



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.

Epiphany and the Twelve Days of Christmas

The Twelve Days of Christmas begins on December 25 and ends just before Epiphany, which falls on January 6. Epiphany is a Christian feast intended to celebrate the 'shining forth' or revelation of God to mankind in human form, in the person of Jesus Christ. It is also a celebration of the manifestation of the divine nature of Jesus to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi.

"Love Came Down" 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 2,000 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 29

‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. “In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Savior.’
Exodus 24:3-4

One Voice

Downtown Newport News back in the 60’s used to be where everyone went during the Christmas season. The streets were lined in festive lights from end to end. You shopped downtown at Woolworths or Sears or took a short ride over to NewMarket. Since then a lot has changed. Where Merry Christmas once bannered every storefront, the words “Merry X-mas” has replaced them.

Some good did come along though, the news was circulating that we were going to have what we call today a “Mall”! Then bang! - Coliseum Mall, NewMarket Mall and Patrick Henry Mall - whow! Guess what more change has come our way again? We now have QVC on our televisions and Amazon on our computers!

Point is we still as a nation celebrate Christmas! We still, though wicked as we are, call our self a Christian nation. Praise God as a people we still have not given up that title. I think some don’t care at all about “One Nation Under God” or “In God We Trust” but still the fact is this country has been blessed to continue its freedom because we share “One Voice” as Exodus 24:3 reminds us.

Thank you Lord for being our God and we look so dearly for your return. This season, my prayer and that of my Christian Family Lord is simply to revive our Hope!

Gus Saunders

Monday, November 30

'The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah 'In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Savior. Jeremiah 33:14-16

He is the First and Last,
The Beginning and the End!
He is the keeper of Creation and the Creator of all!
He is the Architect of the universe and the Manager of all times.
He always was, He always is, and He always will be ...
Unmoved, Unchanged, Undefeated, and never Undone!

He reigns and brings Peace!
The armies can't defeat Him,
The schools can't explain Him, and The leaders can't ignore Him.
Herod couldn't kill Him, The Pharisees couldn't confuse Him,
Nero couldn't crush Him, Hitler couldn't silence Him,

He is light, love, longevity, and Lord.
He is goodness, Kindness, Gentleness, and God.
He is Holy, Righteous, mighty, powerful, and pure.
He is my Lord, and He rules my life!

I serve Him because His bond is love,
His burden is light, and His goal for me is abundant life.
I follow Him because He is the wisdom of the wise,
the power of the powerful,
the ancient of days, the ruler of rulers, the leader of leaders.

Our prayer is that this writing nourishes you heart today and always as it reminds us of what we have in Him. As you read, replace the "I" with your "name."

God's Richest Blessings to All,
Janie & Earl Conkling (2009)

Tuesday, December 1

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.
-Titus 2:11-13

Because He Lives

It was Friday December 1st, 1978 in Jackson Mississippi, a brilliant beautiful day as far as the weather went. I remember the sun shined so bright that day that it hurt my eyes as I held Mommy in my arms and I thought, she's going home today that's why it was such a brilliantly beautiful day. It was as if the Angel's in Heaven were all rejoicing, but I was not...

Mommy had taken a turn for the worse a month before to the very day. The cancer had spread. I had just turned eighteen and I was enrolled in my first semester at Mississippi College, a Southern Baptist College, in a quiet nearby little area called Clinton. I called her doctor that morning to see if he thought I should even go to class as he had been out to the house the day before, she was failing quickly. He said he thought I should go to class, that she would be alright for a couple of hours with my Grandmother there who had come from NY to help me care for her at the end, but something in my heart said no don't go, and I did not. Mommy and I had a very special bond that I was blessed beyond belief to have had with her and something told me today was the day that she would go to be with the Lord and my life would be forever changed....

At 2:32 PM Friday December 1st, 1978 she left me as she lay in my arms to go be with the Lord and I thought my life was over... I wanted to go with her and I prayed to God for strength to go on because I knew that both He and Mommy would not want me to be so broken. I still had to tell my 8 yr. old sister when she got off the bus, that Mommy had gone to be with Jesus... I kept reciting the Footprints poem to myself in my head. I remember that but the next day, as we were making all the arrangements, my Grandmother seemed very agitated with me and said “Barbara! Would you stop that!” Well, I looked at her like she was crazy because I had not said or done anything at the time, and I replied, “what are you talking about?” I thought she had lost her mind! She replied “stop humming that stupid song! You have been humming it all day today, all day yesterday, even since early yesterday morning.” It was then that I realized without even knowing it I had been humming the Bill and Gloria Gaither song, **BECAUSE HE LIVES**, pretty much according to my Grandmother, for two whole days....

I did not realize then but many years later just how much strength my precious Lord had given me that day with the gift of his love, his comfort, strength and grace that I believe he gave to me in the guise of a simple song called **BECAUSE HE LIVES**....

Barbara Bohan, 2015

P.S. It's ironic that whoever volunteered me to write this Advent Devotional had no idea that the date they designated to me of December 1st for the advent booklet would be so profound... Certainly I believe a testament from God...

Wednesday, December 2

In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

—Isaiah 2:2-5

The Gift

There was no indecision, what to buy or from which stores,
This Gift was quickly chosen, and sent from heaven's doors.
It wasn't wrapped in shiny paper, or tied with a fancy bow,
But was wrapped in one clean cloth which was wound from head to toe.
There was no scent of cedar or pine, but rather the smell of a stable,
Where oxen, donkeys, and cattle slept, and doves nested in its gable.
It wasn't placed under an evergreen tree decked out with handmade trim,
But was lovingly laid in a straw-filled manger in that stables so dirty and dim.
No silver bells were ringing as the shepherds watched their sheep,
But they heard the angels singing of the King now fast asleep.
There were no flashing colored lights, but just one bright shining star,
Yet that one star led three wise men who traveled from afar.
It wasn't a toy to be thrown aside as the days and weeks went by,
But a gift that would last through endless time, and one that would satisfy.
This Gift was meant for every man no matter his race or creed,
It was sent as a Gift of Love by one who saw the great need.
For God loved each of us so much that He sent His own Son to save,
And whoever will believe in Him need no longer fear the grave.
But each man, alone, must choose to accept this Gift freely given,
He must reach out with an open heart, and set his eyes toward heaven.
For this living Gift, Christ Jesus, stands waiting with arms open wide,
To receive us just as we are, and make us His heavenly Bride.

May we be blessed with the joy of His birth into this world and especially into our hearts.

Merry Christmas! – Eugene and Mary Peters (2010)

Thursday, December 3

*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*

The word Christmas begins with Christ: the virgin-born Christ child, our Savior. The babe of Bethlehem was not merely a remarkable child but the Son of God. In His infinite grace, He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was born into this world as a man, yet He never ceased to be God.

Jesus Christ in His infinite love did not begin when He was born in a stable and laid in a manger; He left Heaven's best to come to this world to be the Savior of mankind. He was offered as a free gift.

God's gift to the world was despised and rejected 2,000 years ago. In the life of every person who has rejected Him since that time, there has proved to be a fatal defectiveness. Only when we accept the free gift of eternal life through Christ can we know the true meaning of Christmas, the forgiveness of sin, and life everlasting.

God gave His all for you. By giving Him your all this Christmas, you will reach others with the Gospel that they, too, may receive God's gift

In what tangible ways can you give Jesus your all today and in the coming year?

Billy Graham
Preparing to Celebrate Christ's Birth, Advent Meditations

Friday, December 4

*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*

We live in a world that is not peaceful- it is filled with uncertainty and sadness. It seems like troubles and sorrows in the world never end.

For many, life can be nothing more than a daily struggle in hopelessness. As we watch the news around the world we see the results of man's government, some countries are waging war against their enemies, other countries face economic chaos, and everyone suffers from the consequences of man's sinful heart.

From the Bible we realize that the troubles and sorrows mankind experiences are a result of broken fellowship with God. Suffering as a result of sin and facing future judgment mankind is in desperate need of a Savior, dating back to Adam and Eve.

In Isaiah, we are shown some glorious prophecies, promises for the future, about the Savior who was yet to come. We are told he would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Today we enjoy the fulfillment of these prophecies, in part, for Jesus did come to take away our sins and restore our fellowship with God. We look forward to the complete fulfillment - the day when Jesus will reign over the earth.

As we put our trust in Jesus Christ, embracing His Salvation, light will flood our lives, dispelling the darkness. The good news of the Gospel throughout history has brought freedom, joy, hope, and peace. Jesus brings us hope and peace!

Wishing everyone joy, hope and peace this Christmas season and in the New Year!

Sonya Anthony

Saturday, December 5

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. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. – Isaiah 11:1-9

Throughout his ministry, the prophet Isaiah warned Judah of the judgement and destruction its sin would bring. This judgement would be harsh and would fall on all who defy God. But with this message of judgement and destruction, there was also a message of hope and restoration.

Isaiah wrote that “a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse” (vs. 1), and that He would be righteous, just, and filled with the Spirit. He would have wisdom and understanding, and would bring peace and deliverance to God’s kingdom on earth. What a wonderful message of HOPE!

There are many things in our world today that distract and discourage us – wars, poverty, injustice, immorality, sickness. But throughout the scriptures, we are reminded of the HOPE we have in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 6:19 tells us “this hope is an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” 1 Timothy 6:17 tells us to “put our hope in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” Isaiah 40:31 reminds us that “those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.”

Love came down from heaven in the form of a child. This baby, Jesus, brought hope to all mankind. No matter what our circumstances, when we put our hope in his unfailing love, we will know the true peace, love and joy that only comes from knowing and believing in him.

Donna Phillips

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 6

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior. -Jeremiah 23:5-6

Peace

“This is the name they’ll give him: ‘God-Who-Puts-Everything-Right’”
(The Message Version)

This week we light the candle of Peace. This advent season comes on the heels of tragic headlines that are affecting our world; the ISIS terrorist attack in Paris, the terrorist attack in Mali and the displacement of Syrian Refugees just to name a few. And that’s not all; on a personal level we deal with family struggles, financial and health issues. Where do we find peace in the midst of troubled times?

Jeremiah 23:5-6 reads: *“The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.”*

This prophetic scripture speaks of the coming of the messiah, the birth of Jesus, to fulfill God’s plan of salvation and eternal life. This scripture reminds us to believe God is who he says he is and that he is true to his promises. Jesus was born through the lineage of King David, Jesus lived a perfect life, died a horrible death on the cross and three days later was resurrected. The prophecy has been fulfilled! We can trust God that he is still in control and will not forsake his people. We can thank God that he has made all things right through the birth of his son Jesus Christ.

Living on this side of the cross, we can live in anticipation knowing that a “Time’s coming”-God’s Decree’ (Message Version) when the truly righteous ruler who knows how to rule justly will come back and make everything right. It gives me peace to know that Jesus Christ is sitting at the right hand of the father in control of everything. This advent season let us prepare our hearts to be ready for his second coming.

Merry Christmas,

Paige Townsend

Monday, December 7

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel. And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; and they shall abide, for now, He shall be great to the ends of the earth; and this One shall be peace.”
-Micah 5:2-5a

When Leslie and Keith asked me to do a devotion for the Advent booklet, I was a little overwhelmed. I always consider myself as the silent, encourager part of the “Goude” family! My family is so qualified to do so much more, I enjoy just sitting back and praying for them.

I can imagine how Mary felt when she was told she would bring forth a Son. During my time of waiting for a baby, I experienced many emotions as my little one was expected to be born on this particular day, December 7. As it turned out, he came to us on December 1. As he was the first Goude boy in many years, needless to say he was special to all of us. As we dedicated him to our Lord and Savior we have praised God daily for his calling as we read in Micah 5:4 “He Will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God”.

In Micah 6:8, “He has showed you O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (NIV) As we all follow God’s word, we will live in Peace as He has called each of us.

Pearl Goude

Tuesday, December 8

A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:

Abraham was the father of Isaac,

Isaac the father of Jacob, ...

and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary,

of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

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 Christ.

-Matthew 1:1-17

Christmas... What a wonderful time of the year!

Listening to and singing Christmas carols, decorating the tree, wrapping presents, baking cookies, continuing old traditions and creating new ones. That's what Christmas is all about...or is it?

Most of us as a society today tend to get caught up in the materialistic side of Christmas; who can receive the biggest or most expensive gifts and how many gifts are under the tree. We forget the true meaning of Christmas...GOD, and his love for us.

“For GOD so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”. (**John 3:16**)

His love never wavers. “And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” (**Luke 2:10-11**)

For generations, God has told of his love through many events (to name a few): Abraham's offspring, Jacob's offspring, Prophets like Moses, Son of David, The Son of Man-JESUS! His love continues today and will through the second coming of our Lord-His love is Everlasting!

This IS what Christmas is all about. JESUS IS THE REASON FOR THE SEASON!

May we never lose sight of the true meaning of Christmas and share his love for generations to come.

Lynn Walton

Wednesday, December 9

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and 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, because he will save his people from their sins." - Matthew 1:18-21

When reading this portion of scripture, we notice how at the very outset, God inspired Matthew to give an orderly account of the birth of our Savior. The details given describe the unfolding events and circumstances surrounding the lives of Joseph and Mary at the time. To the common observer, the things that were happening in this couple's lives were anything but orderly (in keeping with Jewish custom), much less, divinely inspired. The people in Mary and Joseph's community knew that Mary was pregnant and that she and Joseph, though espoused to be married, were not yet married.

In our lives, we often wonder how difficult and sometimes chaotic circumstances can be orchestrated by or even allowed by God. Casual observers may even say to themselves, "If they are professing Christians, how can these things be happening to them?" From an earthly standpoint, it's impossible to figure out.

These Scriptures, though supremely unique as describing the story of Jesus' First Advent, are also another great example from the Bible how God can bring about order, accompanied by His peace - as He intertwines a higher purpose in the midst of great challenges in our lives as believers. He looks far beyond what we can see, and is forever at work behind the scenes with sublime intention to bring about His will in our lives and in the world.

David and Angie Crummett

Thursday, December 10

All this took place 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"—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 had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus. - Matthew 1:22-25

An Angelic visit informed Joseph of the truth, and he obeyed God immediately. Matthew recorded two more Angelic visits to Joseph, emphasizing Joseph's part in the unfolding of God's prophetic plan for the birth of His son. The angel explained to Joseph the meaning of the name Jesus and the mission of the child whom Mary was carrying. Joseph obeyed the instructions the angels had given in the dream. He did as the Lord's Angel had commanded him, he married Mary which culminated in Joseph's taking her to his home to live with him. Joseph was willing to share the scorn - and doubtless the blame - Mary's pregnancy would generate. Joseph knew her not until after the birth of Jesus. His obedience was matched by his courage, which should inspire us to follow through with whatever God calls us to do.

Matthew cited this verse(Matthew 1:23)as he wrote, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the birth narrative of Jesus. The virginal conception of Jesus remains a unique event in all history. The conception enabled Jesus to be both "Son of God" and "Son of Man." The two names given to our Lord at His birth summarize His unique nature: Jesus means, "God is salvation," showing "His diety," and Immanuel means, "God is with us," showing His humanity."

Love Came Down.....The world was blessed at Christmas with a miracle of love.....a guiding star and angel choir rejoicing from above. They pointed to a tiny baby within a cattle stall - a Savior bringing peace on earth - the greatest gift of all.

Christmas carols contain some of the most beautiful praises of our Savior's birth.

- O Holy Night -

O holy night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Till He appeared and the Soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born.

Peace Be With You, Alice Oldfield

Friday, December 11

In the sixth month, 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 be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. - Luke 1: 26-31

On this day 15 years ago our youngest son J.E.B. was born. If we look back to May of 2000 things were different. We believed that we had the ideal family; an older son and a younger daughter. We had just completed the first year of owning a small business and had celebrated Madison's second birthday. Just like Mary, everything seemed to be going as planned. She was engaged to Joseph and would soon be married.

I received a call from Hope telling me that I needed to come home. As I pulled in front of the house, Hope was sitting on the front steps waiting for me. I knew that something was wrong or so at first I thought. Our "angel Gabriel" was actually a nurse at Henrico Doctors Hospital who had given Hope the news that we would be having a third child. Like Mary's feeling of being unprepared, we too did not think we were ready or prepared for a third child. But we began to make plans to welcome our newest addition, a son born in Richmond named J.E.B. I can only imagine how unprepared Mary must have felt when Gabriel delivered the news.

Although two children seemed like the ideal for our family, God had different plans for us. With three wonderful children, we learned that our family was now complete.

Happy Birthday J.E.B., and Merry Christmas to all from the Hutson Family.

Saturday, December 12

*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 the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.*

- Luke 1:32-33

Of all the things that come to mind with the word peace, childbirth is most likely not one of them. Having a child can be one of the most rewarding, but stressful, times in the life of a person. Weight gain, hospital bills, late nights, sleep deprivation, etc. are all far from peaceful. These are all things normal people in today's world go through, but add in that the baby is the son of God and we cannot even begin to see what Mary went through. She was just a teenage girl waiting to be married to her fiancé, Joseph, but after being visited by an angel and being told her son will be the messiah, Mary simply responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." Mary knew that this meant being ridiculed by her peers for having a child before marriage and even risking her engagement for the matter, but she still went through with God's plan because she was a true servant for the Lord and she put God first in her life.

How does peace tie into this story? Carrying a baby for the God of the universe sounds more daunting than comforting. When we look at the story through human eyes, it *is* daunting, but if we could look through the eyes of God, we would see a beautiful plan unfolding that is full of grace and ends in victory. It may not have been immediate, it took over 30 years from this point for Jesus to make his way to the cross, but the sheer thought of a savior coming to bring us home and reign forever over heaven and earth was enough to put peace in the heart of Mary during the most stressful time of her life. The expectation of good things to come far outweighed her current circumstance. If she could find peace in the middle of a hurricane of emotions, so can we. Just like Mary, our present circumstance does not have to control the amount of peace in our lives.

This Christmas, let us remember Jesus has paid the price for us all and when we think about our eternal future in the place in which he has prepared for us, peace is one of the only responses our grateful hearts can make.

Merry Christmas!
Seth Gandee

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 13

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin? The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. – Luke 1:34-35

"How will this be," Mary asked the Angel," since I am a virgin? " The Angel answered, "The Holy Spirit" will come upon you, am the power of the Most High will over shadow you. So the holy one will be called the Son of God. Luke 1 34-35

Joy in my world has not been for the past year an half. As many of you know I lost my precious Larry. I thought I would never find Joy in my life again. As I began searching I was wrong Joy was all around me. But I would not allow Joy in my life.

As I began my new journey alone I found I had a lot of Joy surrounding me. I was really not looking for it. I found the most precious Joy knowing Jesus Christ as my personal savior, that brought much Joy to me. Knowing my family, friends, my church family has brought me Joy with them caring about me.

Now as days go by I always have Joy in my heart. Especially at Christmas time. May the Joy of Christ be with you always.

Pat Fowler

Monday, December 14

At the 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!"

– Luke 1:39-42

As I read this scripture, I ask myself, what is the significance of Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth, before the birth of Jesus? God's work hidden in these two unlikely women's bellies. Mary, a "lowly" servant girl and Elizabeth, past child bearing age. Why Mary or Elizabeth? Many times we may ask ourselves the same question. Why Lord, why me?

There are a lot of problems in this world that we cannot solve. The world is full of massive injustice at every turn. Hungry children dying, natural disasters, disease, terrorist groups seeking revenge on the innocent. How can anyone believe in God, who would allow all this injustice. But then there is Mary - a "lowly" servant girl, carrying the son of God.

Luke 1:39-42 is to remind us to have faith. Step out of your comfort zones, as Mary did as she traveled the distance to Galilee to visit Elizabeth. For nothing will be impossible with God. God does hear our prayers. Trust in the Lord and do not be afraid. God does have a plan. We must remember that all things are possible with God.

Blessed be within. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us to enable us to know and experience his presence within.

Jennifer Podbesek

Tuesday, December 15

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.⁶³ 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. All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. 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

Have you ever wondered if you would be able to hear God speak to you? And if you do hear Him, will you do what He tells you to do?

As Zachariah and Elizabeth had resigned to believe they were to remain childless, an angel spoke to Zachariah and told him that Elizabeth would bear him a son and his name is to be "John." Because he did not believe that this could be true he was left unable to speak, and remained that way until Elizabeth gave birth to their son. At that time Zachariah spoke for the first time and said, ***"the child will be called John."*** He had listened to what God had instructed.

My hope, as we approach Christmas is that we will take time from our busy schedules and listen for God to reveal His will in our lives. I pray you and your families enjoy a blessed holiday.

Nancy Bolton

Wednesday, December 16

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. ... 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 1:67-69

Zechariah was not a special man. We know that he was not a high priest in Jerusalem. He probably came from a small rural synagogue in Israel, yet God chose this country rabbi to reveal God's purposes. Zechariah's prophecy (the first words he spoke after an angel made him deaf and dumb) was a sign that God uses ordinary people to glorify His name. God is looking for the Zechariah's of our day to fill them with His Holy Spirit and use them in amazing ways.

God always seem to reveal himself to us just when we need him most. In Luke 1: 67 it tells us to praise the Lord, God of Israel and that he has come to help HIS people and set them free. He provided for me many times a Savior whom I could trust and call on in the midst of many difficulties. I have felt HIS presence in the midst of sickness, sorrow, financial difficulties and raising a family as a single parent. He helped me to be worry free in the midst of life's storms.

I know in my heart God has always been there for me and my family because we trusted Him.

I stress to you God will never leave nor forsake His own. God is Love!

Carol Tooley-Hall
Phil 4:13

Thursday, December 17

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 his 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 room for them in the inn. - Luke 2:1-7

Luke 2:1-7 details many ways that Love Came Down when Jesus was born as Luke gives us a view into the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. God sent LOVE in the person of Jesus Christ, who gave up His kingly, heavenly presence to live among mankind and truly show us the meaning of LOVE. LOVE is personified in Joseph for the way he cared for, and believed Mary.

Caesar Augustus considered himself to be god and declared that all his subjects would pay homage to him, even requiring them to travel to the city of their ancestors. Since Joseph was an ancestor of David, he had to go to Bethlehem to be counted and pay his taxes to Caesar. (This also fulfils the prophecy in Micah 5:2).

We often, in our thoughts, think of Joseph and Mary leaving Nazareth on December 24, arriving late to Bethlehem, giving birth on December 25, and heading out to Egypt on the 26th. The trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem was about 80 miles, so on foot and donkey, it took several days. In all likelihood, Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem several days before the birth of Jesus. Also, as Joseph's family was from Bethlehem, it seems likely that they would have had family to stay with, but perhaps other family members had occupied all the guest rooms ahead of them; but it was also custom for peasants to give birth in a barn where the hay could absorb some of the birthing fluids. After birth, babies were normally wrapped in swaddling cloths, strips of cloth tied tightly around the baby to keep the baby warm and help straighten the body. So, it appears that Jesus's birth was very much like the births of most babies in the first century.

We love this passage in Luke and all the pageantry we have assigned to it. Today, at Christmas, families will travel great distances to be together, just as Joseph and Mary did. God showed his LOVE for humankind by choosing to have His Son born of a peasant girl who was betrothed to a very LOVING man who would take care of both Mary and Jesus. God's Son being born in this manner, instead of in a castle or palace somewhere, shows that God LOVED us enough to become like we are.

*"Love came down at Christmas, Love all lovely, Love Divine.
Love was born at Christmas, Star and Angels gave the sign."* Christine Rossetti, 1885

May you experience much LOVE during this Christmas Season, Jimmy and Charlene Diggs

Friday, December 18

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 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 the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." - Luke 2:8-12

Why the shepherds?

The love story of Christmas, God's perfect and merciful love, is magnificent at every turn. This love narrative told by the gospel writer, Luke, quietly espouses the simple but earnest message of humility. The Son of the God, the King of all Kings, the Prince of Peace... his birth was announced by an angel of the Lord to *shepherds*. Shepherds who stood on the bottom rung of the social ladder, an unenviable status. Shepherds... who are called loathsome in Genesis 46:34 and whose profession was considered a type of punishment if you read Numbers 14:33. The illustration of God's unspoiled and eternal love gift to mankind is the subtext of the shepherd's role. "We can trust that God had a specific purpose for this shepherd audience, and the work they performed suggests the reason. These men who watched the sheep meant for the slaughter received a divine message about the ultimate Lamb who would take away the sins of the world through his death and resurrection." (*Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*)

Our Heavenly Father had planned from the beginning, to time and again, use men and women of low social standing; of questionable moral character; even prosecutors of the faithful; to advance His Kingdom. He chose humble people who became believers in our Living God to fulfill prophecy, to write our Bible, and to teach us through perfect example that every soul is worthy of our Christian benevolence and prayer, especially during the Advent season.

Wishing you all a very blessed Christmas,
Dale, Amy & Melissa Jacobson

Saturday, December 19

*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: 13-14*

Have you ever seen a "real" night sky that looked like Van Gogh's *Starry Night*so why would an artist paint the sky this way? Consider this....When you're happy, why do you sing instead of speak? Or when you're in love, why do you speak using poetic words? When we do this we're expressing ourselves beyond a mere clinical, scientific description, in order to communicate our feelings more powerfully.

I have felt the majesty of our Lord and Savior more than once while gazing up at the stars at night. Reminisce with me for a moment. I lived in CA when I was a child and in 6th grade, students had the opportunity to go to camp for a week up in the mountains. While at camp one evening the youth counselors took us out to look at the stars to discuss the constellations in the sky. I had never seen the night sky quite like that before. Remember, I lived in CA and the lights from stores, street lights etc. blocked out the beauty of the stars at night.

- There was a crispness in the air which made everything seem clean and refreshing.
- The sky was crystal clear. It was the kind of night we imagine when we think of a chorus of angels singing to frightened shepherds.
- The blackness was a deep, rich, velvet midnight blue.
- The stars were not spots of light but brilliant, magical diamonds that danced and flickered against the dark night. The sky was somehow alive.

When Van Gogh painted *Starry Night* he was suffering from a debilitating disease. Perhaps Van Gogh felt God's majesty as I did and realized he was not alone. I believe Van Gogh felt something so powerful that he went beyond the familiar to express it in his painting.

- The sky swirls across the canvas are full of vitality and power that speaks of God's presence.
- The stars don't just sparkle; they explode in radiance.
- The windows of the houses glow with the same light that illuminates the universe.
- The cypress trees capture the joy by erupting in a living flame of praise.
- And the church steeple reaches up and points to God

This is the sky the shepherds saw looking up at the heavenly host, who (singing with happiness) proclaimed the Glory of God and His love for us.

May God bless you richly this Christmas season, Leslie Belvin

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 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

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. ... 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: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel. ... Luke 2:25-35

Gary and I just celebrated our 24 year wedding anniversary in November. What a blessing it is to celebrate such an accomplishment. But as with most marriages, ours also came with a lot of tears, broken promises, heartaches, and disappointments. Our marriage started out wrong because we thought we controlled our own destiny, you see, we weren't living our lives for Christ. So it's no wonder that it failed so miserably. God allowed our marriage to fail, because of his great love for us. He wanted to rebuild it the way it was meant to be all along, with Him first in our lives.

John 3:16 "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." Another great verse about God's love is found in Romans 5:8 "But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." In these verses we find no conditions placed on God's love for us. God doesn't say "as soon as you clean up your act, "I'll love you; nor does he say, "I'll sacrifice my Son if you promise to love me." God wants us to know that his love is unconditional. He loves us because He is love. He created us to have a loving relationship with Him, and He sacrificed His own Son to restore that relationship.

In the midst of our broken marriage, God poured out his love on Gary and I, healing our hearts, and replacing our old desires with new ones, He changed our whole world as we once knew it. God restored our marriage, and we give Him all the praise and glory. "With God all things are possible." Matthew 19:26.

Gary and Barbara Mangrum

Monday, December 21

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. ... 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: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel. ... Luke 2:25-35

Most of us spend quite a bit of time making plans for the Christmas season. Every detail is important. We plan with our loved ones in mind because we want everything to be spectacular and memorable. It is a way of saying, "I love you".

God's flawless planning of Jesus' birth tells us how very much He loves us. His attention to each and every detail created the perfect arrival of His perfect Son. The people, the sequence of events, the locations, the elements of nature, the heavenly host ----- every detail worked together perfectly to reveal God's truly spectacular, and loving, plan for mankind.

Among the God-chosen people Luke recorded was a man named Simeon. His name may not be one that stands out in the songs and celebrations of Christmas today, but God inspired Luke to include him in his gospel. So he's important. The character of this man and his pronouncement of Jesus as the salvation of the world are noteworthy.

Simeon is identified as "righteous and devout". He was certainly a man seeking God's presence in his life. He was waiting for the Messiah and the comfort the Messiah would bring to Israel. So intensely devout was this man that Luke records the working of the Holy Spirit in him three times. That's powerful. Simeon was a man whose character and devotion we can seek to emulate. God rewarded Simeon's devotion and righteousness with a special insight by the Holy Spirit that allowed Simeon to recognize Christ, The Messiah. And Simeon did. The Holy Spirit moved him to go to the temple courts where he saw Jesus, took him in his arms and issued a hymn of praise to God for the Christ that lay in his arms. What greater gift of love can God shower on us than the gift of His Son, the Messiah. What greater gift can we give to God than to seek His presence in our lives.

The Mitchell's
Linda, Wendy and Chase

Tuesday, 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.

—Luke 2:36-38

By now, we've got the candles in the windows, the wreaths on the doors, the Christmas decorations placed around, and plans are in place for a Christmas dinner with the family. This is a busy time of year - just days before Christmas.

And yet, we are reminded by the story of Anna to keep Christ in our celebration of Christmas. Anna was a prophetess and a long-time widow. According to our verses for today, she had spent many decades worshiping and praising God daily in the temple. I wonder what she had to praise God for - a short married life? A life of poverty? Children aren't mentioned and she stayed in the temple area, seemingly without any family.

And yet - Anna gets to see Jesus. Mary and Joseph brought baby Jesus to the temple to be dedicated to God, because He was the first born son in the family (v.22 & 23). Simeon and others gathered around to see Jesus and to bless Mary and Joseph. Anna, being in the temple as usual, saw the gathering and joined them in realizing that the Messiah, the Savior, had come. She quickly told everyone she knew about this wonderful event.

We, too, can see Jesus this week, but what will it take? In Matthew 5:8, we are reminded that the pure in heart will see God. In spite of the busy-ness, am I taking time to remember the reason for the season? God sent Jesus, knowing that He would grow up to become our Savior and Redeemer. No wonder Anna went to tell everyone. Who will I tell about Jesus?

Amy and Mark Boykin

Wednesday, December 23

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. - John 1:1-9

This happens to be some of our favorite scripture. As a family that has had it's share of tough times, we could have easily turned against God or even blamed God. Being a Christian I've always known that God doesn't bring you to it if he can't see you through it.

These words of scripture have always let me know that even in the darkest of times we have God's light to shine upon us and protect us. With his light also comes peace. With his light our family overcame. We live everyday trying to share with others how great God's light is.

We hope by sharing our story with others it will help them trust in him. With God's light shining any darkness can be overcome.

The Cannon Family
Craig, Jenny and Ben

Thursday, December 24

Christmas Eve

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. - John 1:14

I have experienced Gods glory, his grace and His love for me.

My fishing story - Christmas Eve 2014, Key West, Florida

Terry and I decided to spend the Christmas Holidays in Florida.

We were fishing December 24, in Key West, FL and it was a beautiful afternoon. At 5 PM before leaving to get ready for a Christmas eve service I had to throw in my fishing pole a last time when I had a big bite. Excited about my catch, I stepped back holding on tight to my fishing pole when I slipped on the slippery cement boat ramp. Not catching myself with my arms or elbows, didn't want to lose my catch, I hit my head with full force on the cement. I felt the impact, but no pain. I passed out, I think only a couple minutes, until I woke up. I did not see any bright lights, but an incredible calm and peace, and I wondered I had died and gone to heaven. I felt with my fingertips the cold water beside me. Just trying to raise my head made me pass out. Terry realized I had a serious injury and called 911. Laying on the ground in the water, waiting for the ambulance, my head was swelling up fast and filled up the palm of my hand. I wondered if those were my last clear thoughts and if I would pass out forever. I prayed to God. I was not afraid and if it was my time to go home to the father I was ready.

I made it to the hospital and spent a long week from Christmas Eve to New Year's Eve at a Miami hospital.

It has been a long year of recovery, and yes there is such a thing as PTSD, but with the heartfelt prayers and love from family and friends, I feel so blessed and better every day.

We don't know when it is our time to be with our Lord, but we can prepare ourselves and make every moment precious and be ready by giving our lives to Jesus, our LORD and Savior, and give Him all the Glory, who is full of grace and truth.

Have a Blessed Christmas,
Pauline Littell

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 has 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

First Day

Friday, December 25

Christmas Day

“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

What do you love about Christmas? Is it the joy you receive by giving or receiving gifts? Is it the one time of the year that you can see the homes and businesses lit up in beautiful sparkling lights? Perhaps it is the Christmas trees that are decorated with colorful and memorable ornaments? Maybe it is the gathering of family and friends around a table of delicious food.

The word “love” is mentioned 310 times in the Bible. Love is an important feeling and God wanted to show us His love at Christmas. His love was so great that He gave us Jesus Christ. It is the time of the year when people may feel more motivated to love, to give and to share with others.

Here on Christmas Day, let us celebrate along with God, that His love continues to flow down from Heaven and covers EVERY person, whether they claim it or not. The love of God coming down from Heaven to earth did not depend on the obedient spirit of Mary nor upon the protective hands of Joseph. Love motivated God to take action!

If we remember the scripture from I Corinthians 13:13, the Apostle Paul records, “...faith, hope, love, these three abide but the greatest of these is love.” Love motivated God to send Jesus Christ so that whoever believes in Him will not perish (miss Heaven) but have everlasting life! God loves us so much that when we receive His free gift of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, God will give us the gift of being in Heaven with Him, forever!

So this Christmas as we share in our own traditions of celebrating this Holy Season, I trust something special will occur to remind us all of the Love of God that came down to all who believe in Jesus Christ!

Merry Christmas,
Bud and Donna Goude

P.S. Our family places a very decorative red heart shaped cushion at the top of our Christmas tree. It reminds us of the love of God that flows down to our family.

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

We had only been married four months when in August of 1972 we were able to put into action our three week trip across the USA. Weeks of planning and fixing up a twenty year old telephone truck van to sleep in as we crossed the country was about to get under way. We had our Trip Tics from Triple A, three hundred dollars in cash and a blank check from my mother in law, Bertha Green, "just in case." No credit cards, you had to be over 40 to have one of those! With no fear we set off with gas costing .29 cents and a very anxious Bertha.

God's timing had to be perfect as well and the Bible tells us He was sent in the fullness of time. This was foretold in the Old Testament and it was always God's perfect plan. When he sent His Son to be part of this world, He was born of a woman and needed to grow up, so that He might live, only to die for us. I have often wondered what Jesus must have felt, once he realized that he would not be here very long and would have to suffer before his time on this earth would come to an end. His mission was to save us and give us a way to be one with our God through the Holy Spirit that lives in our heart. We no longer need to be slaves to this world and its sin. What a wonderful gift we have been given, it's absolutely free and always available. You only need to believe!

Jo Green

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

- 1 Timothy 1: 15-17

The long suffering in Verse 16 seemed to speak to me. I think the last 2 years have been (for me) as long suffering as I ever want to be. With the breakup of my grandson's marriage in 2013, me moving in with him to help him financially, my cataract surgery that wasn't as successful as predicted, my detached retina surgery on Easter Monday, having to move into a studio apartment earlier in 2015, and the recent brain surgery that I had, makes me feel like I have had my fair share.

Then I watch TV with all the people in the world carrying everything they possess in a sack on their backs and and think how lucky I am - they are God's children too and all they want is a roof over their heads and food for their families - which I am truly blessed to have. I feel very small when I view these happenings.

Love came down to me during my most recent health issue - I could feel it - I never doubted that I was going to be all right. With God's hand on my shoulder helping me along, how could I go wrong? His love was apparent to me especially so during the brain surgery stay in the hospital.

With my faith, Pastor Bud's visits, a wonderful Christian doctor, my family, and all the people in a half dozen churches praying for me and God apparently on my side, all is well in my world. I am truly blessed and loved.

Barbara Fryer

Fourth Day

Monday, December 28

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Hebrews 2:14-18

This year had been a very hard, stressful, fun, and blessed year for me. I was working three jobs, Walmart, Substituting, and working as a tour guide at Jamestown Settlement. I was fortunate enough to meet a lot of friends through school and to be in a Shakespeare play. I know I have been busy but with the help of God, I was able to do it all, with the help of family, friends, and a wonderful boyfriend Matt, to keep my spirits up and do what I need to do.

This year has been a blessed year, building character, and work ethics, with the help of God, there is nothing I can’t do to be successful. This is my last semester at Thomas Nelson, and I’m praying I can get a full time job either at the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, or in public schools, as my degree will be in Social Sciences with a specialization in education.

I know with perseverance and the guidance of the Lord I can do anything. I pray that the next year will be just as great as this year. Have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Mackenzie Firman

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! — Philippians 2:5-8

Regardless of the significance of a relationship, or a particular situation, it is important to humble yourself and have a serving mindset to live as God has intended us to.

Martin Podbesek

Love Came Down At Christmas

Love came down At Christmas
Love all lovely, love divine;
Love was born at Christmas
Star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead
Love incarnate, love divine;
Worship we our Jesus
But wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token
Love shall be yours and love be mine
Love to God and to all men
Love for plea and gift and sign.

*Author: Christina Rossetti (1885)
Music Traditional Irish Melody.*

... in whom we have redemption through His blood the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

-Colossians 1:15-20

How beautiful a passage that tells us exactly who Christ is. He is supreme over all things heaven and earth. The invisible made visible. God was now able to be seen, touched, and heard. This was all possible through the birth of Jesus Christ. We were made in God's image but Christ is that image.

“Men could have not done it (renewed the image of God in mankind), for they are only made after the image: nor could angles have done it, for they are not the images of God. The Word of God came in His own Person, because it was He alone, the Image of the Father, who could recreate man made after the image.” St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood: St. Vlasimirs Seminary Press, 1944), 41.

It amazes me everyday to know that my God loves me so much. I recently joined Gloucester Point Baptist Church after a life changing event that led me to leave my childhood church. Through prayer, I asked for God's guidance. The day I walked into Gloucester Point I had that childhood feeling and knew God put me here. Being a part of a church is very important to me and I am thankful for the spirit that dwells in this Church.

Jodi Lane

Seventh Day

Thursday December 31

New Years Eve

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

-2 Corinthians 8:9

This scripture shows us that Jesus is the most gracious and generous giver of all. He gives purely out of love, mercy and grace, not out of duty or obligation.

Jesus, a King, came down to earth to live among us and to die for us to free us of our sins. If we express love by generous giving of ourselves, then Jesus is the greatest example there is of love. Love came down in the form of Jesus to give us the greatest gift of all-- salvation and eternal life with Him. We are all undeserving sinners, but He shows us unconditional love.

As we end another year and begin a brand new one, let us try to show our love to others by giving to them purely out of kindness and grace. We have the greatest example in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Have a blessed New Year,
Denise & Stan Gandee

Eighth Day

Friday, January 1

New Years Day

*And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things, at all times,
having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

-2 Corinthians 9:8, 15

God's grace and love toward humankind is immeasurable. It cannot be measured by time nor by space and is indescribably abundant in all things.

Psalm 90: 1-2 says: *"Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought for the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."*

Psalm 103: 2-6, 12 says: *"Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who forgive all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."*

Lastly Psalm 8: 3-5 describes our relationship with the Lord: *"when I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor."*

Considering the lowly man and the Creator, thanks be to God for His indescribable mercy and gift.

Harry Wang

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 in the east and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. - Matthew 2:1-3

The story concerning these scriptures remind me of a love-hate relationship between the Christ Child, King Herod and the Magi. It is also a story of generosity and greed.

The Magi are also known as wise men and astronomers. As wise men, they studied the world's great religious texts. As astronomers, they interpreted the stars. They are learned, studious, and wealthy. They traveled many miles over rugged desert terrain to follow an extraordinarily bright star that will lead them to Bethlehem and their Savior.

Herod, King of Judea, was known for being notoriously cruel and had a penchant for killing anyone who would try to threaten his throne. He ordered the deaths of one of his wives, her mother and two of his own sons for allegedly plotting against him. Herod had wealth and lived in a luxurious palace. He wanted for nothing materially. He suffered from numerous diseases and lived a wretched life.

The Magi stop by Herod's palace to pay their respects while in route to paying homage to Jesus. This is the first time Herod hears about the Holy Birth. They are carrying treasure chests filled with gold, frankincense and myrrh. Herod is troubled. Why are the Magi risking their lives and the theft of this great fortune to give it to a baby boy born in Bethlehem? If Herod only knew that these gifts would represent the birth, life and death of our Lord and Savior-- Jesus Christ!

We are so very thankful for all of the countless blessings that have been bestowed to us. It is easy to let the many negatives of the world get us down and consume all the positives in our lives. There are many ways you can give back this holiday season. Shop for an angel on the tree, give to the benevolence fund, and give to the church. To quote Rev. Tommy Speight, when you get your Lottie Moon envelope, "Put SOMETHING in it. SOMETHING is better than nothing!" Give with love and joy in your heart.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!
Becky & Wayne Matthews

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'" Matthew 2:4-6

LOVE CAME DOWN

My devotion this year is based on having faith in God in regards to timing and patience. I am not always as patient as I should be when I want something and I know I'm not alone in this. For many years I yearned to have a child. At the age of 37, a miscarriage and 18 years of marriage I figured by then it just was not meant to be. At that time I didn't believe in GOD's timing, only my own and that I could control it. It was very difficult seeing my siblings and friends with little ones and me not having the one thing I wanted so badly. To this day I now feel blessed for the miscarriage that I had, otherwise I would not have the wonderful daughter that I have today. As we know we are all created uniquely by our amazing GOD and no two of us are the same.

My point to take away from this is that GOD gives us what we need when we need it, not necessarily when we want it. If he does not allow us to have it there is a reason for that as well. He knows what is best for us. Sometimes he makes us go through trials and tribulations before receiving it. I personally think that is a test of our faith in Him. ***Love came down*** on us the day our daughter was born and she has brought Love and Joy to us every day since.

God Bless and Happy New Year to ALL
Jamie, Lee and Bailey Moore

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 make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

TRADITIONS

- Matthew 2:7-8

We grew up in Gloucester County where our ancestors settled in the sixteen hundreds. Our backgrounds and traditions are similar. The five generations of our Christmas memories are centered around family, schools and churches (Union and Providence). At our churches we learned about Lottie Moon, missionary to China, and we saved coins for the foreign mission offering. At school we enjoyed Christmas parties.

Christmas day was always spent at "Grandma's" house. An enormous dinner of country ham, Severn River oysters, homegrown vegetables and scrumptious pies and cakes was served. Grandma made red and green Jello in pretty sherbert dishes for the children. Small gifts were exchanged with our cousins and friends.

After our marriage and the birth of our two sons, the traditions continued including baking cookies, gathering greenery and setting the nativity scene in a prominent place. Christmas Eve was a time for Jesus' birthday cake, reading "The Night Before Christmas" and the Christmas story. Christmas day we went to Grandma's house where a stack of presents was waiting, only to be opened after Christmas dinner.

As our parent's health declined and some passed away our families celebrated Christmas day in our home. Chincoteague oysters replaced Severn River oysters which were no longer available. Then as our families grew larger, brothers and sisters no longer came together on Christmas day.

When we no longer had young children, we spent more time with adult activities like participating in Audubon Christmas Bird Counts. Today we still enjoy this event.

With the gift of two granddaughters, now ages 14 and 18, Christmas was never more joyous. We are busy observing family traditions and making wonderful memories with them! We continue to enjoy the "gifts" of our "wise" ancestors.

After our son Roger's death, we now spend several days in Williamsburg around Christmas taking in the music, pageantry and beautiful decorations. Our other son, David, and his family join us for an 18th century Christmas dinner.

This Christmas our hearts overflow with thanks to God for all the good "gifts" He has given us. We are so grateful for "wise" parents who taught us the love and miracle of Christmas, for a wonderful family and pets, for "wise" friends who daily share their love with us and for God-given peace of mind which goes beyond understanding.

How drab, how empty life would be without these "gifts".

Hayes and Joyce Williams (2009)

*After they had heard the king, they went on their way,
and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them
until it stopped over the place where the child was.
When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.*

- Matthew 2:9-10

Read Matthew 20:1-16

The Parable of the Laborers

There is more than one lesson in this parable and the scriptures teach of other rewards in heaven. The lesson I refer to here is the equality of the gift of salvation and eternal life.

This passage shows me the mercy and grace of God. It is like one life rather than one day in the vineyard. Some chose early in life and others chose even in the last moments of their time here on earth to follow Christ. God gave salvation equally to all who chose Jesus as their personal savior, showing that Gods grace is sufficient for all, regardless of their station or time in life. Time or works have nothing to do with salvation, it matters not who came first and who came last.

It is truly an equal gift from God, offered to all through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Wesley Bullis

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 and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. - Matthew 2:11-12

Epiphany is the celebration of the recognition of Jesus by the gentiles through the gifts of the Magi or wise men. The Bible doesn't actually say how many Magi there were. 3 is just the traditional thought because of the 3 gifts.

These wise men, probably of middle eastern heritage, brought 3 gifts that were the traditional gifts given to a king at the time. The Bible doesn't say how much of each gift they brought, but we can imagine that they were as generous as was possible. You don't exactly scrimp when paying homage to a king!

The most precious of the 3 gifts at the time was the myrrh which was very rare. The frankincense would be the next most costly gift and the gold would follow as the next most precious. As an example, when Tutankamen's grave was robbed, it was the gallons of essential oils that were stolen, not the gold. All 3 are, not only actual pragmatic gifts given and used somehow throughout Jesus' life, but are also items with much symbolism in the Bible.

The **gold** symbolizes Jesus' Diety and Kingship.

The **frankincense** which was used in the incense in the temple, of God's own recipe, was a symbol of prayers wafting up like smoke to God as a pleasant aroma. So the frankincense symbolizes Jesus' duties as our High Priest.

Last of all, the **myrrh** was used in burials and symbolizes the coming sacrifice of Jesus as our Savior.

Jesus doesn't want these precious gifts from us today. Instead, He wants the most precious gift that we can ever give Him- our hearts- which includes obedience, belief, service, praise and worship of God for all eternity. After all we can't scrimp when giving homage to the King of Kings.

May Jesus' gift to us of His Forgiving Blood be the one true gift that matters most and inspires our every day in service to Him.

Margaret Sarratori

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/>

November 29	<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
December 2	5:30-7:30 PM	Children's Advent Bible School (Preschool – 5 th)
December 6	<u>Second Sunday of Advent</u>	
	9:30 AM	Sunday School 11:00 AM -Worship
	2:00 PM	CARE Ministry
	3:00 PM	Deadline –Angel Tree Gifts
	4:00 PM	Lottie Moon Tea
December 9	5:30-7:30 PM	Children's Advent Bible School (Preschool – 5 th)
December 13	<u>Third Sunday of Advent</u>	
	9:30 AM	Sunday School 11:00 AM -Worship
	6:30 PM	Christmas Cantata and Reception
December 16	5:30-7:30 PM	Children's Advent Bible School (Preschool – 5 th)
December 19	5:00-9:00 PM	Youth Christmas Party
December 20	<u>Fourth Sunday of Advent</u>	
	9:30 AM	Sunday School 11:00 AM – Christmas Worship
December 21	6:30 PM	Christmas Caroling in Community
December 24	5:00 PM	Christmas Eve Service (Church Office Closed)
December 25	Christmas Day	(Church Office Closed)
December 27	Sunday	9:30 AM -Sunday School 11:00 AM -Worship
	2:00 PM	CARE Ministry
December 30 – January 1		Youth at Winterfest
January 1	New Year's Day	
January 3	Sunday	9:30 AM -Sunday School 11:00 AM -Worship
	2:00 PM	CARE Ministry
January 6	<u>Epiphany</u>	

Each Wednesday

5:30 PM Youth Program,

6:30 PM Children's and Adult Bible Study

7:30 PM Chancel Choir Practice

Each Friday

9:30 AM Seniors Morning Out