

Advent Devotional 2011



WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

SECOND BAPTIST CHURCH

Liberty, MO

Preface



“What Child Is This?” asked English insurance man and poet William Chatterton Dix in 1865. By 1871, his question had been set to music. And now, so many years later, our pastor, Jason Edwards, has chosen the lyrical title of what has become a cherished carol to inspire our church’s 2011 Advent worship; to inspire our Advent Booklet, too.

In these pages we will wonder with Mr. Dix and Jason for a while, “What child is this . . . whom shepherds guard and angels sing?” Then we will celebrate with renewed gladness the answer in all its rhyming truth: “[This] Christ the King salvation brings; Let loving hearts enthrone him.”

“To raise [our] song on high,” twenty-nine “loving hearts” at Second Baptist have penned their personal insights or a favorite holiday memory along with scripture verses assigned for our daily reading, to guide our visit back to Bethlehem. I thank these writers and my fellow editors, Neita Geilker, Maggie Henderson, and Terri Soper (who is also our booklet’s graphic designer) for the gifts they are. As for bringing my own “laud” to “the Word made flesh,” I offer this bit of Yuletide fiction—The Magi’s Gold.

Sue Wright



The Magic's Gold

by Sue Wright

Joey flopped onto his sister's bed looking grouchy. "Go ask Mom how much longer," he snapped.

In no mood to be bossed by her twin brother, the girl replied, cross as the boy, "She'll call us when she's ready!"

"Maybe she forgot," worried Joey, still fretful. "Find out, and I'll give you a bite of my candy." He waved a half-eaten Milky Way in front of his sister.

A minute later, Jill was back with a report. "I told you. We have to be patient. Mom says the dough needs to chill another whole hour."

"A whole hour! How come?"

"What else? To keep it from sticking to the rolling pin!" Jill licked her lips, now gooey with chocolate.

"Keep it from sticking to the rolling pin!" mimicked Joey, his voice a flawless imitation of his sister's.

"Better not make fun," cautioned the girl. "I'll tell Mommy, and you won't get to help at all." Then, ducking the pillow her brother threw at her face, Jill burst into giggles. Joey might act like he was mad at his sister, but she knew better. The teasing children loved one another more than anything.

The mood between the siblings improved; Joey brightened. "Wanna play a game of Sorry?" he asked. "I promise not to be lucky."

"Sure," said Jill, "if I can be red."

"No problem."

It had been two hours since the children's mother, Jen Evans, began stirring up the ingredients for her family's annual afternoon of Christmas cookie-making. First she had sifted together four cups of flour and a half teaspoon of salt. Then she creamed one and a half cups of shortening with one and a half cups sugar, three eggs, one teaspoon pure vanilla, and a half teaspoon almond extract. She could

have substituted lemon extract for the almond. After mixing all the ingredients, then forming them into a roll, she wrapped the dough in wax paper and put it in the refrigerator to chill.

The children were in the middle of their fifth game of Sorry, when they heard their mother call, "It's time!"

The twins screamed "Yippee!" and in an instant stood in the doorway of the kitchen, their focus on one thing—the foot-long roll of creamy dough that Mrs. Evans marched from the refrigerator to the kitchen table.

"Mom looks like one of the Wise Men," squealed Joey, stepping tall behind his mother as though he were a wise man, too. Soon, his sister joined the parade.

The trio strutted about the kitchen table four times before Mrs. Evans finally brought them to a halt. Then, with great ceremony, she held the dough like an offering before her children's dancing eyes. "Behold," she said, "The Magi's Gold."

Even Joey, who considered singing Christmas carols too girly for a guy, broke with his mother and sister into a rousing first verse and chorus of "We Three Kings."

Abandoning their try at a second verse, Mrs. Evans settled instead for placing the dough on the table with great flourish. "Ta-da!" she said, "And now for the next order of business."

"I know what that is," shouted Jill, "Dividing the roll into sections!"

Mrs. Evans was still grinning as she sliced off just enough dough to get the cookie baking started. The rest of the dough she returned to the refrigerator.

"So," said Mrs. Evans, "Who wants to roll out the first batch of cookies?"

"We do!" cried the children as one.

"Thank goodness rolling pins have two sides," thought Mrs. Evans as she dusted the pastry sheet with a fistful of flour. Then she plopped the chunk of dough onto its center.

"All right, kids, grab a handle, and remember, the dough has to be rolled out about this thick." Mrs. Evans measured her fingers into a quarter inch. "Don't push down too hard. Cookie-making requires the lightest of touches."

After Jill and Joey had rolled the dough out flat, Mrs. Evans began to press the red plastic cookie cutters—as old as the children’s great grandmother’s famed cookie recipe—into the dough. Then she passed the up-turned cutters to the children whose job it was to tap the dough into the details of the cookie cutter’s pattern until the design showed through. Once that job was complete, the cookies were shaken gently onto a greased cookie sheet and baked for seven to eight minutes in a 350 degree oven.

Tapping dough into a cutter and shaking it onto the cookie sheet was anything but easy. Dough pushed too firmly into cutters didn’t shake free and caused cookies to tear. The children knew their mother would tolerate only so many failures before she took over this phase of the cookie-baking. Truth was, they didn’t mind losing the ticklish job. What they relished most was decorating each cookie after it had cooled.

On many of the cookies, the twins worked as a team—especially when it came to the happy-face Santas. While one of the children slathered white frosting on Santa’s face, the other readied Santa’s raisin eyes, his red-hot candy mouth, and the shredded coconut pushed into the frosting for a beard. They shared turns painting Santa’s matching cheeks and stocking hat with red icing.

“Wow,” exclaimed Joey when they were done. “These are our best Christmas cookies ever.”

Jill sighed. “Yes, and isn’t it nice we’ve got four kinds?”

“Four!” popped Joey. “There’s more than four! We’ve got six! Christmas trees, stockings, bells, stars, angels, and the happy-face Santas!”

“I didn’t say shapes, silly. I said kinds!”

The boy frowned and so did his mother. “Jill, are you purposely trying to upset your brother?” she asked.

“No Mommy. I’m just saying we’ve got four kinds of cookies here.”

“Name them!” demanded Joey.

“Okay, number one are the cookies we stuck holes through to hang on the Christmas tree; two, the pretty good but not quite perfect ones we’re saving just for us; three, the perfect ones we’ll take to the neighbors and the cookie-exchange at church; and four, what’s left of the mistakes we’ve been feeding Daddy all afternoon straight out of the oven.”

Shrugging sympathetically in her son's direction, Mrs. Evans responded soft as a whisper, "Maybe she's right, Joey."

"Uh-uh, Jill forgot the most important ones!" The boy was beaming proud as a peacock.

"How's that?"

"The extra super special perfect cookies we leave out for Santa on Christmas Eve with his glass of milk."

Jill groaned. Her brother was right. There were, indeed, five kinds of Christmas cookies at their house.

"So, which cookies shall we leave out for Santa this year?" asked Mrs. Evans.

Joey paused a moment to consider his answer. "That's a tough one, Mommy. Our happy-face Santas came out best, but I'm not sure a person—even Santa Claus—wants to eat a cookie that looks exactly like him."

"Perhaps we could give Santa a choice," suggested Mrs. Evans,

"Leave him your best Santa and a couple of stars."

The twins agreed that was a terrific idea.

On Christmas morning, Joey and Jill woke early and hurried downstairs to see what Santa had left under the tree. In the hubbub, neither saw the letter that lay beside the cookie plate set out for Santa the evening before. When it did catch someone's attention, it was Jill's. Dropping her new Slinky, she ran to grab the letter up. "What's that?" asked Joey. "I think it's a letter from Santa!" "Neato! What does it say?" "I'm not sure. Daddy, will you read it for us? Santa wrote in cursive." "I'd be glad to," said Mr. Evans, patting his knees as an invitation for his son and daughter to come sit with him. Flying into their Daddy's lap, the children rearranged themselves until the three were cuddled tight.

"Santa begins," said Mr. Evans, "*Dear Jill and Joey, just so you know—I'm crazy about cookies that look like me. Thank you. The Santa was delicious. Hate to think I have to wait a whole year before I get another. I'm with you about waiting. It's nothing but the pits! Now both of you—have a Merry Christmas. And most important, don't forget to be nice to one another. That's really what keeps a happy-face on all us Santas—on the face of Baby Jesus, too!*"

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WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

November 27–December 3



... Whom Shepherds Guard

Sunday, November 27
Luke 1:5-17

And he will go on before the Lord . . . to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17).

If seeing an angel in the temple wasn't frightening enough, Zechariah was told by that angel his son would play an important role preparing the Israelites for the coming of the Lord. Overwhelming news, right?

Yes, but the bigger news to Zechariah, and especially Elizabeth, was that a baby was coming to these two elderly people. How could this be? Perhaps he thought he'd inhaled too much incense! Elizabeth soon came to know the truth of God's message delivered by the angel.

Within that truth came time to absorb the entirety of the angel's message and enjoy what all expectant parents enjoy—anticipation and getting ready. Already they had a glimpse of their child. The angel said, "He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth."

As Zechariah and Elizabeth enjoyed this impending happiness, they also had to consider the role their own son would play in Messiah's coming. He was to "prepare the way of the Lord." This would be no ordinary baby. Do you suppose they asked themselves, "What child is this?"

That's what anticipation is, isn't it—asking questions, wondering what it will be like, imagining, planning, getting ready? And Advent is the same. We are not unlike Zechariah and Elizabeth. The angel helped them know their anticipation was not just about an arrival, but about the life to follow.

So, will our anticipation be more than the exhausting preparations to sing "Silent Night" and "Joy to the World" in a few weeks? If so, our individual and collective anticipation might take us well beyond Nativity to help prepare the Lord's way to a needy and frightened world.

Monday, November 28

Isaiah 64:1-9

*Still, God, you are our Father. We're the clay and you're our potter.
All of us are what you made us (Isaiah 64:8, The Message).*

Everything that surrounds our lives is made—made by man, by creatures, by way of our environment, by nature. Some things are unchanging once made; others are always changing. Either way, our lives are influenced by what is made.

Much reasoning, time, and effort are put into bettering our lives these days through advancements in technology, health care, nutrition, and lifestyle. And all this progress is made by design—design aimed at helping us and simplifying our lives. No wonder then, we're always anxious for what may come next.

Thinking on this and how we, too, have been designed, I find myself amazed. Of course, I'm not a design of man. I'm of God's design.

In verse 8, all of us are referenced to being clay—and God, our potter. God shapes and plans each of us before we are ever made part of this Earth. God has designed us to be of Him and His influence and love. Molded by God, we experience His plans for us. Sitting ready and malleable, we can be open to His design and revel in His plans for us—God's children.

We are not haphazardly here of our own accord. We are made by HIS design. Our goal in life is not only to embrace this and acknowledge it on a personal basis, but to extend that awareness and love to those we have in our lives, made also by HIS design. Those with whom we come in contact or with whom we share a relationship are also clay and God their potter.

Kristin Wooldridge

Tuesday, November 29

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

“God calling . . . anybody there?”

In this scripture, the songwriter is begging God to stop treating Israel so poorly. The psalmist wants to return to the days of a former glory. Sound familiar? Many Americans also miss former glories we may have enjoyed. Whether economic, military or spiritual . . . we miss the good 'ole days.

Sometimes it seems like nothing has changed since the songwriter's day. Our news is filled with politicians and protestors proclaiming the need to return to a previous status. For instance, those who occupy the inside and outside of Wall Street buildings are saying they want a return to an economic prosperity for all. But few have seemed to cooperate toward that goal!

Having read and experienced the Gospel of the New Testament, we know Israel was wrong to blame God for their predicament. Israel had nobody to blame but themselves.

Throughout history, God has reached out to man seeking a relationship which would make us whole and God-complete. God desires a complete relationship with us. It's like phoning someone who doesn't answer. A call unanswered is a message never received. Connection doesn't occur; hence a relationship can't be established.

God finally grew weary of Israel missing the point and failing to answer his call. That's why he sent his Son . . . to complete the connection. In our own lives, we let so much interfere with God's call—as individuals and as a nation. Let's listen more. After all, isn't that why God gave us twice as many ears as mouths?

Steve Hemphill

Wednesday, November 30

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:6-7).

Whom Shepherds Guard

Bright colors and warm textures—some shiny, some sparkling and some so pleasing to the eye that the mere look of the package promises not only excitement but pure joy as we delight in guessing what secret treasures it holds! Quite a bit of imagery for a child, I know; but now as an adult, it adequately describes what my young heart was feeling in the days and hours leading up to Christmas morning. I couldn't wait to get my hands on every package that had my name scrawled on it. The "true" meaning of Christmas couldn't be further from my mind on Christmas morning. For me, as a child, the "true" meaning was exactly what I wanted: presents, candy and good food. The possibility that I might be lacking in any gifts was the furthest thing from my mind.

It's only in the wisdom of my years that I've found that, in those young days, that's exactly what I was lacking—not gifts of the earthly kind, but the spiritual gifts that were much more beautiful than the ones I was unwrapping. As the scripture I've chosen indicates, the Lord has made sure we aren't lacking in ANY gifts through his promise of his Son, Jesus Christ.

"What are those gifts?" you ask. The gifts of grace, forgiveness and everlasting life. These gifts need no colorful wrappings, no shiny ribbons and no temporary home beneath a decorated tree. These gifts are ours for the asking and are with us everyday. May each of your days be filled with the eternal gifts from our Lord, Jesus Christ, and may you remember each of them as you unwrap the wonder and beauty of Christmas with your families and friends.

Lee Ann Zech

Thursday December 1
Mark 13:23-37

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away
(Mark 13:31, NIV).

A couple of weeks before last Christmas, the youth were meeting at the Tankersleys' for our final discussion group of the year. The Christmas tree sparkled brightly in the corner, and there was warmth in the room as we gathered around to talk about why we really celebrate Christmas.

Per usual, we were trying to look beyond the regular Sunday School answers. It was brought up that one of the reasons we celebrate Christmas is similar to why we celebrate President's Day or Martin Luther King Jr. Day—to honor a great leader and the things he has done.

But yet, we know there is a difference.

We don't just celebrate Christmas because of what Jesus did, but also because of what Jesus does. He is an active presence in our daily lives through his love and word. Even as we await his coming, we know that he is with us.

Abby Bland

Friday, December 2

Isaiah 2:1–5

There's a new day coming . . . (Isaiah 2:2).

- Radar was initially developed for detection of incoming bombers, and now is used in commercial airliners.
- Jet engines were developed for fighter craft by Britain and Germany during the Second World War.
- The first computers, Colossus and ENIAC, were developed for code-breaking or the calculation of ballistic trajectories.
- The Autobahn was originally conceived and constructed as a means for German artillery to get across Europe during WWII.
- Cyanoacrylate was developed in an attempt to produce synthetic gunsights for airplanes during World War II, but was too sticky to be useful. It is now commonly sold as "super glue."
- Active sonar was developed during World War I to facilitate the discovery of enemy submarines, which led to medical ultrasonography.
- Facial tissues such as Kleenex were originally created while attempting to develop better gas mask filter membranes.*
- The Sculpture "The Tree of Life" that stands in the British Museum in London was constructed entirely of decommissioned weapons from the Mozambique civil war.

These are all examples of beating our swords into plowshares. Is this part of the vision that Isaiah had about what was going to happen in the days to come, a vision of universal peace? Are these just small examples of movement in the right direction? But Isaiah probably knew that this kind of peace would not occur until after Messiah came the second time.

Our world is full of war and conflict, and our streets are full of protestors demanding better from our leaders and the faceless institutions that dominate our land. But Isaiah questions whether it is natural to be at war. He says nations won't train for it anymore in the future that he sees. But this vision of universal peace won't come easily, and Isaiah tells us to "walk in the light of the Lord" while we await the realization of the vision.

This Christmas, look to the future. Anticipate the coming of Christ to the world, the Christ that is the "light of the world," the Christ that will bring peace to a troubled world. Don't give up hope. Remember, there's a new day coming.

Allan Aunspaugh

*In Wikipedia, Retrieved November 7, 2011, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swords_to_ploughshares.

Saturday, December 3

Psalm 122

I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord" (Psalm 122: 1).

Why do we go to church? As a child I went because that's what my family did—twice each Sunday! We sat in "our pew," where my sister and I had the best view of our piano teacher playing the organ, and I looked forward to Ritz crackers and red fruit punch in Sunday school.

I was still expected to go as a teenager, but I didn't mind hanging out with my friends there. I tolerated youth group games, and lively discussions helped me apply the Bible to my growing faith. By the time I was a young adult, I couldn't imagine NOT going to church, and my commitment was deepened through sharing my gifts of music and teaching in the churches I attended.

So why do I attend worship now? It's still a habit—a habit we want our children to internalize—and I still have obligations there. But as I read Psalm 122, originally sung during pilgrimages to Jerusalem for holy celebrations, I realize these reasons should not be the first that come to mind. Am I glad to go to church? Do I yearn to go back each week? Do I invite others to join me? Too often I allow concerns and responsibilities to hinder my worship of God.

The shepherds outside Bethlehem were the first to hear of the birth of the King of Kings. They could have stayed in the fields, but they chose to find and worship this Baby. When they made their short pilgrimage into town, what were their emotions? Curiosity? Apprehension? Joy? They were not only the first witnesses, but also perhaps the first believers—returning to their fields boldly "glorifying and praising God."

This Psalm illustrates the joy of anticipation, which is what Advent is for us. We know what happens on the 25th. Why do we save our joy until Christmas? Or for that matter, why do we save our joy until we finally go on vacation, get that promotion, reach retirement, or make it through _____? (you fill . . .)

I can still hear my high school basketball coach reprimanding sloppy habits during practice: "You play like you practice, ladies." How true in our daily living, as well. We must rehearse to be ready. We cannot worship with genuine joy on Christmas and Easter without finding joy in worshiping God the other 50 Sundays of the year.

In our life pilgrimage, do we go to church to mark it off our “to-do” list, to satisfy someone, to socialize, or to fulfill duties there? Hopefully it’s more than that. Hopefully it’s a refuge of peace and joy—even during difficult parts of our pilgrimage—for we were created to worship God.

Jesus, may joy like that of the shepherds be evident in my life, not only during my worship in God’s house, but also in my daily life of worship. As I go to church each Sunday, may my heart sing with fellow believers, “Oh come, all ye faithful, joyful, and triumphant!”¹

Angie Fuller

¹John Francis Wade



WHAT CHILD IS THIS?
December 4–December 10



... and Angels Sing

Sunday, December 4
Luke 1:18–23

Every word I've spoken to you will come true on time—God's time
(Luke 1:21, *The Message*).

God's Time

I re-read the familiar passage about the angel Gabriel's announcement to a doubtful Zachariah that his wife would become pregnant, even though she was beyond child-bearing age. As I read *The Message*, *The Bible in Contemporary Language*, verse 21 jumped off the page: The angel Gabriel told Zechariah, "Every word I've spoken to you will come true on time—God's time."

Time! I've been thinking about time quite a bit lately. I've struggled to manage it, wished for more of it, regretted misusing it, and worried about how it will play out in the future. During Advent, many Christians count down days until Christmas on unique calendars designed especially for the season. These are intended to serve as a way to prepare for celebrating the birth of the Christ child, but might also create stress over the passing of holiday shopping opportunities. The blessing and the curse, all on one calendar!

This passage in Luke is a perfect reminder that "on time" and "God's time" are synonymous. This is a tough concept for some of us. We prefer to create our schedules for ourselves. We may even set our phones to give us reminders before events to help keep our day moving as we believe it should. We prefer that our lives, and the lives of our families, flow in a certain order . . . something that is traditional and well sequenced. But for Zachariah and Elizabeth (not to mention Joseph and Mary), the timing of a fabulous life-changing event was unexpected, worrisome, and out of their control. They may have prayed prayers over the years that seemed to go unanswered. Gabriel's message was difficult to accept and understand at this point in their lives. Nevertheless, God used these faithful people for a wonderful purpose. Perfect timing.

May we be open to the blessing of being on time . . . God's time.

Becky Gossett

Monday, December 5

Isaiah 40:1–11

The words in Isaiah 40:1-11 ring down through the centuries, providing the backdrop of Christmas celebrations around the globe. It is not hard to imagine these very familiar passages being read in the synagogue during the first century; repeated again during the Middle Ages; and shared with congregations all over America since our nation's founding.

Perhaps no one has provided a better setting for these magnificent verses than George F. Handel in his work, "The Messiah." Becky and I both have been privileged to sing and play in several performances of this oratorio during our lifetime. I am sure that many of you have been inspired by its presentation over the years. Isaiah's message comes through loud and clear as music blends with scripture to glorify our Lord and Savior.

As we read anew the words, our attention was drawn to the contrast between its grandiose proclamations of the greatness of our God and the soothing balm of His love towards us.

"Let every valley be lifted up . . ."

"The glory of the Lord . . ."

"The Lord God will come with might . . ."

"Comfort, O comfort my people . . ."

"Like a shepherd . . ."

"He will gently lead . . ."

We were especially moved by verse 11.

"Like a shepherd He will tend His flock,
In His arm He will gather the lambs
And carry them in His bosom;
He will gently lead the nursing ewes."

In these days of economic woes, uncertain futures, unusual events, and challenges to our way of thinking, we remind ourselves that God is still in charge—and that He has time to invest in us. Both of these realities provide comfort and encouragement. Hallelujah!

Ron and Becky Whited

Tuesday, December 6
Psalm 85:1–2; 8–13

Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase (Psalm 85:12).

“One of our nurses gave me permission to tell this story,” begins today’s writer. Marjorie, a long-time member of Second Baptist and perennial contributor to our Advent Booklets, lives at the Baptist Home in Chillicothe. She sends what follows with her “love and Christmas blessings.”

Several Christmases ago, this nurse didn’t have a job. Money was short. She and her teenage son and college-age daughter lived on unemployment and child support. Still, they were filled with the spirit of Christmas that year. It happened like this.

Despite their desperate circumstances that December, the nurse decided to give each of her children ten one dollar bills and three fives. Then, she instructed them to roll each bill up and tie it with a piece of twine. They attached a note to each bill, “To the one who finds this, Merry Christmas.”

Soon after, the mother and her children drove to Wal-Mart and began hiding their 26 tiny gifts around the store. For example, one in a carton of eggs; one hidden near the fish tank; another in the candy section.

Their surprises in place, the family waited and watched—all the while enjoying the happy faces they saw and the laughter they heard when shoppers found the money. A small boy found a dollar bill and his friend shouted, “That’s really neat!” An older woman found a five-dollar bill and called out, “Did someone lose this?” Once she saw the note, she smiled. “Oh, this is for me!” she exclaimed.

Next year at Christmas, the nurse’s son said, “Let’s do it again.” That’s when his mother knew—more valuable than anything she might have purchased for her children—she had given them the gift of giving.

When we hear the Christmas Story about God’s gift of love to the whole world, Marjorie hopes that each of us realizes with joy in our heart, “This gift is for me.” She asks that we live and give the love of Jesus to others every day.

Marjorie Stump

Wednesday, December 7

2 Peter 3:8–15a

So, my dear friends, since this is what you have to look forward to, do your very best to be found living at your best, in purity and peace (2 Peter 3:14, The Message).

Advent means “coming,” so this is a season of waiting and expectation. The whole church is busy lighting candles, singing, ringing bells and anticipating the coming of Christ at Christmas. It is the time of year when everyone is “getting ready for Christmas” in so many ways.

Second Peter reminds us that Advent has another side to Christ’s coming—Christ’s “second coming.” In that sense, the timing is rather fuzzy for “with the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like one day.” To many of us, that day seems so far from everyday life, but this passage reminds us that this is the reason that Christians have been waiting for the last 2000 years—waiting for something to happen, for God to intervene, to make Himself real to everyone and establish peace for this world. In the midst of this season of preparation, this Scripture serves as a reminder that every preparation we make is preparation for the day when He comes again.

So . . . put up a Christmas tree to remind you that the evergreen does not change during winter, just as God’s love does not change. Hang ornaments to remind you of special times, and remember that the star on the top reminds of the one that guided the wise men to worship Jesus. Put up the lights and remember that he is the “light of the world.” Wrap the presents and remember the gifts of the Magi; send out Christmas cards and remember how the letters of the early Christians spread the story of Christ throughout the world. And finally . . . ring the bells that remind each believer to come to worship and to announce to the world that in spite of our individual worries and concerns, we are ready, we have prepared ourselves, and we are eagerly anticipating the coming of Christ.

Linda Jones

Thursday, December 8

Mark 1:1–8

See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Mark 1:2–3).

John the Baptist

In the time of Christ, there was no television or radio, not to mention email, instant messaging, or texting. So how did people go about announcing the impending visit of someone important? They sent someone ahead to announce that visit. In some places it is still customary to announce the arrival of each guest at a gala, or even a guest making a social call.

Look at the preparations God made to announce the coming of His Son. Centuries before, prophecies had been made, and then God fulfilled those prophecies through the ministry of John the Baptist.

Sometimes it's hard to understand the number of unbelievers remaining in the world with all the prophecies made and then fulfilled about Jesus. But of course, unlike many, you and I have had access to the entire Word of God in our lifetime. Still, I can't help but wonder why more don't believe by now.

Perhaps the answer is that only God can open our hearts to receive Him, and in the meantime, Satan is always busy providing traps with multiple temptations to keep us from discovering the truth that Christ is the only one who can save and keep us from all the grief of a wandering heart. What an amazing God we have!

God had a specific purpose for John the Baptist. He was a witness for Christ. And the specific purpose for each of our lives? For mine? Well, I'd like to think that some of my purpose is rocking generations of babies in the church nursery, choosing books for even the most reluctant readers, preparing delicious food to share with my family and others, being a friend to students who have few others, buying birthday treats for a student whose family cannot afford them, and one of these days, being a grandmother. What's yours?

Roxann Brenton

Friday, December 9

Isaiah 11:1–10

Advent Chaos of Mind

Benedictus qui venit in nomine domini. (Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.) For some reason, I am listening to these words from the Sanctus of Bach's Mass in B minor at precisely the moment I begin reading the opening lines of today's passage from Isaiah 11:1-11: "A shoot shall come forth from the stump of Jesse . . ." words that presage the coming of one from Grandfather Jesse's line who would establish God's reign of justice in the earth. That justice would bring peace, and not just any kind of peace. It was to be an extraordinary peace, one in which wolves and lambs, infants and asps—mortal enemies since earth's beginning—would dwell within striking distance without one devouring the other. Does one dare to risk such a vision?

The music soars. I read scripture and mull over the opening chapter of Miroslav Volf's book in which he urges that the God of Grandfather Jesse (and thus of Jesus and his followers) is the same God to whom Muslims pray. This God is therefore the basis for Muslims and Christians finding common cause in their love of God and neighbor (not to mention each other). While the music soars over my reading, reflections, and writing, I am also thinking about my new grandson, August (Is this what my students mean by multi-tasking?), about seven months old at this writing, who has been born into a world still waiting for justice and peace.

It's an old conversation . . . about peace, I mean. And I'm learning so much about grand-fathering. For instance, I bet that old Jesse, like me, worried a lot about his grandchildren. And, I think I have learned why grandparents risk that vision of peace. They risk the vision by hoping down deep in their souls that someday someone will indeed bring justice and peace for their grandchildren. Maranatha. Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Milton Horne

Saturday, December 10

Psalm 72:1–7; 17–19

When I was in junior high at Kearney First Baptist Church, I sang in the junior high and high school choir. For the Christmas program, one of the songs we were to sing was "O Holy Night." After our choir sang a verse, one of the girls was to sing the chorus as a solo part.

On the night of the performance, all the other choirs had sung their songs, and it was now our turn. We sang the first verse and then came the chorus. When the soloist began to sing, her voice filled the auditorium. I felt like I should fall on my knees. It was as if the angels were truly singing. When we had finished, there was a moment when no sound was heard. Obviously, her singing had touched the audience as it had me.

That was more than forty years ago. To this day, whenever I hear "O Holy Night," I think about that night and the feelings I experienced. So, as we sing the songs of Christmas this year, imagine being a shepherd, hearing the angels proclaim the birth of Jesus, and experiencing the awe and fear they must have felt.

Drew Kingery

WHAT CHILD IS THIS

December 11–December 17



...the Son of Mary

Sunday, December 11

Matthew 1:18–25

They will call him Immanuel (which means "God with us")
(Matthew 1:23).

I wanted my family's first Christmas to be perfect.

So, right after Halloween 2005, I began turning our tiny house into a winter wonderland, inspired by a mile-high stack of Martha Stewart holiday magazines and endless runs to the craft stores. At the top of my list? The perfect Christmas tree.

"It's barely November," my husband exclaimed when he saw what I was doing. "Are you sure we should get a tree this early?"

Hours later, our bright-eyed baby girl watched her parents dance around the giant Douglas fir in the front room, bright with lights and garland.

Two weeks before Christmas, however, I woke to find thousands of pine needles and broken ornaments lying underneath our bare-limbed tree. It had dried out, cut too soon to endure the holiday season.

"What is Christmas without a tree?" I wailed, devastated to see my preparations undone. But the tree debacle got me to thinking: Like a child, I had been too easily caught up in garlands and gift-wrap; in the traditions of comfort and joy I celebrated in the name of Christ—in what I thought Christmas was supposed to look like.

And I wasn't alone. The National Retail Federation predicts we will spend \$465.6 billion to deck our halls, trim our trees and buy each other gifts of material comforts and joy this year. \$465.6 billion! What would Jesus think of that?

In Matthew 1:18-25, we are reminded that, to prepare the way for the coming of his Son, the One who would save His people from their sins, God didn't require extravagant decorations or decadent banquets, only the pure, humble hearts of two people with unshakable faith in Him and His plan for them.

This holiday season, may we find ways to humble our own hearts and step away from the billion-dollar blitz and bling of our commercialized Christmases in favor of finding ways to celebrate the only Christmas gift that truly matters: God's gift to us, his son, Jesus.

Jennifer Huffman

Monday, December 12

Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11

Advent Economy

Our passage for today is a familiar one. Many of us have heard it read and referenced numerous times. However, our familiarity may be a disability: we may be so comfortable with the words of this text that we are deaf to the dangerous message they hold. See, this text is so threatening because, at its core, it is a passage about economics.

To proclaim the year of the LORD's favor (61:2) is a reference to the Year of the Jubilee in Leviticus 25. The Jubilee was to be observed every 50 years. Land that had been sold outside of a family was to be returned to that family. Slaves were to be released. Debts were to be erased. The Jubilee was to be a literal overturning of the established economic order.

In Isaiah 61, the prophet is addressing the people as they return from being in exile for decades. They are rebuilding their society, culture, and economy. The prophet cries that the people ought not to forget the controversial dream of Yahweh, that the economy of God's people is, foremost, to be tempered by radical neighborliness.

As if Isaiah's declaration was not challenging enough, good church-folk will remember that in Luke 4 Jesus stood up in the local synagogue, grabbed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and read our passage. He then looked at his parents, sisters, brothers, and neighbors in the eyes and said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled" (Luke 4:21). He basically told them, "Alright, folks. Y'all are going to start doing this." If you read on in Luke 4, you know that immediately after saying this, the people tried to kill Jesus.

Because we know that people will rally hard and fast if their economy is threatened, won't we?

As I wrestled with this passage over the past few weeks, I was so tempted to try and soften its message. But then I realized that Advent is the time that we need to be reminded of the Bible's radical imagination more than any other.

As we go about our shopping, eating, and rejoicing, all of our Advent celebrations should be tempered by joy, laughter, and a deep, creative, radical, imaginative neighborliness.

Tyler Tankersley

Tuesday, December 13
Psalm 126

Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy (Psalm 126:5).

In many areas, the people going out to plant a field are starving. The only food they have to look forward to is what will be growing from the seeds they are placing in the ground. They weep sowing these seeds, hoping—knowing—God looks favorably upon them and will give them a wonderful harvest. They have planned for the future and feel certain they will reap the rewards. This is a tale of people everywhere. Through the ages, no one has been excluded.

The people of Zion, as we read in Psalm 126, had no doubt God would restore their fortunes, and that's what happened. Instead of focusing on what they had lost then, they looked to the future and celebrated what they had gained. God had preserved their lives, saving those that trusted in him.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, a great number of people lost their jobs and went on the "dole." Companies were going out of business; crop prices were sky high; banks were folding; crime rates were up; people were losing their houses. Sound familiar? With a strong belief in the future, hard work, patience, and a renewed sense of community, things got better. Now we're asking God to help us once again so that all of us might enjoy the "Good Life." I have no doubt God will.

Angelina Springs

Wednesday, December 14

Luke 1:46b–55

Christmas Eve is hard for me now. It wasn't always. When I was younger, Christmas Eve meant getting together with my family at my grandparents' house. There was laughter and joy and memories enough to treasure for a lifetime. But now, now I have to remind myself of those things. Now every Christmas Eve I remember a clock on a wall of a hospital room counting down, and my senses flood with memories of Christmas Eve, 1999.

After a long battle with cancer, the doctors told us that Christmas would be my father's last. We watched an entire day as he slowly left this world. Each of us getting time alone with Dad, I recall singing "Silent Night" to him and sharing special memories by his bedside. Late that evening, we stood around the bed as my Dad took one last breath on earth, waking up whole and healthy at the feet of Jesus.

My initial response was a wave of grief like I had never experienced in my life. Then I felt God's presence fill me. It was as if the Holy Spirit was speaking directly to my heart and saying, "I have promised you a peace that passes all understanding. Claim what is yours."

Remembering my family gathered around my father's hospital bed and those hours praying Dad into heaven will always make Christmas Eve hard for me. So don't be surprised to see me crying my way through a Christmas Eve service. My family understands. They know Mom's heart is extra tender on that day.

What continues to amaze me is how, in the middle of my sadness, my heart eventually responds as Mary's did in the verses we have read today. In the midst of the great unknown, the great challenges of her life—a new baby, a new husband, an uncertain future—Mary fervently recognizes her humble state compared to the greatness of a God come to earth as a tiny baby and accepts that, because of this baby, one day she and all of us will weep no more, die no more, grieve no more, search no more.

She reminds us in her prayer that there is juxtaposition between our current condition and the awesomeness of Christ. In our weakness, He is great. In our frailty, He is powerful. In our uncertainty, He is sure. In our need, He is provider. In our lacking, He is everything. Mary is claiming what is hers, not because of who she is, but simply because of Whose she is.

This Christmas season, my prayer for myself and for all of us is that we will simply claim the promise of Christ in our lives.

Thursday, December 15

1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

Pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17, NIV).

OK, so right out of the chute, I admit, I'm a history major. When I saw my assigned date for the Advent booklet, December 15, I went to History.com and guess what I saw? On December 15th, 1791, Virginia ratified the Bill of Rights, thus providing the last needed state to make the Bill of Rights the law of our land. And who do we have to thank for these important, nay, critical, amendments to the constitution? Come on, search your brain. The answer's under that pile of American History facts collecting dust in the corner of your mind. It was George Mason. Mason, with some help from his friends, petitioned, cajoled, persuaded and ticked off anyone who would listen about the need to guarantee our individual rights and freedoms. You're asking—what has this got to do with Jesus, Mary, Christmas? Hold your horses. I'm getting to that.

The verses for today's devotional come from 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24. I draw your attention to verse 17. I know you never start a sentence with "if"—grammar totalitarians, relax—but IF "brevity is the soul of wit" (that's Shakespeare from Hamlet; Polonius saying it unfortunately makes the truth seem less wise, but I digress), then this scriptural nugget is wittier than two divinity professors at an agnostic ball. (Just laugh. Don't think about it too much.) In my Bible, the verse is just two words long. It says, "Pray continually," which makes me immediately begin to wonder, does that mean we're not supposed to stop praying even long enough to eat our dinner? Is there any way we could ever have a 54 Mbs (mega bits per second) channel open with God? I mean, really. Suppose you tried. How would it work? Could your upload and download ever get in balance? Or would you just keep praying as if the connection were serial and never let the other end transmit?

Jesus was a prayer warrior beyond the pale. You may pray, but that guy, dude, that guy was epiphanic (adjectival form of the word epiphany) dead ahead of us. Jesus was in "relationship" with "The

Father.” Not as in, “I need more money, I need a better job, I need for the neighbor to get a clue” conversation, but in true relationship. So much so, he could talk and listen, and thereby, pray continually.

On this date, the right to pray continually was ratified into the law of our land. As long as the Bill of Rights is not abrogated or rescinded (don't worry, I am not going there), we all have the unimpeachable right to worship any way we choose. I think we could do worse than endeavor to remain in a prayerful state with God at all times.

While the reason for the season is the “Child of God,” this “Son of Mary,” isn't the basis of our celebratory hearts and grateful souls the potential we have of living in continual prayer with God? We have been tasked to do so; our ancestors suffered and toiled tirelessly to ensure this spiritual freedom. So while you are out looking for the Justin Bieber toothpaste warmer, or the baby Elmo communion set, or the orthopedic garden hose dispenser, remember you CAN download and upload at the same time.

Gary Smith

Friday, December 16
Isaiah 35:1–10

As a lover of most things vintage and quite often musty, I enjoy a good treasure hunt. Recently, while scavenging for swag at a favorite local “gettin’ place” (as my Nanny used to say), I came across three pristine volumes of 1940 something Christmas Annuals. The oversized collections lay spread on an exceedingly low mid-century coffee table, lost to the allure of holiday sparkle. That was my great fortune.

As I flipped through *Christmas: An American Annual of Literature and Art*, I was thrilled, yea—transported—into my brain’s own Andy Williams holiday special, one in which families sit around roaring Yule logs reading to each other the likes of riveting gems such as “Historic Ships in Early America,” and “Girl Scout Carolers” —a detailed, four-page primer of Miss Marjorie Edgar and the costumed cuties under her counsel. Amidst this bramble of thorns, however, was also the boldly colored pageantry, illustrations and stories of Lois Lenski, lesser-known holiday hymns and carols, and an opus on William Billings, the father of American hymnody and choral music.

Billings was, by all accounts, the epitome of what the Isaiah scripture describes. A self-taught, withered-limbed, stump-legged, gravelly-voiced musician, he made the “voiceless break into song” praising a God who saw fit to bestow upon all of us His gifts. Trained as a tanner, he abandoned that vocation for a career as a composer and a creator of singing schools in post-revolutionary Massachusetts. Billings was compelled, literally, to sing his way to Zion. The first volume of his works, engraved by Paul Revere, contains a tune set to Isaac Watts’ text “Shepherds Rejoice.” The first verses of the hymn are voiced by Gabriel, who sings the praises of the newborn Son of God. The last verse, clearly mortal-tongued, eschews:

Lord! and shall Angels have their songs,
And men no tunes to raise
O may we lose these useless tongues,
When they forget to praise.

Here's to an Advent filled with energized hands, strengthened knees, and leaping souls. Whatever your song—may the God of humble beginnings help you sing your way unfettered and un-fearing down the Zion road.

Michelle Cook

Saturday, December 17

John 1:1–14

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it (John 1:5).

Have you ever been afraid of the dark? Or are you afraid of something else?

When I was ten years old, my parents made the mistake of allowing me to see the movie “Jaws.” It’s about a great white shark that terrorizes the beaches of Long Island. In one scene, the shark leaps from the water onto a boat’s stern, eating the captain.

For weeks afterward, I made certain my legs did not hang over the side of my bed at night. While it may have been extremely unlikely that a great white shark would mount an attack on an unsuspecting child in a landlocked bedroom of America’s heartland, I figured one could never be too careful.

My fear was irrational, but that made it no less real. I was genuinely scared a land-loving shark might take a bite of my foot in the middle of the night.

I may be the only person to have feared the shark-infested carpet of a bedroom. But even those of us who are adults often fear other things: sickness, death, loss of employment, and the like. And nearly all of us, children and adults, have been afraid of the dark at one time or another.

Darkness is a powerful metaphor for all of our fears, because darkness introduces an element of the unknown into our surroundings. And in the end, most of our fears are about that, the unknown. We fear what we do not know.

The Gospel of John preaches the good news that a light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. That light, of course, is Jesus Christ.

If we trust in Christ and yield our fears to God, we need not be afraid of the dark unknown. Rather, we can know that the Christ Child—whose birth was made known to the shepherds in the fields when “the glory of the Lord shone around them”—will light our way.

WHAT CHILD IS THIS

December 18–December 24



... *Christ the King*

Sunday, December 18

Luke 1:26–38

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" (Luke 1:35).

In this passage, the angel Gabriel visits Mary and gives her news that she has conceived the Son of God. The Living Bible says she is "confused and disturbed." The angel tells her this is a "wonderful blessing." In Mary's position, would you consider this a "wonderful blessing"? Giving birth to the Son of God sounds difficult and stressful.

Mary asks a few questions. (I think I would too if visited by an angel.) Her main question: "How can I have a baby? I am not married." The angel responds: "The Holy Spirit will overshadow you; the baby will be utterly holy, the Son of God." Translated in even more modern language it means: "Mary, this is something special; it has never been done and will never be done again."

This verse becomes a turning point. The angel convinces Mary what has been said is real, and she doesn't ask further questions. This is also glorious. Not only could God give her a son without an earthly father, He could put it in her heart to believe the angel's message without question.

As Christmas is nearing, we recall the story of Jesus' birth. As you are surrounded by this Advent time, remember Mary and her perfect submission to the Lord. She was willing to do anything and everything for one purpose.

Elliott Yoakum

Monday, December 19, 2011

2 Samuel 7:1–11; 16

And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart; for the LORD is with you" (2 Samuel 7:3, NIV).

The Error of Shooting from the Hip

This passage, 2 Samuel 7:1-11 and 16, is confusing to me. It begins with King David expressing his good intention of building a house of cedar for God's ark after it had been in a tent for many decades. That is followed in verse 3 by the response of the prophet Nathan encouraging David to do what was in his heart.

Soon after Nathan endorsed David's idea, the Lord told Nathan what he SHOULD tell David, It was just the opposite of what David and Nathan had thought was a good idea. The Lord told Nathan to tell David that building a temple was NOT what the Lord wanted David to do. That was something the Lord wanted done by the king who would come after him, David's son, Solomon. The Lord also wanted David to be reminded that many good things had come to David in the past, and many good things would come to David's people, including a place to stay, peace from their enemies, and a kingdom that would last forever.

How often do we have great intentions and a good idea to fulfill those intentions, but don't take time to ask God what he wants us to do? How often does the fulfillment of those good intentions end up with unfortunate, unintended consequences? On the other hand, how often have we seen unimaginable great outcomes when we take time to ask God for His guidance?

The sense of commitment and support that comes from knowing we are following God's will helps us struggle through and beyond those setbacks that often come along the way.

My prayer for this day is for us to LISTEN for God's will before making commitments in how we use the resources of our time, talents and money in support of God's kingdom.

Tuesday, December 20
Pslam 89:1–4; 19–26

I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations (Psalm 89:4).

The phone rang with the message, "The baby's here!" Family and friends hurried to the hospital to see the new born babe. After checking on the mother, they declared that the baby was beautiful! They asked, "Does she have a name?" Upon hearing the mother's reply, they responded, "Perfect, lovely." Someone moved the little knit cap showing her blond hair and said, "Her father's hair! Maybe she'll be a teacher like him." Then the little one blinked giving a glimpse of her blue eyes. Someone noticed, "Her mother's eyes! Maybe she'll be a doctor like her mama." The swaddling blanket gave way allowing a perfect, tiny hand to grasp a loving finger. "Long, slender fingers," someone observed. "Perhaps she'll be an organist like her grandma." And the adoration continued.

Flashback more than two thousand years—the message came then, too. The angels sang "A Child is born!" Not the family, but the Magi and the shepherds hurried to where the star shone over a lowly manger. Let's hope they checked on the young mother, Mary, but the gospels say they fell on their knees and adored the baby. There was no question about His name, for the angel Gabriel had shared God's choice, Jesus; and no speculation about his future occupation, as Gabriel had foretold that the baby would be Christ the King—a puzzling foretelling for some, because His kingdom was neither an earthly realm nor His reign for a lifetime on earth. Instead, Jesus Christ was born to change EVERYTHING, not only in Bethlehem and Judea, but to the ends of the earth. Christ the King was born not only for His first century family, disciples, and followers, but for all generations and that means YOU and ME!

Good news! Tidings of great joy! Let's celebrate the birthday of this King by sharing His gifts of love, hope and peace today and every day!

Carroll Moore Makemson

Wednesday December 21
Romans 16:25–27

The revelation of the mystery, kept secret for long ages, but now disclosed (Romans 16:26, NRSV).

'Tis the season of secrets and whispers
Of wondering and waiting and hope

When we were children, my little brother and I would examine the packages under the tree and whisper together our hopes and dreams of what would be revealed once the paper and ribbon were cast aside. Sometimes a particular package would capture our imaginations, either because it was very large or very small, or because it made an unusual sound when we shook it.

One year, there appeared under the tree a small package, unusually heavy for its size. To say that my brother was obsessed with that package would be an understatement. He hurried downstairs every morning as soon as he woke up and held that little package in his hands for as long as my mom would allow. A few days before Christmas, he could not stand it another minute and begged and begged and begged to be allowed to open just one package early. Mom and Dad put him off the first few times he asked, and then relented. As soon as he received the green light, he tore into that little package with a vengeance! At long last, the secret held for so long would be disclosed. It took just seconds to discover the gift inside—eight D-size batteries. It would be days before the fullness of the promised gift would be revealed, before the purpose of those batteries would become known.

'Tis the season of yearning and promise
Of seeking and finding and joy

On Christmas morning, there were race cars powered by those eight D-size batteries. They whirred and whined and whizzed around a figure eight track all day long. On the journey toward discovery of the ultimate gift that Christmas, there were days of frustration and impatience as time seemed to just stand still. But the days did pass, and Christmas did come, and the mystery of the batteries was solved. We still talk about that Christmas and those batteries, and we smile.

'Tis the season of mystery and wonder
Of beholding and kneeling and peace
'Tis the prelude to Advent, another
When at last we look into Love's face.

Thursday, December 22
Isaiah 7:10–16

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign (Isaiah 7:14a).

Signs are a part of our everyday life. They promise us gas at certain prices, food too good to pass up, names and phone numbers for every business under the sun, and road markers to lead us in the right direction. Even children begin to recognize all kinds of signs at very early ages. Children can call out the names of stores without even being able to read, just by seeing a sign. There are signs everywhere we look, but we sometimes get to the point that we no longer notice them.

King Ahaz, according to Isaiah, didn't want signs. Isaiah told him to "Ask the Lord your God for a sign," but Ahaz refused. Ahaz, who was personally threatened and was the leader of a country that was threatened, did not want a sign. Perhaps relying on a sign from God would have required him to follow a path he did not want to follow? Perhaps relying on a sign would have required a level of faith he did not possess? We don't know why King Ahaz didn't want a sign from God, but God gave him one anyway! Isaiah told Ahaz that a child would be born and his name would be Immanuel. Immanuel means "God with us." God's promise to Ahaz was that of his presence, and God's promise to us is the same.

We have signs all around: some are man-made, some are natural, some are evidenced in the actions of others. Some signs teach us, some lead and direct us, and some remind us that God is present in our lives. The signs are there for us, but it is up to us to notice them.

Angela Bush

Friday, December 23, 2011
Romans 1:1–7

And was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 1:4).

This week's series is titled "Christ the King." Kings have been around for thousands of years. Some cultures called them by the title of "Caesar" or "Czar." They all signified the person who had the most wealth and power. The Romans used the term "king" derisively when Jesus was crucified by putting "King of the Jews" at the top of His cross.

The title of "king" for Jesus doesn't sit right with me. King Solomon, King David, King Herod, King Jesus? I know the Jews were looking for a messiah (savior) that would be their king. I feel that Jesus is so much more than the cultural implication of "king."

Consider that Jesus was born in a stable. He did not live in splendor, but as a common man, learning the trade of a carpenter. He showed examples of being a servant, rather than a king. Although He was a Jew, His reach went far beyond the Jewish people.

In Romans 1:1-7, Paul tells us that as to his human nature, Jesus was a descendant of David. In verse four, Paul states that Jesus ". . . through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord." Our Messiah. Our Savior. He is so much more than a king.

Marian Reineke

Saturday, December 24
Luke 2:1–20

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger (Luke 2:16).

Anticipation! So much of Christmas for me can be summed up in that one word. When I was a child, my family spent Christmas Eve at my grandparents' house. Some years, my grandparents would tie a colorful piece of yarn onto a branch of the Christmas tree. The yarn would lead to another room of the house, or sometimes to the garage. At the end of the yarn was my Christmas present! My grandparents gave exciting gifts. One year, it was my very first bike, complete with white and yellow streamers on the handlebars. The next year, it was a beautiful doll house that my grandparents had spent months making, gluing on each shingle and sewing each tiny bedspread by hand. Christmas Eve dinners took FOREVER back then. As children, we weren't allowed to follow the yarn and find our presents until everyone was done eating. Looking back, I think that the excitement that led up to receiving these gifts was almost more fun than the presents themselves.

I have this same feeling of excitement every year when I read the Christmas story. I picture Mary and Joseph, with their crazy birth in a barn, away from home. They may have felt nervous and overwhelmed. And then the shepherds rushed in, so excited about this amazing baby that the angels had told them about. And I imagine that Mary and Joseph shared in the shepherds' excitement. So many months of waiting, and now the moment had finally arrived. As an adult, I no longer get to follow pieces of yarn to find my presents. But, I still love the anticipation that comes with Christmas. It is Christmas Eve! We have arrived!! Tonight we celebrate together as Christians, so thankful for the ultimate gift that our God gave to each and every one of us.

Jennifer Jarrett Dilts

WHAT CHILD IS THIS
Christmas Day, December 25



... let loving hearts enthrone Him.

Christmas Day: Sunday, December 25
Luke 2:21–40

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel (Luke 2:30–32).

Simeon. Anna. Two prophets who had been waiting: one for consolation, the other for redemption. And now, it was here—now He was here. Chris Rice captures the essence of this moment in his song “Welcome to our World”:

Tears are falling, hearts are breaking
How we need to hear from God
You’ve been promised, we’ve been waiting

Welcome Holy Child
Welcome Holy Child

Hope that you don’t mind our manger
How I wish we would have known
But long-awaited Holy Stranger
Make Yourself at home
Please make Yourself at home
Bring Your peace into our violence
Bid our hungry souls be filled
Word now breaking Heaven’s silence

Welcome to our world
Welcome to our world

Advent is a season of waiting, but like Simeon and Anna, most of us have been waiting much longer than a month for the peace of Christ to break into our lives. Advent reminds us of our waiting. Christmas reminds us of our need to welcome the Christ child into our lives again . . . and again . . . and again.

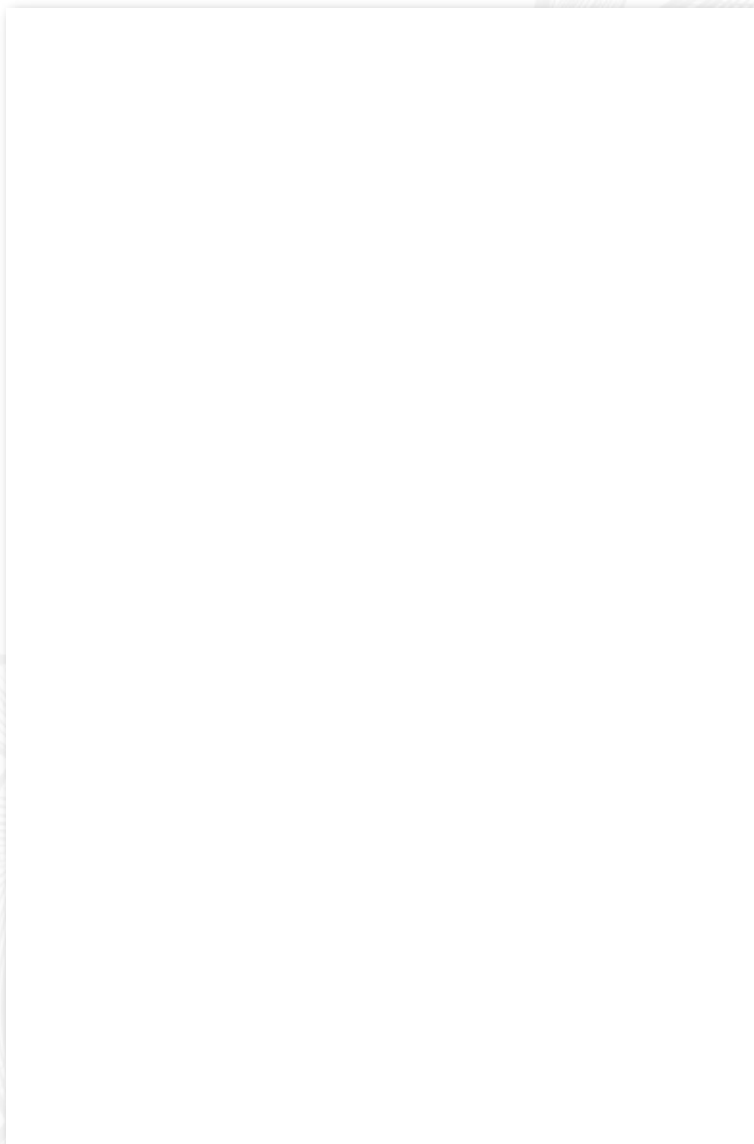
Loving God, we thank you for your sacrificial grace. As we celebrate the gift of your son today, help us to welcome him into our lives again in a new way, so that as we remember his birth, we might also experience anew the mystery of being born again.

Advent 2011

The characters who share in Christmas Eve and Christmas Day aren't just shepherds and folks like Anna and Simeon. They are you and me. Yes, we are characters in this story, too. And so, we also must answer the questions posed by the presence of Emmanuel—What child is this? We invite you to write your thoughts on these two pages.



Advent 2011



Advent 2011

Sunday, November 27

Worship: 8:30 & 11:00 a.m.

The First Sunday of Advent

Zechariah / Luke 1:5-23

Sunday, December 4

Worship: 8:30 & 11:00 a.m.

The Second Sunday of Advent

The Angel Gabriel / Luke 1 and Matthew 1

Sunday, December 11

Worship: 8:30 & 11:00 a.m.

The Third Sunday of Advent

Joseph / Matthew 1:18-25

Sunday, December 18

Worship: 8:30 & 11:00 a.m.

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Mary / Luke 1:26-38



Saturday, December 24

Christmas Eve Worship

Candlelight and Communion

5:00 p.m. & 11:00 p.m.

Shepherds / Luke 2:8-20

Sunday, December 25

Christmas Day

Worship: 11:00 a.m.

Simeon and Anna / Luke 2:21-40



SECOND BAPTIST CHURCH
300 E. Kansas, Liberty, MO 64068
816.781.2824 • 2bcliberty.org