may be your burden or battle today, God has the power to meet it, handle it, solve it, and use it for your good and His glory.

The idea in the title "Everlasting Father" is that Jesus is the source or author of all eternity, that He is the Creator Himself. Here Isaiah is highlighting the divine nature of the Messiah by calling Him "Father." It is because of His everlastingness that He can make all who believe in Him the recipients of everlasting life. The Father of eternity became the Babe of Bethlehem, and because He lives and has ever lived, we also can live. Jesus is the one whose rule will bring peace.

The title "Prince of Peace" speaks to the deepest needs of the human heart. Could anything be more welcome in this time of unrest and uncertainty than the coming of the Prince of Peace? Not only does Jesus make peace between God and sinners, but He gives peace to all the subjects of His Kingdom by graciously inviting us to cast all our cares upon Him. Let us all rejoice that Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace brings His own into a Kingdom of eternal peace.

Ronnie Pollard

November 29

God's Gifts

“And the angel said to them, ‘Fear Not’ for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.”

Luke 2:10

In God's infinite love for mankind that he created in His image, he had a plan already laid out from day one of creation (and before) and down through the centuries. His Gift of free will to each of us has provided a most colorful past of God's chosen people (the Israelites) following God's laws and directions...until they chose to leave him and follow their chosen idols. This has continued throughout these centuries; and even to today. But in God's redemptive love, forgiveness, and mercy, He had chosen individuals (that didn't usually want to; or think they could) serve as his leaders to bring these children back, like lost sheep to him, and to live according to His word once again.

In God's Word, Matthew 1:18-25, we read of the prophesied news of the birth of a Savior. “The Birth of Jesus the Messiah...occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through the prophet. “Look! The virgin (Mary) will conceive a child! She will give birth to a Son, and they (Joseph) will call Him Immanuel, which means, ‘God is With Us’.” (Vs. 23)

This happened in the little town of “Oh Little Town of Bethlehem.” Mary and Joseph traveled there to pay their taxes; but couldn't even find an inn to stay. The innkeeper directed them to a stable behind him where they could try to stay warm and safe and sleep.

Here our Beloved Savior “Jesus” was born among the animals (part of his original creation).

The Bible is God's Holy Word. It is full of history, truth, His promises, wisdom and other prophetic messages. It is to help guide us through our life in this world full of temptations and snares.

The Great News, however, is that our loving God offered his only son to be born of a virgin to us. To live a life on earth among man and Satan's snares. To preach and teach His Word of God and guide and train his disciples so that His word would continue all the way to today ~ to us.

Jesus allowed himself to be cruelly and unjustly crucified. But after three days He was resurrected to live and serve at the right hand of God, and to give us The Holy Spirit as our continual comforter.

The Bible tells us in I Thessalonians 4:13-18... We have the Hope of the Resurrection. When no man or angel knows—Jesus will come to earth and take his believers (dead and alive) to Heaven to live with Him eternally.

May each of us know Him personally and Thank Him for this special Gift, called Salvation. His Grace offered to each of us.

Father, again in this Advent season, we celebrate your birth, life and Grace.
Thank you.

Merry Christmas,

Joy Duff

November 30

Count Your Blessings!

As I sit here getting ready for the “rush of the holiday season,” it occurred to me that we all need to “Count our Blessings.” The hymn by that name should really make us stop and think.

When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

Refrain:

Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your blessings, see what God hath done;
Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.

Are you ever burdened with a load of care?
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
Count your many blessings, ev'ry doubt will fly,
And you will be singing as the days go by. [Refrain]

When you look at others with their lands and gold,
Think that Christ has promised you His wealth untold;
Count your many blessings, money cannot buy
Your reward in heaven, nor your home on high. [Refrain]

So, amid the conflict, whether great or small,
Do not be discouraged, God is over all;
Count your many blessings, angels will attend,
Help and comfort give you to your journey's end. [Refrain]

By Jonathan Oatman, 1856-1922

Stop and count your blessings!

Amen

Terry Hall

December 1

Was it a “Silent Night,” really?

Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright.
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child.
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

I absolutely love singing “Silent Night” during the Christmas season, especially on Christmas Eve. The candlelight recession begins out of the church. The children are also excited that Santa is on his way.

If you’re like me, when you sing this classic hymn, you imagine a small Bethlehem village off in the distance, stars twinkling, and a hush over the land, maybe even snow falling and dusting the ground. I also picture Mary, dressed perfectly in her blue mantel, Jesus never whimpering or waking her up in the night, and Joseph knowing how to meet every single need of Mary’s before she could think to ask. I picture Mary confident and never questioning herself, knowing exactly how to care for this new baby who is dependent on her to meet His every need, and sleeping in heavenly peace. And as I say these things out loud, it makes me laugh and I wonder, how silent was the night Jesus was born, really?

The idea of a “Silent Night” is picturesque. It is comfortable, easy and beautiful. Personally, I’d rather brush past the whispers of divorce from Joseph, the idea of a virgin with labor pains, the deterioration of Mary’s reputation by those who wouldn’t believe her. I can’t imagine the inadequacies felt by Mary and Joseph to care for this new baby, that was actually God wrapped in flesh, who also got hungry in the middle of the night and needed His swaddling cloths changed all too frequently. That night and the nights leading up to the birth and the nights following it were hard and likely rarely silent.

This Christmas, as we sing “Silent Night,” may we push ourselves past the picturesque, comfortable manger scene and remind ourselves of the sacrifices that a young woman and her new husband made. May we remember the cost that they paid to follow God’s will for their lives and how it changed the world.

How do you picture the “Silent Night” that Jesus was born? Take a few minutes and think about what it must have really been like that night, even choosing to ponder the hard and uncomfortable parts that we’d prefer to gloss over, especially during the holidays.

Elizabeth Swicegood

December 2

Sweet, Sweet Spirit

We were walking in the footsteps of Jesus, renewing our Baptismal vows at the River Jordan, and celebrating Eucharist beside the sea of Galilee. We saw the awesome desolation of the Judean Wilderness where Christ was tempted by Satan, the hillside where we sat among the wildflowers where Jesus spoke to the multitudes, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher built on the place called Golgotha. Everywhere, we experienced the overwhelming presence of Jesus. But nowhere did we feel it more than at the church “traditionally viewed” as the location of the room where the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples. No one spoke. It was as though we were listening for the sound of rushing wind.

Then in the quiet, someone began to sing. “There’s a sweet, sweet spirit in this place ---” We joined in, and as we stood there singing, tears streaming down our faces, we were both overcome by a feeling of connectedness to all the pilgrims, who for centuries had come to this place where the Christian church is thought to have been born.

Was this really the exact room where the Holy Spirit descended in tongues of flame? We don’t know. Does it matter? Not to us. It is enough that we were in the place where countless faithful believers have come to kneel, to pray, and to receive the blessing of the Sweet, Sweet Spirit of God.

*There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place,
And I know that it's the Spirit of the Lord;
There are sweet expressions on each face,
And I know they feel the presence of the Lord.*

*Chorus- Sweet Holy Spirit, Sweet heavenly Dove,
Stay right here with us, filling us with Your love.
And for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise;
Without a doubt we'll know that we have been revived,
When we shall leave this place.*

*There are blessings you cannot receive
Till you know Him in His fullness and believe;
You're the one to profit when you say,
"I am going to walk with Jesus all the way."*

*If you say He saved you from your sin,
Now you're weak, you're bound and cannot enter in,
You can make it right if you will yield,
You'll enjoy the Holy Spirit that we feel.*

Songwriters: Doris Akers, Arranged Peter Link. For non-commercial use only.

Ed & MaryAnn Stinson

December 3

Joy to the World! The Lord is Come!

“Joy to the World” was written by Isaac Watts and is considered by many to be one of the greatest hymns of all time. It is sung by people all over the world at Christmas time to commemorate the birth of Jesus. A lot of people would probably be surprised that “Joy to the World” was not meant to be a Christmas song.

The Hymn is based on Psalm 98 which is not about the birth of Christ, but rather His return. The two comings of Christ are connected historically and theologically making the other more meaningful. Therefore, the sentiments expressed in this beloved hymn can apply to the birth of Jesus as well as His return. “Joy to the World” helps us to understand this and encourages all believers to break out into joyful song looking back to the birth of Christ with gratitude and faith and looking forward to Christ’s return with hope and anticipation.

The birth of our Savior sets the stage for His Second Coming when He returns in glory to establish His perfect Kingdom where there will be no more tears, sorrow, pain, or death. The hymn’s final stanza speaks of how life will be in the eternal Kingdom under the perfect rule of Christ as He rules with truth and grace. Christmas is a time to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior. But the greatest gift God offered the world was not just the birth of His Son Jesus, but was the salvation offered by His death, burial, and resurrection. That is what “Joy to The World” is meant to remind us of. The birth of Christ was the beginning of His mission to save the world. When He returns, He will claim complete victory over evil once and for all. “Joy To the World” remains one of the favorite hymns sung during the Christmas season. Let us all rejoice this Advent season at the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ as we anxiously await His return when the “earth receives her King.”

Ronnie Pollard

When I think of *peace*... words like harmony, serenity, tranquility come to mind. The season of Advent and Christmas has always been one of my favorite times of the year. Although I stay very busy planning special musical events, rehearsing choirs and getting programs to the press, I find myself more relaxed. Music soothes my soul and gives me peace.

I would like to share one of my favorite Christmas anthems that I have come to treasure over the years. The text to *Peace Will Come* was written by Terry York in 1987 and the music was composed by David Danner in 1988. I would like to invite you to take a moment and reflect upon these words...

Peace Will Come

Peace will come to those who let the Son of God be born
to them, born to them; born in their hearts, their homes, their lives.
Christmas comes, Christmas comes when we hear the still, small voice of God.

Deep inside the Spirit's carol sings to us, "Make room for Him,
room for Him; room in your heart, your home, your life."
Christmas comes, Christmas comes when we hear the still, small voice of God.

Some will notice, but not know what they hear; others hear a
voice from distant past. Still others choose to listen and heed the voice's words.
Peace will come, Christmas comes when we hear the still, small voice of God.

Peace will come to those who let the Son of God be born
to them, born to them; born in their hearts, their homes, their lives.
Christmas comes, Christmas comes when we hear the still, small voice of God.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we find these words:

"I pray that...the Messiah may dwell in your hearts through faith."
Ephesians 3:16-17

As we go about our daily activities during the Advent season, I encourage each of us to take a moment and reflect upon the gift that was given at Christmas. May the Christ-child come and dwell in our hearts today and forevermore.

Rev. Barry E. Templeton

December 5

Emmanuel, God with Us

“Behold the virgin shall conceive a Son and shall call His name Immanuel, God with us.”

Isaiah 7:14b

Emmanuel, Emmanuel

Emmanuel, Emmanuel, His Name is called Emmanuel.

God with us, revealed in us, His Name is called Emmanuel.

© Bob McGee 1976

Starting about five years ago, my vigorous health was interrupted by what would be a series of many challenges. Along the way of this journey, there have been both highs and lows. Sometimes the news from my doctors was very good, and other times not as good as I wanted to hear. So often I felt like me and my family were on a roller coaster – up and down. What has made a difference each and every day? A good God, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

There have been times when the days have been hard and I have been down and tempted to despair. I have learned to tell myself to just stop, pray, and make a “thrust of trust” in the Lord. I once heard someone say that phrase and I love it. I may not have been instantly given hope again, but soon the Holy Spirit by His Power alone lifts me, gives my heart hope once again, and I know all will be well. You see, God made me, loves me, sees me and knows what is best for me and my family, and provides. He will never leave me. I can count on that.

The chorus, “Emmanuel, Emmanuel, God with Us” has a short but powerful message. God who loved His prized creation, man, sent His only Son, Jesus, to earth, to not only be with us, but to be in us- giving us hope, help, and victory.

Hallelujah!

Lynn Rausch

December 6

O Little Town of Bethlehem

“But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah,

From you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel

Whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Micah 5:2

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means

The least among the rulers of Judah;

For from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd

My people Israel.” Matthew 2:6

The little town of Bethlehem – its name means “House of Bread.” Probably there were farmers, millers, and bakers there who supplied bread to nearby Jerusalem.

The little town of Bethlehem has a long and distinguished history. It was the adopted hometown of Ruth, who met who met and married Boaz in Bethlehem. Ruth gave birth to a son, Obed there. He would become the grandfather of a humble shepherd boy who rose to become Israel’s great King David.

The little of town of Bethlehem was known, along with Jerusalem as “The City of David.” However, it was a rather obscure little village until the pagan leader, Caesar Augustus, ordered a census to be taken. This required Mary and Joseph to leave their Nazareth home and register at the hometown of Joseph’s ancestor David. Descendants of David were apparently numerous enough to fill the lodging facilities of the town.

So it was, that in a stable, the name of the little town of Bethlehem became synonymous with hope and peace to men on earth. “For the Christ was born of Mary.” As angels kept their watch – the promise made by Micah - the promise of a king who would shepherd his people and bring them peace – was fulfilled.

With the birth of Jesus came the certain promise of “peace on earth, good will to men.” That promise has sustained God’s people in exile, in war, and in adversity over the centuries. During this Advent season, we remember the words of Micah and believe that from Bethlehem came the Shepherd King, the Man of Peace. We long for the day when peace will reign on earth. God, make us instruments of your peace.

O Holy child of Bethlehem, descend on us, we pray.

Cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell.

O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord, Emmanuel. Amen

Susan Trout

December 7

On Eagles' Wings*

I first heard this song in the early '80s when I was in my mid-20s. I was a member of Christ Episcopal Church at the time and the song really moved me. I was young, single and had so many unknowns about life ahead of me. Would I be successful in my career? Would I get married and raise a family? Would I ever be able to afford a house? Thankfully, through God's blessings, all these concerns worked out in my favor.

I found the song to very soothing and as I sang it, many times it would make me cry. I found the lyrics of the refrain to be very meaningful, they are as follows: "And He will raise you up on eagle's wings/ bear you on the breath of dawn/ make you to shine like the sun/ and hold you in the palm of His hand."

When I first heard this song, it brought a tremendous amount of peace and calmness to my soul. I felt that somehow, someday, God would take care of me and be with me as I navigated my way through life. And now 40 years later, as look back on my life, I see that he did just that. He was with me every step of the way and I'm so thankful that He was.

But even today, with the complexities of life, my self-doubts and insecurities start to creep in and anxiety starts to overwhelm me. I have to look back and recall that God has always been with me and remember the words to this song.

Just imagine yourself soaring high above the clouds on eagle's wings, gradually the sun appears, and a beautiful dawn occurs. The orange glow of the sun radiates off you, and lastly you have the sensation of God holding you in the palm of His hand.

What a wonderful and powerful image. God is so powerful, yet so loving. He cares so much about us, that he will hold us in the "palm of his hand."

That is my prayer for you, that you will feel the same peace and calmness that I get from this song. That when the chips are down and times are tough, you will remember how much God really does love you and care about you. And he WILL hold you in the palm of His hand.

May you feel God's peace not only during this Advent season, but throughout the upcoming year.

God bless you and Merry Christmas!!

John Duff

December 8

What's on Your Bucket List?

Matthew 20:18 “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

I have always wanted to sing in a choir, but never had the courage to do so until I saw the Sun Journal advertisement about joining a Christmas Choir! I was excited and nervous, because I don't know how to read music and the rehearsals were at a church I didn't attend. I was unsure why the Lord had put it on my heart to take that leap of faith, but I showed up on that night in August. When Paul Saik asked me what part I usually sing, I looked at him like he was crazy. How did I know what part I sing? I haven't done this before. He placed me in the Alto section where several people quickly introduced themselves. Then I found out that the performance was the same day we would be boarding a Christmas cruise. Paul said not to worry about it but to stay and enjoy being a part of the choir whether I was there for the performance or not. So, I stayed.

Fast forward a few months to my dad's last few days of battling bladder cancer. I was in shock and could not imagine a world without my dad. He was a rock for my whole family. We made many trips to Southport and Wilmington to support him and my mom. When I could make it to rehearsal, choir members would tell me they were praying for all of us. If I didn't make it to rehearsal, I would get emails saying they were lifting us up to the lord and asking if we needed anything. It was fabulous to know that we had a group of fellow believers that were standing in the gap when we needed support. On Saturday, November 23, 2019, my dad passed peacefully on his terms, and with us by his side. When we got home the next day, there were meals in our freezer, cards and flowers outside our door. When I went to rehearsal that afternoon, Paul greeted me with a hug and asked why I was there. I told him I needed a change of scenery and to listen to the beautiful music we had been working on. Being showered with all that love, made the weekend just a tiny bit easier.

As planned, we went on our Christmas cruise the day of the performance. Fortunately, Alec and Tucker attended the dress rehearsal, and heard the choir perform the beautiful cantata, that I was a part of. I was hooked! Christmas Choir is a part of my life for the foreseeable future.

What the Lord made evident is that I was meant to be a part of this choir surrounded by these amazing people. I never would have guessed in August of 2019 that this group of strangers would become family and a source of strength for me. God knew I needed to be a part of a community, and the choir has made my journey so much better. This group of many, gathered in His name, is exactly what I need. It is what we all need. We need to surround ourselves with fellow believers who are gathered in His name. People who will pray, rejoice, and mourn with you. We can't do it alone. I am thankful the Lord pushed me to attend that 1st rehearsal, because it was where I needed to be for the days ahead. Plus, I checked something off my bucket list!

Tammi Newton

December 9

Hymns: Bells a King

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1807-1822

And He will be their peace—Micah 5:5 NIV

I heard the bells on Christmas day Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat Of peace on earth, good will to men.

I thought how, as the day had come, The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along th'unbroken song Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And in despair I bowed my head: "There is no peace on earth," I said,
"For hate is strong, and mocks the song Of peace on earth, good will to men."

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."

Till, ringing, singing on its way, The world revolved from night to day
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime, Of peace on earth, good will to men.

The Birthday of a King

By William Harold Neidlinger, 1863-1924

"I will raise up... a King who will reign wisely"- Jeremiah 23:5 NIV

In the little village of Bethlehem, There lay a Child one day,
And the sky was bright with a holy light O'er the place where Jesus lay.

Refrain:

Alleluia! O how the angels sang. Alleluia! How it rang!
And the sky was bright with a holy light, 'Twas the birthday of a King.

'Twas a humble birthplace, but O how much God gave to us that day,
From the manger bed what a path has led, What a perfect, holy way. [Refrain]

December 10

“Glory to God in the Highest”

*Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,
praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good
will toward men.” Luke 2: 13-14*

When we think of Christmas, we think of the angels proclaiming peace on earth. Sadly, most of the time there isn't peace and good will among the contentious people and nations of the world. Certainly, peace and good will were scarce in Massachusetts on Christmas Day in 1863 when Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned his famous poem, “Christmas Bells,” which is the basis of the carol “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.” The Civil War was raging, and in October Longfellow's wife had perished in a fire that also burned the poet's face. To make matters worse, his son had been seriously wounded fighting for the Union, against his father's wishes, in November. It definitely hadn't been a merry Christmas for the Longfellow family.

On a Christmas night, Longfellow wrote that the cannons of war had drowned the carols of peace, that “it was as if an earthquake rent the hearthstones of a continent.” His grief and pessimism are clear in the next-to-last stanza:

*And in despair I bowed my head.
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"*

But that isn't how the poem ends. Much like many of David's psalms that begin in frustration and despair and end in hope and praise, Longfellow's final stanza proclaims a change of heart and reveals a different message from the ringing bells:

*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."*

Throughout this Advent season, may we cling to the promise from the Alpha and Omega that in God's good time, peace and good will indeed pervade the earth.

Amy Price

December 11

O Beautiful Star of Bethlehem

“O beautiful star of Bethlehem, Shining afar through shadows dimmed,
Giving the light for those who long have gone, Guiding the wise men on their way,
Unto the place where Jesus lay. O beautiful star of Bethlehem Shine on.

Guiding the pilgrims through the night Over the mountains 'til the break of dawn
Into the land of perfect day It will give out a lovely ray O beautiful star of Bethlehem Shine on

CHORUS

O beautiful star of Bethlehem Shine upon earth until the glory dawns
Give us a lamp to light the way Unto the land of perfect day
O beautiful star of Bethlehem Shine on.

O beautiful star the hope of rest For the redeemed, the good and the blessed
Yonder in glory when the crown is won Jesus is now the star divine
Brighter and brighter He will shine O beautiful star of Bethlehem Shine on.”

By A.J. Phillips

My father was a hard working “Type A” personality who spent hours every day and most nights sitting at his drafting board in his home office, or in his Civil Engineering Firm’s downtown Clayton office. His business was so incredibly successful and busy with all of the development around the Raleigh and Clayton area, that it left little time for relaxation and family time.

December 26, 1992 was a turning point for our family when he died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of 50. One of my most treasured memories, is December 25th, the night before his death. My brother and I had given him a new stereo for the home office. My dad and I sat in his office and listened to some of his favorite bluegrass music on the radio. He was a fan of the Pinecone Bluegrass Show and we wanted to make sure the stereo was tuned in for it. He had a nice voice and loved to sing along when he could.

I have a very eclectic music taste which ranges from Christian, Country, Rock, Rap, Southern Gospel, Alternative, Classical to Bluegrass. I guess it depends on my mood for the moment. But, whenever I hear bluegrass at Christmas...especially a song like “Beautiful Star of Bethlehem” sung by Emmylou Harris, I am reminded of my dad and that night sitting with him in his home office listening to bluegrass music.

My father was a pilgrim guided by the “beautiful star the hope of rest...For the redeemed, the good and the blessed...Yonder in glory when the crown is won... Jesus is now the star divine...Brighter and brighter He will shine...O beautiful star of Bethlehem Shine on.”

Kelly Brinson

December 12

So Will I (100 billion Times)

God of creation, there at the start, before the beginning of time, with no point of reference. You spoke to the dark and fleshed out the wonder of light. And as You speak a hundred billion galaxies are born in the vapor of Your breath the planets form. If the stars were made to worship, so will I. I can see Your heart in everything You've made. Every burning star A signal fire of grace. If creation sings Your praises, so will I. God of Your promise You don't speak in vain. No syllable empty or void, for once You have spoken, all nature and science Follow the sound of Your voice. And as You speak, a hundred billion creatures catch Your breath, evolving in pursuit of what You said. If it all reveals Your nature, so will I. I can see Your heart in everything You say, every painted sky a canvas of Your grace. If creation still obeys You, so will I. So will I. So will I.

If the stars were made to worship, so will I. If the mountains bow in reverence, so will I. If the oceans roar Your greatness, so will I. For if everything exists to lift You high, so will I. If the wind goes where You send it, so will I.

If the rocks cry out in silence, so will I. If the sum of all our praises still falls shy, Then we'll sing again a hundred billion times

God of salvation You chased down my heart Through all of my failure and pride. On a hill You created The Light of the world abandoned in darkness to die. And as You speak, a hundred billion failures disappear. Where You lost Your life so I could find it here. If You left the grave behind You, so will I. I can see Your heart in everything You've done, Every part designed in a work of art called love If You gladly chose surrender, so will I. I can see Your heart, a billion different ways.

Every precious one, a child You died to save.

And if You gave Your life to love them so will I, like You would again a hundred billion times. But what measure could amount to Your desire? You're the One who never leaves the one behind.

Songwriters: Joel Houston, Michael Fatkin, Benjamin Hastings. For non-commercial use only.

Christmas is by far my favorite time of year. The nostalgia that it brings, the good feelings it generates in so many, and the music that we all love to sing along with year after year. I am one of those that begins playing Christmas music too early, typically even before Thanksgiving. There is just something about hearing a carol and makes the moment warm. I love to sing the old carols at church and the traditions of our Christmas Eve service. Joy to the World, Hark the Harold Angle Sings, Silent Night, Noel, and my most favorite Oh Holy Night. I could easily write a devotional on each of these that would mirror the season, but the song I chose is a little different. Many of you may not have even heard it because it is certainly more contemporary, and those that have would not tie it to Christmas. But the hymn, *So Will I*, brings a tear to my eye every time I hear it play on the radio. It reminds us that God created this vast Universe, this wonderful world we live, and all life on it by simply speaking all into existence. Billions upon billions of things that He made to worship him, yet we fall so short of deserving all He has done for us. God could easily have given up on us and moved on, but he did not.

That is where this song speaks to me. It sings, "*God of salvation, You chased down my heart through all of my failure and pride. On a hill You created The Light of the world abandoned in darkness to die*". God loves us so much that he gave us His only Son during this season to do what we could not. Jesus came to us in Love and left us in Love. Think about it, on a hill He created, the Light of the world abandoned in darkness to die.

I hope that you enjoy this Christmas season. Surround yourself with family and friends, give joyfully and eat too much. But we must remember that Christmas would not mean as much if Easter did not follow. God loves us so much that He died for us on a lonesome hill He created so that we could have eternal life with him. What a wonderful God we serve!

God bless you all and I wish you and yours a very Merry Christmas, Joey Holton

December 13

Love Came Down

There are many ways that our family celebrates Christmas. This year will be the second year in many years that we will be blessed to have a little one around. Of course, we as Christians think of Christmas as a holiday focused on the celebration of the birth of a baby boy. This Holy child, of course, is our Savior Jesus Christ. We as a family exchange gifts, eat home-made treats, visit our friends and worship together.

For Christians this celebration is a strong reminder that over 2,000 years ago God sent his only Son to live among us and to save us from our sins. He loved us this much, and He wants us to remember that He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. His loving message has never changed, and this message is to be shared with anyone who is willing to listen. We cannot strive for perfection because it is not possible meaning that not a single one of us is perfect. However, we can strive for the good of all men and to be more like His Son Jesus.

A baby is such a gift! What other gift could anyone cherish more than a new life. A life that is without sin, without any faults or judgements. Does this represent our Savior Jesus? Yes, the only perfect one. He came down to be with us, to walk with us, to teach us, and to show us the way to eternal life with Him.

Merry Christmas Everyone!

Love,

Joe and Cathy Chitty Pike

December 14

A Lesson Learned

“I applied my heart to what I observed, and learned a lesson from what I saw.” Proverbs 24:32

Some of my earliest memories are of watching others around me and the choices they made. Some I wanted to emulate, others I knew were choices I would regret later. I remember falling overboard when I was 4 or 5, and my brother jumping in to save me. I remember watching my dad lay bricks for a walkway using strings and a big mallet to make things level. I remember in kindergarten when a classmate stole my racecar for show-n-tell from my locker, and the teacher didn't believe me when I told her. I remember watching my dad be one of the wisemen at Christmas. I remember the first inappropriate joke my grandfather told me, and my mom telling me that was a joke I couldn't tell most people. In college I remember talking to an atheist, and him stating that “believing in a higher power is the greatest insult to human intelligence.” I remember my future-wife standing on a chair to share announcements with our church group, and reminding people that communication is a two-way street. Recently, I remembered my son staying for the second half of a special needs' basketball game as the mascot to cheer on the players, when the cheer team was only expected to stay for the first half.

These are just a few of the memories that have shaped me into the person I am today. Reflecting on Proverbs 24:32 I understand that these individuals didn't know they were teaching me, but I learned (or was reminded of) something important. I learned that sometimes jumping ship to save someone is the right choice. I learned that attention to detail is important for a reliable path, and that a mallet may be occasionally needed. I learned to protect what I value, and that giving someone a reason to question my integrity means they will question it. I learned that its ok to be in the spotlight sharing my faith to serve others. I learned that hearing inappropriate things doesn't make me inappropriate, it's how I chose to use that information that reflects who I am. I learned that faith requires self-confidence, acknowledging that I don't know everything, and to trust my intuition more often than my instinct for selfishness. I learned that standing in a chair gets people's attention, and that I can't expect others to know my needs if I'm not willing to talk to them. I was reminded that sharing my time with others shows them they are valued, and to put my energy into what I am doing.

The birth, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus are lessons that will impact my life and heart for eternity. I learn (and am reminded) about these lessons through reading His word, hearing sermons, and spending time with fellow believers who are likely wiser than me. Christmas reminds me of the beginning of His lessons, and that every day afterwards is an opportunity to learn about Him, and to emulate Him. Jesus spent a lot of time in fellowship, and a lot of time in solitary prayer. I try to seek out fellowship opportunities by being in the pew on Sundays, attending Sunday school regularly, going to Wednesday night suppers, and spending time with fellow believers. I try to pray often and show gratitude for everything in my life. Jesus loved the world with all His heart, so my goal is to use my heart to love others, learn from Him, as well as those He put in my life. Amen.

Alec Newton

December 15

Fully Satisfied

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life.” John 3:16 NRSV

“A certain man died and in a final measure of free will. St. Peter at the pearly gate gives the man one last chance to choose spending eternity in either Heaven or Hell. "Can I see what I am choosing?" asks the man. St. Peter takes the man into a large banquet hall. The long table down the center is filled with the most delicious of all foods, every imaginable sort of meats and fishes and fowls, vegetables cooked and raw, casseroles and soups, baked and fried foods and grains, fresh fruits and nuts, and innumerable varieties of desserts and drinks. "This is heaven!" proclaimed St Peter.

He then led the man to an identical banquet hall where he announced to the man that this was hell. "But they are exactly the same!" protested the man, "No differences down to the exact same condiments." Just then, the residents of Hell marched into the banquet hall. Their drawn faces matched their weathered bodies. Strapped to their arms were large 3-foot long forks and spoons that covered their hands, making it impossible for each resident to get food directly to their mouth. A bell rang and the bedlam began. The hungry did everything they could to get food into their mouths. Food was being tossed into the air, rolling down arms, what a mess. Another bell rang and the residents of Hell marched out unsatisfied.

"Is heaven any different?" the man asked disappointedly as he remembered the other identical banquet hall. St. Peter led the man back to Heaven's room just in time to see its residents happily come in with identical 3-foot forks and spoons attached to their arms and hands. Once all were in place, a bell rang. The residents of heaven then bowed their heads, gave thanks for the bounteous meal, and proceeded to scoop up the food in front of them and give away all they had into the mouths of their neighbors until everyone was filled. When the final bell rang, the residents of heaven walked away happy, fully satisfied, singing praises to God.

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.”
John 13:35 NRSV

Brant Bills

December 16

Are You Highly Favored?

²⁶ Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And having come in, the angel said to her,

“Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” NKJV

Mary was highly favored by God (Lk 1:28), and she had an amazing life journey – one like no one else who ever lived. She lived in the small town of Nazareth. She was looking forward to her wedding to Joseph, the carpenter, followed by a quiet life with her husband and children. Then her world was turned upside down by a visit from the angel, Gabriel, who told her that she was chosen by God to be the mother of His Son. The reason she was chosen is known only by God. She would have to be obedient and courageous. And she was. We also know by her son (Luke 1:46-55) that she was a woman of faith and the scriptures.

Her journey through life was not an easy one. We know she was widowed at a young age as Joseph is not mentioned after Jesus was 12 years old. Being a widow in the first century was not a good position to be in. Then she watched as her first born son was tortured and killed in the cruelest way. Gabriel had told her “The Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28). Therefore, Jesus provided for her from the cross charging John with her care (John 20:27).

Mary was favored by God for a task that would allow each of us to be favored. Through Jesus' sacrifice we can all be saved to spend eternity with Him. Truly we are favored by God our Father. What a wonderful Christmas gift, and it was Mary who delivered the package.

Vicki Lambert

December 17

Hymns: Silence and Light

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

From the liturgy of St James 5th century

Translated by Gerald Moultrie, 1829-1885

Let all mortal flesh keep silence, And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly minded, For with blessing in His hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth, Our full homage to demand.

Rank on rank the host of heaven Spreads its vanguard on the way,
As the Light of light descendeth From the realms of endless day,
That the pow'rs of hell may vanish As the darkness clears away.

At His feet the six-winged seraph; Cherubim, with sleepless eye,
Veil their faces to the Presence, As with ceaseless voice they cry,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Lord Most High.

Arise, Your Light Is Come

Ruth Carolyn Duck, b, 1947

Arise, your light is come! The Spirit's call obey;
Show forth the glory of your God, which shines on you today.

Arise, your light is come! Fling wide the prison door.
Proclaim the captives' liberty, Good tidings to the poor.

Arise, your light is come! All you in sorrow born,
Build up the broken-hearted ones And comfort those who mourn.

Arise, your light is come! The mountains burst in song!
Rise up like eagles on the wing; God's power will make us strong.

December 18

Joy in Community

This holiday season of Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas and Epiphany is an awesome opportunity for Christians to reflect on the powerful gift of Salvation God has given to us. Through past lectures at Campbell University Divinity School and even in the book *A Baptist's Theology* edited by Wayne Stacey that Men's First Light has been discussing, I am more convinced that Salvation is not only our justification through faith but also expands to include sanctification (spiritual growth and maturity) and glorification (our spiritual reward in this life and eternity.) This also makes the doctrine of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, more relevant in my life.

In our Adult Discipleship on Wednesday nights this Fall, I facilitated a group who expanded on this journey in Paul's letter to the church at Philippi. Paul's letter begins talking about the importance of having a relationship with God and other Christians:

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:3-6)

He reminds us that our ultimate example of Christian witness is Jesus, the Son:

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:5)

Paul keeps that theme of joy going even during times of opposition and suffering through the power of the Holy Spirit:

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)

Then he continues to be an example of putting our faith and trust in God:

¹⁰ I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:10-13)

That then makes glorification for us as Christians more than just a personal reward:

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! (Philippians 4:1)

Kerry Peeler

December 19

What Can I give Him, I Can Give Him my Heart

In the bleak midwinter frosty wind made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone:
snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain; heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes
to reign: in the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed the Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

Enough for him whom cherubim worship night and day, a breastful of milk and a mangerful of hay:
enough for him whom angels fall down before, the ox and ass and camel which adore.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there, cherubim and seraphim thronged the air,
but only his mother, in her maiden bliss, worshiped the Beloved with a kiss.

What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb,
if I were a wise man I would do my part, yet what I can I give him, give my heart.

Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830-1894)

The hymn *In the Bleak Midwinter* was written by Christina Rossetti around 1872. Rossetti is remarkable for several reasons: She was a widely respected female poet in a time when such figures were rare (it helped that her family members were also professors, artists, and printers). She turned down several suitors for religious reasons and lived with her devout mother her entire life. She had Graves disease—a thyroid disorder—and endured a mastectomy for breast cancer in a time when anesthesia was primitive. She was a woman who saw much of the emotional hardship that life has to offer, and it's easy to see her understanding of darkness in the early verses of this hymn.

What I find most moving about her work, though, is her unwavering focus on the heart of the believer. If a manger in bleak midwinter was enough for Christ, then we, too, can be content with what we have. If Christ was kissed and loved only by his young mother at first, so too can we be content with a small circle of people who truly love us. We don't need acclaim and glory. What we must remember is the last verse: the state of our heart matters most. You'll see this last stanza in numerous Christmas hymns because several hymn writers borrowed it in their own work. In fact, it's often used alone. But when you hear it, remember that it is really the endcap to a poem of darkness – despite loneliness or hardship, our hearts can be lightened with faith in Christ. He is bigger than anything we experience. As stanza 2 says, “Our God, heaven cannot hold Him nor earth sustain.”

Josie Doak

December 20

The Solid Rock

“...and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ .” 1 Corinthians 10:4 (NASB)

1 My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Refrain:

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand:
all other ground is sinking sand;
all other ground is sinking sand.

2 When darkness veils his lovely face,
I rest on his unchanging grace;
in every high and stormy gale,
my anchor holds within the veil. [Refrain]

3 His oath, his covenant, his blood,
support me in the whelming flood;
when all around my soul gives way,
he then is all my hope and stay. [Refrain]

4 When he shall come with trumpet sound,
O may I then in him be found:
dressed in his righteousness alone,
faultless to stand before the throne. [Refrain]

Text by Edward Mote, 1797-1874

Angel Marsh

December 21

Mindfulness

I “love” the holidays! Thanksgiving is not only turkey and gravy but being mindful and deliberate about God’s blessings. My list is long and includes family, friends, my career, my hobbies, my mission experiences, chocolate, coffee, books, and the list goes on. Then as soon as the leftovers are put away and the dishwasher is running it is time for Christmas.

Christmas has many distractions. I have to put my blessings list away to decorate, shop, cook, manage a very busy party schedule, mail out cards and try to sit down to watch a few favorite Christmas movies. Then when I do sit down, I am reminded to “be mindful and deliberate” in this holiday season as well.

Love comes down to us from heaven in such an extraordinary way:

- Love created us and knew us before we were born. (Genesis 1:27, Psalm 139:13,16, Jeremiah 1:4-5)
- Love gave us relationships, neighbors and friends. (Proverbs 17:17, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, John 15:12-15)
- Love came down to give us eternal life through Jesus Christ. (John 3:16)

So join me in “being mindful and deliberate” every day that LOVE came down for you and me.

Thank you, God, up above.

Lee Ann Smith

December 22

Our First-Born Son

TIME: Christmas Eve

PLACE: Newark-Wayne Community Hospital

REASON: Our first-born son

Fred sat with me in my hospital room that night. I had delivered a healthy son, all was well, and we were proud new parents. What more could I possibly want? A few months earlier, I had left my native New England home, a closely-knit family, and a network of friends to move to Newark, New York with Fred as he started his first professional job. Being over six months pregnant, not working, and in a new community, I had little opportunity to make friends. My obstetrician had left on a skiing trip with his family for a Christmas vacation. A few days earlier, he had given me the name and phone number to call in case I began labor before he got back. I did.

At the hospital on Christmas Eve with Fred and our new baby, there was a slight knock on the door. With a beautiful twinkle in his eye and a huge smile on his face, Reverend Lewien entered our lives. We had visited a few churches while in Newark looking for a church home, including Pastor Lewien's. He stayed with us that Christmas Eve and filled us with the joy that only Jesus can bring. I do remember worrying a bit. After all, it was Christmas Eve and I knew he had an 11:00 service to conduct and a family at home waiting for him. But he chose to give us his precious time on that beautiful night.

In many ways, that was the beginning of my understanding of the meaning of *church family*. That is to say, it is recognizing that a church family is more than just being a part of a church, or just going to church. We are, after all, apprentices to Jesus in his kingdom on earth. As Jesus shows his love through his Word and his contact with us, we can show the love of Jesus by being present in another's life. Fred and I joined that church family where we remained for 35 years, serving in the best ways in which the Holy Spirit had equipped us. What I learned from this is the importance of personal contact in showing the love of Jesus. It is being present for one another just as Reverend Lewien was in ours on that Christmas Eve.

Nancy Galway

December 23

Isaiah's Revelation

Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 9:6

I thank my God, who named His Son "Immanuel."
Living God is with us now.
He's one with us, abiding Grace.
Grace all-sufficient, boundless Love.
Thanks be to God, who loves His world.
Thanks for His Son Immanuel!

I thank my God, Who named His Son "Love's Wondrous Guide."
Light and Hope and Truth are here.
God sent forth Light of World with Hope.
Truth that His Wondrous Love is Life.
Thanks be to God, Who loves His world.
Thanks for His Son, Love's Wondrous Guide!

I thank my God, who named His Son "The Mighty God."
Great Physician now is here.
He creates hearts anew; restored.
Gives strength of Joy, and power of Grace.
Thanks be to God, who loves His world.
Thanks for His Son, The Mighty God!

I thank my God, who named His Son, "The Father Kind."
Father Eternal now with us.
He holds us close to tender heart.
Blesses with care and strong embrace.
Thanks be to God, who loves His world.
Thanks for His Son, The Father Kind!

I thank my God, who named His Son "The Prince of Peace."
Peace with God now made for us,
The Lamb of God is Prince of Peace,
Dying, yet rising from the tomb.
Thanks be to God, who loves His world.
Thanks for His Son, The Prince of Peace!

December 24

He Is Born

He is born, the holy Child; Play the oboe and bagpipes merrily!
He is born, the holy Child; Sing we all of the Savior mild.

Thro' long ages of the past, Prophets have foretold His coming.
Thro long ages of the past, Now the time has come at last!

O how lovely, O how pure Is this perfect Child of heaven
O how lovely, O how pure, Gracious gift to humankind!

Jesus, Lord of all the world, Coming as a Child among us;
Jesus, Lord of all the world, Grant to us Thy heav'nly peace.

Traditional French Carol, 19th Century

“He Is Born”, a carol of simplicity and deep meaning, reminds us to rejoice for the coming and presence of Jesus, the Son of God. It tells of our Savior’s, birth to Mary, an incredibly special and chosen woman of God. The scripture referenced in the hymn is from the second chapter of Luke. The better perspective can be accomplished by reading the entire passage, but the focus of my thoughts comes from Luke 2:10-11, “*But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior who is Christ the Lord.”* (NAS).

I appreciate this hymn text and the joy it describes in the Birth of the Savior. The tune commonly used is French Carol, 1870. It is a beautiful combination of text and melody. Though it was such a dangerous time in history for this magnificent event for Mary and Joseph and the infant Jesus. The entire universe recognized the Lord of all creation. Just as the star shown for the shepherds, it glows for us today. That light appears for us in the form Christian witness, faith, and the creation itself, a gift from God. Our world today also has overwhelming evil and darkness with many rejecting our Father’s presence and love. Many ‘lights’ shine reflecting God’s love and forgiveness today, but Jesus is the only light that can save. There is danger for Christians around the world in the sharing of Christ. Jesus still comes to us, abides in us, and calls us to lighten the darkness.

My hope is that we do not lose the sense of awe and wonder of that coming of the Christ Child, Jesus. It is true that difficulties and struggles are indeed real. Sin and rejection of Truth is close by and surrounds us. Troubles can pervade and distract. Health issues can derail. But the perfect Son of God, Christ Jesus, born of Mary, faced head for our salvation the evils of a lost world. He still of course comes to us, and abides in us. There is massive rejection of Truth in our world, as there was in the first century, and evil surrounds us. Jesus the Christ still loves us and accepts those who call on His Name. He suffered a cruel crucifixion on the cross and paid the sin price for us. Our forgiveness comes by asking Him to forgive us and by accepting that free gift of the Savior.

May the Lord make us instruments of God’s love and peace.

John Rausch

December 25

New and Exciting

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

James 1:17-18 (NIV)

This year on Christmas Day I challenge you to read James 1:17-18 in a new and exciting way! James, the half-brother of Jesus reminds us that in a world of uncertainty and continual change, God is the one and only constant who remains. Jesus is the good and perfect gift who came down from heaven and was sent to earth by our Heavenly Father. Of all the gifts that have ever been given and received throughout all of time, only one can be the perfect gift. God, our Heavenly Father, and Creator, who sent Jesus, the only perfect gift, past, present, and future shows how much we are loved and treasured, and we should share that same love with others.

If you feel like you do not know what to say just remember this, if you were the only person on this earth, God still would have without hesitation sent Jesus down from heaven to live, die, and be raised from the dead. Love came down to our level because we could never make it up to His. Jesus is love and He is why we have a Merry Christmas!

Merry Christmas!

Jeremy Slagle