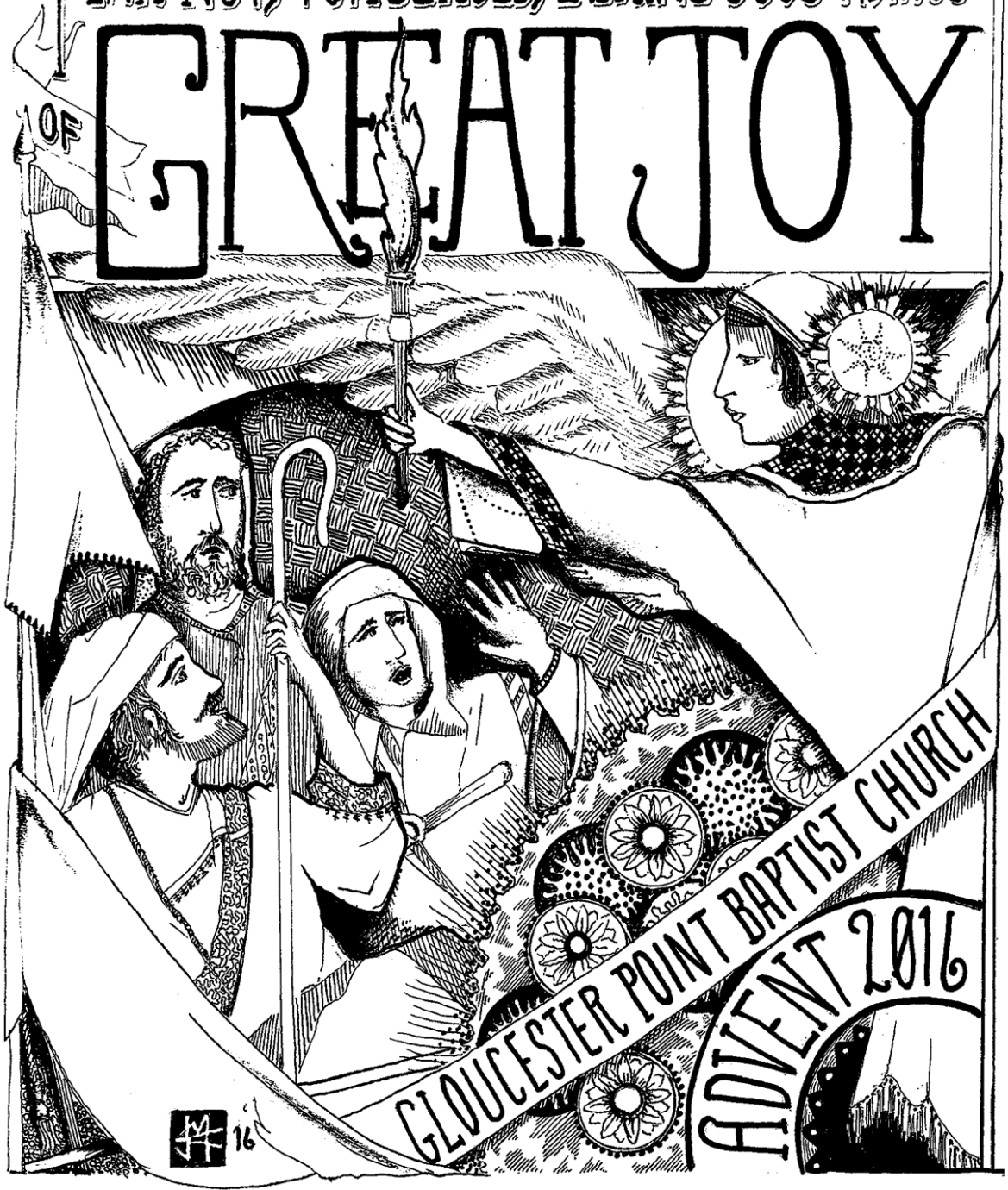


FEAR NOT, FOR BEHOLD, I BRING GOOD TIDINGS

GREAT JOY



GLOUCESTER POINT BAPTIST CHURCH
ADVENT 2016

16

Advent Devotionals:

Jesus Christ, was born some 2000 years ago. The birth of Christ, the Messiah, revealed God's intentions for His creation – hope, peace, joy, and love.

We hope you find this devotional useful in preparing for the fulfilment of both Old Testament and New Testament prophecy.



"Great Joy" Cover Art:

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Introduction to Advent

Advent means "coming" or "arrival." The focus of the Christmas season is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ in his First Advent. This leads to an anticipation of the return of Christ the King in his Second Advent. Thus, Advent is far more than simply marking a 2000 year old event in history. It is celebrating the revelation of God in Christ through which all of creation might be reconciled to Him!

Advent also symbolizes the spiritual journey of individuals and a congregation, whereby we affirm that Christ has come, that He is present in the world today, and that He will come again in majesty. This truth provides a basis for Kingdom living with our call to be faithful stewards of what is entrusted to us as God's people. As we celebrate Christ's birth we honor Advent by loving God, loving others and serving Christ in the world!

Pastor Bud





HOPE

“Jesus said, I am the light of the world; ‘he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’ ” - John 8:12

The first candle lit on the Advent wreath reminds us of the light of HOPE that the prophets had in their expectation of a Messiah who would bring peace and love to the world.

Sunday, November 27

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever." - Isaiah 40:1-8

The dictionary defines Hope as "a feeling that what is wanted will happen."

For non-believers, this wanting and expecting is just wishful thinking. For Christians, it is secure Hope—a hope of confident expectation.

Isaiah 40 tells us of this Hope. There is Hope we will be comforted during our low and difficult times. There is Hope that the glory of the Lord will be revealed to all mankind, and that we will be reunited with loved ones who have gone before us. There is Hope in the word of God. His promises stand forever. He will not fail us.

This Hope comes to us through Jesus. He lived on this earth and died on the cross, paying the price for our sins.

Titus 2:13 calls this "Blessed Hope" – the Hope we have while we wait for the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As we enter this Advent season, let us feel the joy and have the confident expectation of this Blessed Hope that only comes from knowing Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Donna Phillips

Monday, November 28

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ “‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

“Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

- Mathew 25: 1-13

Are You Ready?

I remember as a little girl playing with my cousins and someone would yell, "On your mark, ... get set, ... Go!" We would race toward the target, running as fast as we could. It was so important to be first! Of course, there might be someone who would start running at "get set" instead of waiting, but everyone was ready and anticipating the word "Go" for the race to start.

In today's Scripture, not everyone was ready for the bridegroom's arrival. Five maidens had oil for their lamps and were prepared for the wait. Five others didn't have enough oil to last and had to return to the market to get more. While they were gone, the bridegroom came and everyone who had been waiting went into the feast. The door was closed behind them. Those who came later were not allowed in to the celebration.

The Christmas season can be a time of great joy. There are many ways of celebrating the great advent of God into the world, in the form of a baby. From listening to and performing Christmas music, to attending parties and gatherings of family and friends, to enjoying special services and Bible readings - there are things we can do to prepare our hearts and minds for the season. However, we must be intentional about this preparation. It will not come naturally because our lives are so busy and hectic, so full of activity already. The idea of adding more activity to the mix might seem overwhelming.

This year, let's determine now to prioritize and concentrate on those things that really matter - those things that bring us and those around us closer to God. What do you think? Will you be ready when Christmas Day arrives? Ready, ... get set ...

Mark and Amy Boykin

Tuesday, November 29

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth...

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean.

-Isaiah 11:1-11

The book of Isaiah was written approximately 700 years before the birth of Christ, but as we can see, God had already told his prophet about the birth of Jesus. He not only described the family Jesus would come from, but also attributes of his character and the kind of person he would be (verses 2-5). Wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord, delight in obeying the Lord, etc. God knew how His son would turn out because He knew His son *already* (John 1:1-5). Jeremiah 1:5 tells us that God knew each of us in advance as well and Jeremiah 29:11 tells us that He has a plan for our lives.

Another example of this is in Judges 6 when the angel of the Lord called Gideon a “mighty warrior” even though he was the weakest member of his family in the weakest tribe of Manasseh. God already saw the mighty warrior He would make of the young man if only Gideon was willing. This is no different for you and me. God has seen every possible outcome for our lives and He has paved the best path for us to follow, if only we trust Him. This way may not be the easiest, the quickest, the cheapest, the most convenient, the most glorifying, or even the most sensible. However, God never promised us these things. What He *did* promise us is far better: eternal life through His son Jesus Christ. Those who recognize him as Lord and Savior of the world, repent of their sins, and trust him with their lives will have a spot in heaven reserved just for them. This is truly why we celebrate the Christmas season: to recognize Jesus as the supreme authority in the universe and joyfully celebrate his birth with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Merry Christmas,
Seth Gandee

Wednesday, November 30

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. ...*

*For unto us a child is born, unto 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.

Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

*He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with
justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.*

The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. - Isaiah 9:2-7

The book of Isaiah was written in 8th century BC. It is one of Jesus' favorite books. He frequently quoted it because the central theme is salvation.

Isaiah 9:6 predicts the birth of our Savior and says His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

The title of the first seven verses in Isaiah 9 in my Bible is THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PROMISED SON. I wonder what the people who read these verses during that time thought of the coming of THE PROMISED SON. Did they look forward to this event and have hope for future generations or was it ignored and considered a phenomenon that would never occur.

Today in the 21st century, it seems like many of us are looking for a little peace and quiet in our lives. We practically have everything at the touch of a button, yet there are not enough hours in the day to accomplish all we want to do. I know I need to not only unclutter useless things in my house, but to unclutter my heart, soul and mind and focus on Him.

Jesus is the One who gives us peace in our lives. He whispers calm into our hectic situations. He gives us a break from worries that sometimes overwhelm us. When you take your eyes off of your circumstances long enough to turn them toward Him, you find immediate relief. What great joy it is to have the Prince of Peace on the throne of our lives.

Merry Christmas!
Becky & Wayne Matthews

Thursday, December 1

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive
and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.* *–Isaiah 7:14*

In today's world, most people during Christmas time focus on buying gifts for each other and trying to out do what they had done in the past...consumed with finding that perfect gift. In the mist of the hustle and bustle, we can become frustrated, anxious and angry because things didn't go as planned.

Christmas is about hope, peace, joy and love. Don't let people or situations steal your joy. Psalm 126:3 "The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy". Let us as Christians share the greatest love story, the gift from GOD sent for you and me: the babe in a manger named JESUS.

"The Greatest Joy"

Merry Christmas
Lynn Walton



Friday, December 2

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

- Zechariah 9:9

Jesus Christ, a King, rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Not a mighty stallion as other kings would have done, but a donkey. Most kings would have been arrogant and pleased that common people showed fear when they rode through. But Jesus showed true humility and grace.

Jesus was born in a lowly manger and He died on a cross. Nothing about the way He lived His life was “King like”, yet He is the most important king of all. He gave us the greatest gift we can ever receive and will never be worthy of—salvation from our sins and eternal life with Him in His kingdom. The only way for us to receive this most precious gift was for Jesus to die.

We all get caught up in the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season, but we should focus less on the material aspects of Christmas and more on the true meaning of this holiday. No gift we can give or receive can match the one we were given through the shed blood of Jesus. Share your faith and your love for Jesus with others so that they too might experience the great joy of being a true follower of Christ.

Merry Christmas!
Denise Gandee

Saturday, December 3

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all...

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

– Isaiah 53:1-12

“God Raises the Roof”

Being part of a military family required me to move a lot, bringing me to some interesting places all around the country. Before we moved to Hayes, our family spent two years living in Valdez, Alaska. Northern winters were often challenging, especially concerning buildings. After a while, people get used to the cold temperature. However, after a good six months of winter, the snow would pile up to several feet high. A large snowball may have a hefty weight alone, but several compacted feet of snow can amount to several hundred pounds, possibly thousands. That much weight covered the rooftops of Valdez, often collapsing buildings. One of the buildings that had collapsed, a fishing and game store, had just recently been rebuilt before it was destroyed the next winter.

The bedroom my younger sister and I shared quickly became a potential danger zone. If all that heavy snow broke through the roof, we could have been seriously injured and probably would not have survived. Without a way to remove the snow from the roof (there was barely a way to get outside the house!), our family grew more concerned. My sister and I sometimes were told to sleep in our parent’s room where the roof was more secure. Fortunately, our roof never collapsed in while we lived at that house. A couple leaks would spring up—or rather down—now and then, but we mostly remained warm and dry during the winters. Our safety was not just from the building’s construction, but also from the Lord. Personally, I believe that God was present with us during those winters, holding the roof steady in protection.

-Olivia Adkins, 2016

Peace



“Jesus said, I am the light of the world; ‘he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’ ” - John 8:12

This first candle reminds us of the light of HOPE of the prophets. The second candle reminds us of the light of PEACE God offers us in Christ Jesus.

“We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”- Romans 5:1

“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” - Romans 4:25. “He is our peace.” - Ephesians 2:14

Sunday, December 4

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years. “The angel said to him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time.” -Luke 1:11-20

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Zachariah, he brought him amazing and wonderful news. Although Zachariah and Elizabeth were both old and past childbearing age, they would have a son and were to name him John. The angel Gabriel explained to Zachariah how important John would be in preparing the people for the Lord Jesus. Although Zachariah heard the words that Gabriel spoke, he questioned how such could be possible; thus questioning God’s ability. His mind was filled with questions about how he and Elizabeth would be able to have a child at such an old age. Because he questioned, Gabriel told Zachariah that he would “become silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place.”

I’ve heard it said that “the quieter you become, the more you can hear.” Zachariah should have embraced these words. Although he literally heard the words that the angel spoke, his mind was so busy questioning that he truly did not hear with understanding and acceptance what God’s messenger was saying to him. Like Zachariah, we often do not hear and accept what God is saying to us. We need to behave more like the silent Zachariah by keeping quiet and listening for God and accepting that with God, even the most unlikely things are made possible. God speaks to us all, we just need to be quiet and hear him.

Merry Christmas!
-The Hutson Family

Monday, December 5

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

When his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.

-Luke 1:21-25

GOD IS FAITHFUL

Life is tough, but God is always faithful and His love never fails. It is the same today as it was in Zechariah's time period. God, through His love and faithfulness, provided a child to Zechariah and Elizabeth to fulfill the prophesy of His plan for salvation. When we remain faithful to God and allow the Holy Spirit to work in us through **prayer** (pray for one another), **care** (open our hearts so that God's love may flow through us onto others), and **share** (let others know about God's love through our words and actions), then great things happen because nothing is impossible with God. Jesus came into our world as a baby to give us hope; hope for freedom, forgiveness, and a new life. Hold onto this Hope, keep it close in your heart and mind always.

But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31

You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word. Psalm 119:114

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year with love in Christ,

Al and Martha West

Tuesday, December 6

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." ... "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.
—Luke 1:26-38

I decided with the Lord's help to focus on verse 37, "with God all things are possible." A very old and dear friend had said what was in my heart very eloquently just the other day. James Simons is from my hometown of West Point Military Academy in NY. He is someone who has fought for our country but also remembers a time when things were very different, and as many of us today, long for those times once again. With his permission, I share the following:

I am feeling very optimistic about our future... I would like to see us return to a time:

- Where the companies take care of all employees, instead of rewarding the very few.
- Where our children can play together, without color, race, fear and prejudice.
- When our society had respect for each other, our elders, Veterans, law enforcement, love of God and country and RESPECT for our Flag and Anthem.
- When we could hold our heads high and not be ashamed of being an American and a World super power and not apologize for it or us as a nation, weakened and shrunk down and wither to appease other nations.
- Where we fear Gods wrath, consequence, law and not reward bad behavior.
- Where people weren't so thin skinned and offend so easily.
- Where we are not being drained in our pockets by cost of living, utilities, high prices for basic living needs.
- Where we value our time together and not having to work two jobs to take care of our families, to slow down and really enjoy life and the beauty of the world.

I am optimistic about a new direction of peace, hope and love for all in the days that are ahead of us... It's never too late to restore America to her intended greatness.

I am very hopeful... hope you agree. [James Simons – Nov. 2016]

Merry Christmas everyone and a Wonderful and Blessed New Year to us all.
Barbara Bohan

Wednesday, December 7

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" — Luke 1:39-45

CHRISTMAS 1998

An historic ice storm and bitter temperatures blanketed the state of Virginia and other surrounding states that year. The trees and ground were covered in ice and you could hear the cracking of trees throughout the neighborhood when the wind blew. I and Tammy were blessed that year with a baby boy. We named our son Benjamin and he was 8 months old when the storm arrived. We were without power for 9 days. I heated the main part of the house with a kerosene heater for warmth and to keep the pipes from freezing. A tank of fuel then was only 99 cents per gallon and it would burn for 16 hours. Tammy heated Benjamin's baby bottles on our gas grill, we used candles and oil lamps for light, and our refrigerator was the extreme cold outside.

This reminds me of Mary when she traveled to see Elizabeth to celebrate in the birth to come and the reaffirmation of her faith. I think about the simplicity of their lives and the obstacles they had to overcome in just the day to day activities of being a woman in those times. I mean after all there were no modern conveniences, yet their faith and their joy for life was evident. I traveled to my parents for Christmas that year and while their wood stove kept us warm I thought about the true meaning of being together as a family without the modern conveniences we take for granted and it put into perspective the important things in life like conversations at the dinner table eating the food my mom and dad had prepared, instead of rushing through dinner to watch sports on the television. I was reminded that Gods blessings are often in disguise and that being with those who love the Lord somehow strengthens my faith and trust. My family still today brings up that memorable 1998 Christmas.

The Greggs

Thursday, December 8

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation ...

"Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

-Luke 1: 46-56

The Magnificat

This passage is the beautiful song that Mary sang to her cousin Elizabeth. These words have been put to music many times, and they are referred to as "The Magnificat." The word "Magnificat" is Latin for "magnifying. To Magnify is to increase the apparent size or perception of; to extol; to exalt. And Mary used this opportunity to exalt her God and to give God the glory, honor, and praise he deserved; to express her delight and pride to be chosen by God for this specific purpose.

Elizabeth greeted Mary with the news that her own baby, John, had leapt with JOY in her womb upon seeing the "Mother of my Lord," Mary broke into this song of praise. Don't you often respond to JOY or happiness with a song? I know I do. During a beautiful day, I often sing, *How Great Thou Art* or *For the Beauty of the Earth* - songs I have known since childhood. When I ponder the salvation and forgiveness of God, I often sing *Amazing Grace* or *The Old Rugged Cross*. Outside on a particularly starry night, I recall the words of Psalm 8.

In this song of Mary, she also recalled songs she was familiar with. She uses words from Psalms (her hymnbook) 34; 138; 71; and 98. She also recalls the beautiful song of Hannah in I Samuel 2, another woman who was blessed by God with a special son.

Both in times of joy and sorrow, we often turn to hymns, scripture, spiritual songs that are familiar to us as our prayers. Our joys and sorrows are often shared by many people and are what we might call everyday experiences. But Mary's Joy (and later her sorrow) is like no other. Only Mary was the Mother of the Son of God. This miracle that every Jewish girl had dreamed of having bestowed upon her, happened only to Mary. Her emotions had to have been humility, fear, reverence, but also JOY and hopefulness. I can almost see this young woman dancing with glee as she spoke to her cousin, just like Miriam danced before the Israelites and led them in singing after God had delivered them from the Egyptians.

Many of our Christmas songs express Joy, but also mystery, reverence, praise, and prayer. Mary committed her life to God as she reared his very son. Our lives today may seem very small in comparison, but we are the bodies God uses to spread his word, to bring God's people back to him, to sing his songs. May we use the power God has given us wisely.

Joyfully, Jimmy and Charlene

Friday, December 9

When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."

They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. ... Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him. - Luke 1: 57-66

A Woman's Missionary Union mission project helped make the Christmas of '71 a meaningful experience for our family. Early in the year, the Annie Armstrong Circle "adopted" Linda, a teenage resident of the Virginia Baptist Children's Home, located in Salem, Virginia. During the summer, Linda spent several weeks with our church family, residing in our home for a part of that time. During that visit, Linda asked if she could spend some time at Christmas with us and, in response to an inquiry about gifts she would like to receive for Christmas, expressed a desire for a green velvet dress.

Gifts for Linda, including the materials needed to make a green velvet dress, were added to the family Christmas shopping list. The drive to Salem to pick up Linda, as soon as she completed her last day of school before Christmas break, and the return trip went smoothly. She stayed with us until about noontime on Christmas Day, then visited other members of our church family before returning to Salem a few days later. While with us, she participated in our usual Christmas activities: Christmas Eve dinner with Doris' mother and family, a Christmas morning reading from Luke's gospel, a birthday party for Jesus and the exchange of gifts. Her delight with the green velvet dress (and other gifts) was evident.

It's amazing how much joy and excitement Linda's presence added to our family's rather normal Christmas celebration that year. Our efforts to share our gifts and Christian love with a young teen who was separated from her own family resulted in our family being rewarded tenfold and more.

- Tom and Doris Riley (1996)

Saturday, December 10

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

*“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.*

*He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
...*

*And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.” - Luke 1:67-80*

Zechariah’s Song came after nine months of trial. Zachariah, an older Israeli priest, was chosen to burn incense in the Jerusalem Temple. The angel Gabriel appeared to him there and announced that Zachariah’s long-time prayer request for a child would now be granted. But this priest didn’t believe Gabriel! Zechariah was a spiritual man who served God daily and yet he was skeptical because his wife was old and barren.

So Gabriel struck Zachariah mute as punishment for his unbelief.

Now the “miracle” baby had been born and Zachariah obeyed God by naming him John. *“immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak, praising God.”* (Luke 1:64) Zachariah’s faith had grown. God visibly worked in his life and he gave God the glory.

How about you? What truths has God shown you through struggle and adversity? Do you praise Him for His care and guidance?

*“Great truths are greatly won, not found by chance,
Nor wafted on the breath of summer dream;
But grasped in the great struggle of our soul,
Hard buffeting with adverse wind and stream.”¹*

Linda Breaks

¹ Streams in the Desert, L. B. Cowman p. 414.

Joy



“Jesus said, I am the light of the world; ‘he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’ ” - John 8:12

This first candle reminds us of the light of HOPE of the prophets. The second candle reminds us of the light of PEACE God offers us in Christ Jesus. The third candle is a symbol of the great light and JOY which surrounded the shepherds at the announcement of Jesus’ birth.

Sunday, December 11

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

Abraham was the father of Isaac,

Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

...

and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

...

and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

– Matthew 1:1-17

Our Bible Old Testament predicts Christ's birth and in the New Testament records the genealogy of Christ's origin. Matthew wanted believers in his day and later readers to know exactly how and where Jesus came to be. He made no omissions in his report so there would be no question regarding Jesus heritage.

Some liberal theologians, past and present, have tried to isolate "sacred" history from "real" history. Their argument is that an event did not have to really happen to be considered "true" in a religious sense. They say Jesus didn't really have to be born of a virgin, contending that this is just Christians' way of saying Jesus was "special". Matthew does not share this view. The Jesus he presents is the Jesus of history (sacred and secular) and Matthew goes to great lengths to make sure his readers know specific details of Christ's birth and earliest years.

The Jesus Christ we trust for our salvation and joy was truly born of a virgin and really is God's son as our Bible tells us. Jesus birth was the fulfillment of the promise given David in Hebrew 2 and is predicted in various books of the Old Testament.

On a personal note relating to Joy, the Breeden family experienced much Joy on December 11, 2000. Our third grandson (Jon English Breeden Huston) was born on this day. He has brought joy and happiness to his parents and grandparents.

Bill and Gloria Breeden

Monday, December 12

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,^[1] because he will save his people from their sins."

– Matthew 1:18-21

The story of birth of Jesus Christ came about via Virgin Mary conceived a baby through Holy Spirit. When Joseph, the groom-to-be and son of David, was considering to divorce Mary quietly, an angel appeared to him in a dream and said to him: *"Do not afraid to take Mary home as your wife and she will give birth to a son, and you are to given him the name of Jesus"*.

This is an extra-ordinary historical event, which was to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son...and they will call him Immanuel". Jesus is the son of David whose name was called out by a blind man in Jericho: "Son of David, have mercy on me". Jesus asked: "what do you want me to do for you". The blind man said: "Rabbi, I want to see". "Go,," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you". This is the same gift I received from Jesus, the son of David and the Immanuel, in that I was once blind, but now I can see again. Hallelujah.

Harry V. Wang

Tuesday, December 13

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

—*Matthew 1:22-25*

The birth of Jesus was the fulfillment from the Lord through the prophet. Joseph did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, speedily, without delay, and cheerfully, without dispute. Taking Mary as his wife, accepting his son, he was to call his name Jesus, a Savior.

Jesus Christ was with God from the beginning and was sent by God to do what the world could not do, but which only God could do, and that is to reconcile the world into God’s Self. The word taking our flesh and dwelling among us; this is the great act of God’s gracious self-giving love to bring the world into right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Tidings of Great Joy only comes through Jesus. He came first as one of us, to show us who God is, and to make a way for us to be reconciled to God. He is the Messiah and King.

Joy is trusting when you want to doubt.

“Trust in the Lord forever, because in Yah, the Lord, is an everlasting rock.” (Isaiah 26:4)

Joy is receiving what you want to reject.

“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.” (Hebrews 13:2)

Joy is celebrating when you want to fear.

Write a note to someone who is experiencing fear and worry. Let them know you’re praying that God will give them the courage they need.

May we find Joy through Hope, Peace, and Love, all which symbolizes God’s never-ending love.

Merry Christmas,
Alice Amanda Oldfield

Wednesday, December 14

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

*" 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.' "*

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

- Matthew 2:1-12

This chapter in Matthew has a special meaning to me. My three grandsons and two great grandsons were a wonder to behold when they were born. I don't think anything else before or after has filled my heart with such joy and anticipation then the birth of these 5 precious boys. I didn't have gold, frankincense nor myrrh to give them but they were each in their own right a miracle from Heaven for my family and there was nothing then, nor now, that I wouldn't do for them if it was in my power.

The miracle of birth is such a wondrous thing - such a tiny, trusting little thing that God gives us to care for and raise in his image. I can't begin to imagine how Mary and Joseph must have felt when Jesus was born and they knew that he was going to be King of Kings. In spite of Herod's duplicity our King survived and became our one true GOD. Praise the Lord.

Barbara Fryer

Thursday, December 15

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

...

- Matthew 2:13-18

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

- Galatians 4:4-7

Galatians, verses 1-2 lead up to our scripture for today. In these verses we learn that the heir, as long as he is a child, is not different from a servant, though He is Lord of all but is under tutors and governors until the appointed time of this father.

Verse 4 – at God's PERFECT TIME He sent JESUS into the earth to die for our sins. We can come to CHRIST at any time; knowing HE will welcome us as a member of HIS family.

Jesus was born to Mary, a young virgin woman. He was born a Jew and fulfilled all the Jewish laws. Jesus is not just Joseph's adopted son; HE is GOD'S "only begotten SON." We may sometimes wonder if GOD will ever answer our prayers. But we should never doubt Him or give up hope.

As we go into this Christmas season; let us remember all Jesus endured in His lifetime and the terrible suffering on the cross as He died that we might have eternal life.

My Christmas wish for you is peace and GOD'S LOVE EACH DAY.

- Dot Elder (2010)

Friday, December 16

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene. - Matthew 2:19-23

At this time of year, we cannot forget the joy Joseph and Mary must have felt with the birth of their son. Yet, sorrow must have consumed them both. King Herod had ordered the death of their child. These were very dark times for Mary and Joseph but they never gave up. They had complete faith in God's plan.

Every week I receive email's or text messages with information about members of our church who are having surgery, suffering serious illness, loss of loved ones, loss of jobs and many who have request prayer for unnamed reasons. It seems that so much sorrow surrounds our community. How can we find JOY in SORROW?

"For his anger last only a moment, but his favor last a lifetime, weeping may remain for a night, but joy comes in the morning." Psalm 30:5

We can experience joy when we know God. He is our joy, and the more we know Him the greater our joy becomes. As Christians in times of sorrow we find strength and hope in prayer and our belief in God's power. Circumstances can not take away your joy. This means that even when we are in the midst of a situation that brings us sorrow, our inner joy is never taken away. The very core of our being can still rejoice in the fact that we are forgiven children of God. We are shown daily his love, mercy and forgiveness. Our joy is strengthened when we remember that, no matter what the circumstances, God is with us and He is above all.

Wishing my church family a wonderful Christmas and a safe and happy new year.

Sonya Anthony

Saturday, December 17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

- Matthew 3:13-17

Glory to God in the Highest and Peace on Earth Good Will to All Men.

Jesus came to teach us that love and peace is possible with faith.

Several weeks ago the choir sang an anthem, "The Lighthouse" by Ronnie Hinson. Below are some of the words from that anthem:

*There's a lighthouse on the hillside
That overlooks life's sea
When I'm tossed it sends our a light,
Tis a light that I might see.
And the light that shines in darkness now
Will safely lead us o'er
If it wasn't for the lighthouse,
My ship would be now more.*

*And I thank God for the lighthouse,
I owe my life to him.
For Jesus is the lighthouse
And from the rocks of sin;
He has shone a light around me
That I could clearly see,
If it wasn't for the lighthouse
Tell me where would this ship be."*

Lighthouses lift up our spirits and inspire us, just as the bright beacon of lights guides ships along their route directing them away from danger. The lighthouse symbolizes guidance through our lives. It also serves as a symbol of Christ, the Light of the World. "God's word is a lamp unto my feet and a light for my path." Psalm 119:105

Is it any wonder that the Angels sang Glory to God when they looked on the face of Jesus laying the manger while the Angles hovered over, singing and the Shepherds and the Wise Men knelt at His feet? May we all find joy and peace as we look forward to the Birthday of Jesus, Singing glory to God in the highest and peace on earth good will toward men. This is my wish that all of us have a Happy, Holy Christmas and a Healthy New Year.

My love to all of you, my church family! You are all special to me!
Alice Deal

Love



“Jesus said, I am the light of the world; ‘he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’ ” - John 8:12

This first candle reminds us of the light of HOPE of the prophets. The second candle reminds us of the light of PEACE God offers us in Christ Jesus. The third candle is a symbol of the great light and JOY which surrounded the shepherds at the announcement of Jesus’ birth. The fourth candle reminds us of the tremendous LOVE that God has for each one of us.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should have everlasting life” - John 3:16

Sunday, December 18

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Luke 2:1:7

When Mary and Joseph had to leave the Town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea to Bethlehem to the town of David to register for the census for the entire Roman World...Imagine how they must have felt knowing that their baby was soon to be born? The journey was about 70 miles. I wonder how Mary was feeling about it. When they did arrive ...there was no room for them at the Inn. Mary gave birth to her first born son in a stable and laid Him in a manger. Mary gave us our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ! What a gift of Love she gave us!

I have had many gifts of love in my life. The love of my wonderful parents, grandparents, sisters, husband, child and grandsons. I have also had the love of my church family and my Sunday school class. I have been so blessed with so much love in my 81 years, but the greatest gift of love is my Savior Jesus Christ!

May you all have a Merry Christmas and a Blessed Happy New Year!

Rachel Wells



Monday, December 19

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."
- Luke 2:8-14

The first twenty verses of Luke 2 present an interesting interplay of earthly and heavenly beings surrounding the birth of Christ. Luke mentions the ruler of the Roman world, a governor, a young pregnant Jewish girl, her soon-to-be husband, the baby, shepherds, the angel of the Lord, and a great of company of the heavenly host. And God, the Lord God Almighty. Powerful, loving, all-knowing, omnipresent.

Why did God choose these particular beings? What do we learn from each one? Of course, the young pregnant Jewish girl and the baby had to be there. Everyone seems to have a place in this beautiful nativity story, except, maybe, those shepherds... dirty, smelly, bottom of the social ladder. Shepherds were not highly regarded in ancient times. As far back as Genesis we find evidence of this. Genesis 46:33-34 tells of Joseph giving his brothers advice on how to be socially accepted in Egypt. His brothers were not to tell Pharaoh that they were shepherds. "Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians." They were despised elsewhere as well.

God's choice of shepherds to be the first humans to meet and worship the Christ Child causes us to stop and think. God loves all of His people. He has important roles for His people. He calls on all of us to tell others about Jesus. He watches over all of His people. He lifts their heads up and restores their self-worth. God called on these shepherds to witness the One who would be the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). God calls on us to do the same.

Merry Christmas and God Bless!!
Linda, Wendy and Chase Mitchell

Tuesday, December 20

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

—Luke 2:15-20

I would think that most people we come across daily have heard of Jesus. They've heard some version of the Christmas Story and they may even categorize themselves as Christians if asked. If however, we asked them what makes someone a Christian we would most likely get all kinds of answers.

In God's eyes there is only one correct answer to that question.

If we sinful ones (that's all of us) upon "SEEING" Jesus, realize our condemned condition, and ask God's forgiveness through Jesus, believing and excepting His loving, forgiving love on the cross, and then begin living our lives for Him...we are Christians!

Seeing Jesus-believing Jesus-accepting Jesus death in our place- living for Jesus-telling others about Jesus.

The story of Jesus' birth is the story, also, of our new birth through Him!

Margaret Sarratori

Wednesday, December 21

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord,

...

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

– Luke 2:21-35

This year we traveled to Barcelona, Spain where we enjoyed visiting many churches and cathedrals. One cathedral in particular stood out, the Sagrada Familia designed and partially constructed by Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí. Gaudí, now known as a famous architect and artist, was also a very religious man. Gaudí worked on the Cathedral from 1883 until his death in 1926. In the last years of his life, he worked exclusively on the Cathedral day in and day out.

Surprisingly, the Sagrada Familia is still under construction! It will be the tallest religious building in all of Europe with the central tower reaching 170 meters tall. Gaudí believed that nothing man-made should ever be higher than God's work. The final height will be 1 meter less than Montjuic, the mountain in Barcelona, which is the city's highest point. The towers and most of the Cathedral's structure are to be completed by 2026, the centennial of Gaudí's death.

In the scripture for today, we find Jesus visiting the most famous place of worship during His time on earth. Jesus was taken to the Temple in Jerusalem for the Jewish religious ritual of redemption when he was 40 days old. This ritual was an obligatory ceremony for boys according to the law of Moses. At the Temple, the baby Jesus is approached by a man named Simeon, who has been told by the Holy Spirit that he will not die until he has seen the Messiah. (The same Spirit told him to go to the Temple that day too.) Simeon takes Jesus in his arms and praises God: "*Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel*" (Luke 2:28–32).

Can you imagine Simeon's great joy! He had spent his last years in obedience to God and visiting the temple almost every day. The Holy Spirit had told Simeon he would see the Messiah before he died, and because of his obedience Simeon experienced the greatest joy that anyone will ever have, to meet Jesus our Savior face-to-face. We pray that our country and people throughout the world will come to know the **Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love** that can only be known through **Faith** in Jesus.

Keith and Leslie Belvin

*"To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with **GREAT JOY.**" (Jude 24)*

Thursday, December 22

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him. *– Luke 2:36-40*

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. *- Colossians 3:15*

It was a tradition in our family to take a trip up to Richmond, Va. shortly before Christmas each year. The morning we left home, we were each given some money (for us kids it was usually \$20) and instructions. We were to use the money to purchase gifts for all people on our Christmas list.

On one such trip, I spotted a perfect prize very early into my shopping duties. This prize was a small wooden airplane, and it was perfect for me. I purchased the plane, and continued with my shopping. The money I had not spent, I soon realized, would not allow me to purchase the rest of my presents. I sought out my father who was doing his own shopping in the same store. He had already finished buying presents, and was fondly admiring a pipe in the tobacco department. Pipe smoking you see, was the only “vice” I ever knew my father to have. I told him of my plight, but not about the airplane (which I am sure was visible sticking out of the shopping bag). He reached for his wallet, as he always did. I remember that there were only three \$1 bills there. That amount would allow me to finish my shopping or him to buy a pipe. He quietly handed me the money, and off I ran to finish my shopping. It was not until a year later, that I noticed my father was still smoking his OLD pipe. When I asked why he still smoked it, he simply said that the one he had was all he needed. I never knew him to ever purchase a pipe for himself after that.

JESUS’ gift...He cared more for US than He did for Himself!

- Gene Cumbia (2008)

Friday, December 23

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them. — Luke 2:41-50

"Where is Jesus?"

When things are going smoothly for us, we often perceive that as a sign that our Lord is with us, blessing us as we go about life's journey. It is true that every blessing is from above. James 1:17 says, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."*

But what about the times we don't seem to get a break, and life is throwing us curve balls from almost every direction? The temptation to wonder "where is Jesus?" sometimes presents itself. Why doesn't He immediately come on the scene and fix our problems the way we want the moment we ask Him? We can rest assured that He hears our prayers and that He has not forsaken us (1 John 5:14, John 9:31, Matthew 28:20).

In Luke 2:41-50, we are taught that Jesus was about His Father's business as He "tarried behind in Jerusalem", though Mary and Joseph wondered where He was. We can be comforted today that Jesus loves us and is committed to us. The Bible teaches us that *"Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever"* (Hebrews 13:8). He cares for us, His children, and is with us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Also, He is still *"about His Father's business"* as He sits at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us (Romans 8:34) He is praying God's perfect will for us, no matter what we're going through.

If you're wondering where Jesus is right now as you're encountering difficult times, please hold on. Jesus will never let you go. He will bring you through, as He is still *"about His Father's business"*.

David Crummett, 2016

Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.
- Luke 2:51-52

The Angelic Visitation

A Poem by Mary Peters (2009)

She was just a young girl, a lovely sweet pearl,
And to Joseph was soon to be wed.
While taking a walk, she heard someone talk,
And quickly she turned her head.
There glowing and bright, in a garment of white,
An angel reached out for her hand.
Confused and afraid, she covered her head,
For his words she did not understand.
“Mary” he said, as she bowed her head,
“You are favored by God who is true.
I have come here today, these words to you say.
The Lord God is surely with you.
You will soon have a child, a babe meek and mild,
And Jesus shall be his fine name.
And this little one, will be God’s only son,
And his greatness the heavens proclaim”.
Mary couldn’t believe, that she could conceive,
Since a virgin she happened to be.
So the angel so bright, in the garment of white,
Answered her questioning plea.
“You can believe and you will conceive,
As God’s spirit comes down over you.
God’s son will be known, and it will be shown,
That these words I have spoken are true.
So fear not young Mary, and be thou not weary,
For you are now blessed beyond measure.
This child you will bear, will be God’s Holy Heir.
He will be the whole world’s greatest treasure.

Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love



“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good new of great joy that will be for all the people. Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. ‘Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth PEACE to men on whom his favor rests’”

- Luke 2: 10-14

Christmas Day

Sunday, December 25

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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. - John 3:16-17

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. - Luke 2:7

I enjoy Christmas manger scenes. They are filled with people like Joseph and Mary, the shepherds, animals and most importantly, Baby Jesus! God's Christmas Manger is a special message regarding "Shelter."

Our Scripture passage for Christmas Day, John 3:16, has the greatest idea of "Shelter." God provided for us by giving us His only begotten Son. Believing by faith in Jesus means we will have eternal life. Believers will experience eternal never-ending life. We will experience God's eternal "Shelter" which is Heaven!

Luke 2:7 concludes, "... because there was no room for them in the inn." Our Lord God provided "Shelter" for His Beloved Son, His willing servants and His attentive animals. The Lord God is still providing His shelter of love for all who believe in Christ!

The following story is an example of how God provides for our needs, even our need for "Shelter." Life was tough for Datha and her family. At age 39, she had a heart attack and bypass surgery and learned that she had coronary artery disease. A year later her 15-year-old daughter, Heather, became paralyzed as the result of a car accident. Datha quit her job to take care of Heather, and the bills started piling up. Soon they would be facing eviction. Datha became angry with God and stopped praying.

Then on Christmas Eve 2004, a young girl knocked on Datha's door. The girl wished her a Merry Christmas, gave her an envelope, and left quickly. Inside was a gift that would cover Datha's housing needs for the next year! The attached note read, "Please accept this gift in honor of the Man whose birthday we celebrate on this holy night. Long ago, His family also had a shelter problem."

Datha never knew who provided for their housing needs. God has a way of putting others in our paths when we need it most. Perhaps the next time we see a Manger Scene, we will reflect on God's "Shelter" of love for all who believe in Jesus Christ!

This winter we will assist the homeless by providing them with 2 weeks of "Shelter." God gives us this opportunity to provide the shelter that these people need during the winter months. It is one way that God can use us to show His love to others.

Merry Christmas,
Bud and Donna Goude



Joy to the World

English Hymn: Isaac Watts 1719

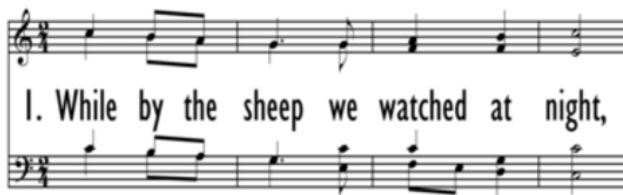
Melody: George Frederick Handel, 1742

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King.
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns;
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, and wonders of His love.



How Great Our Joy

German Carol

Melody: Hugo R. Jungst, 1890

While by the sheep we watched at night,
Glad tidings brought an angel bright.

How great our joy! Great our joy!

Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!

Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

There shall be born, so He did say,
In Bethlehem a Child today.

How great our joy! Great our joy!

Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!

Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

There shall the Child lie in a stall,
This Child who shall redeem us all.

How great our joy! Great our joy!

Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!

Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

This gift of God we'll cherish well,
That ever joy our hearts shall fill.

How great our joy! Great our joy!

Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!

Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

Opportunities for Involvement, Service, and Worship

Gloucester Point Baptist Church

7741 Terrapin Cove Road (P. O. Box 305), Gloucester Point, VA 23062

Phone: 804-642-2555 <http://www.gloptbaptist.org/>

<i>November 27</i>	<u>First Sunday of Advent</u>	
	9:30 AM	Sunday School 11:00 AM -Worship
	2:00 PM	CARE Ministry
	6:00 PM	Hanging of the Greens
<i>November 30</i>	6:30-7:30 PM	Children's Advent Bible School (Preschool – 5 th)
<i>December 4</i>	<u>Second Sunday of Advent</u>	
	9:30 AM	Sunday School 11:00 AM -Worship
	2:00 PM	CARE Ministry
<i>December 7</i>	6:30-7:30 PM	Children's Advent Bible School (Preschool – 5 th)
<i>December 11</i>	<u>Third Sunday of Advent</u>	
	9:30 AM	Sunday School 11:00 AM -Worship
	2:00 PM	CARE Ministry
	6:30 PM	Christmas Cantata and Reception
<i>December 14</i>	6:30-7:30 PM	Children's Advent Bible School (Preschool – 5 th)
	6:30 PM	Called Business Meeting
<i>December 18</i>	<u>Fourth Sunday of Advent</u>	
	9:30 AM	Sunday School
	11:00 AM	Worship & Children's Music
	6:30 PM	Christmas Cantata
<i>December 24</i>	5:00 PM	Christmas Eve Service
<i>December 25</i>	<u>Christmas Day</u>	
	11:00 AM	Worship
<i>December 30 – January 1</i>		Youth at Winterfest
<i>January 1</i>	<u>New Year's Day</u>	
	9:30 AM	Sunday School 11:00 AM -Worship
	2:00 PM	CARE Ministry
<i>January 6</i>	<u>Epiphany</u>	

Each Wednesday

5:30 PM Youth Program-TLC,

6:30 PM Children's and Adult Bible Study

7:30 PM Chancel Choir Practice

Each Friday

9:30 AM Seniors Morning Out