

*Tidings*  
OF *Joy*

CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONS FROM DENVER SEMINARY

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I love the Christmas season. The music, decorations, parties, and cards—each December we all smile a little more, give a little more, and love a little more. Here's a suggestion: this year, let's take a moment each day and ponder a little more what the season means.

You are holding in your hands a gift from us to you—our faculty and staff have written twenty-five devotionals to help you enter the sacredness of Christmas. You can read them on your own or share them with your family. Each entry is designed to help you contemplate and celebrate the mystery of Christmas—the eternal Son of God becoming a man to live here on earth. To paraphrase the angelic message to the shepherds, “We bring you good news of great joy! The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born!” (Luke 2:11, NLT).

So please accept this gift as an expression of our appreciation for your friendship. We pray that it will encourage, inspire, and challenge you. And may we all rejoice in God's great gift.

*Merry Christmas!*

Mark Young  
President

December 1

## Be It Done to Me

Howard Baker

Instructor of Christian  
Formation and Campus Chaplain

*"[Gabriel] went to her and said,  
'Greetings, you who are highly  
favored! The Lord is with you.' . .  
. 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary  
answered. 'May it be to me as you  
have said.'"*

LUKE 1:28, 38

The "annunciation" to Mary that she would be the Christ-bearer was accompanied by an assurance of grace and an encouragement to not be afraid. These contrasting words from Gabriel foreshadowed the journey of joy and the path of pain that were ahead for this "favored one."

The grace led to the great joy that we see in Mary's *Magnificat*, "My soul glorifies . . . my spirit rejoices . . . for the Mighty One has done great things for me" (Luke 1:46-49). Mary, through her adolescent eyes, glimpsed the glory that was to be birthed through her—Jesus, who would save his people from their sins.

The "fear not" gave Mary fair warning of the insults, difficulties, poverty, and pain that would surround the birth of Jesus. Mary saw clearly the sacrifices that were ahead for her as an unwed mother.

Mary's "be it done to me" revealed a heart of surrender to both the joy and the pain of becoming the Christ-bearer.

When we read that Christ is being formed in believers (Galatians 4:19) and that He is in us (Colossians 1:27), we discover that what happened to Mary physically happens to the believer spiritually.

**Ponder these things in your heart:** What "great things" has the Mighty God done for you? What joys do you experience because you are a Christ-bearer—having Christ in you?

What sacrifices or hardships have you faced as a result of being a Christ-bearer?

This Advent can you say with Mary, "Be it done to me according to your word," knowing that being a Christ-bearer will involve pain as well as joy? Maybe your prayer this season could be, "May Jesus be born anew in me this Advent."

Bible readers are regularly unsure what to do with the genealogies in Scripture; they may well decide to just skip some of them. But what about Matthew 1:1-17? It comes right at the very beginning of Matthew's version of the Christmas story.

There are actually a number of important things to appreciate about this one. In particular, this is where Jesus is most clearly demonstrated to be the Christ, the descendant of David and Abraham, with the legitimate right to the Messianic throne (v. 1).

By the standards of the day, though, the most surprising feature of these opening verses is the five women's names mentioned: Tamar (v. 3), Rahab (v. 5), Ruth (v. 5), Uriah's wife (Bathsheba, v. 6) and Mary (v. 16). Mary's inclusion is the easiest to understand, because Jesus wasn't born from Joseph—He merely became his adopted son.

The other four are even more surprising, because all were tainted in many Jewish people's minds by unusual and suspicious circumstances surrounding their sexual behavior: Tamar who played the prostitute so that Judah would lie with her (Genesis 38), Rahab who *was* a prostitute (Joshua 2), Ruth who lay at Boaz's feet while he was sleeping and snuck away in the morning (Ruth 3), and Bathsheba with whom David committed adultery (2 Samuel 11)

Mary, too, would have been shrouded with suspicions of illegitimate sexual behavior, as would anyone today who became "miraculously" pregnant. Throughout his life, Jesus would have been viewed by many as illegitimate. But God cares for all such people, as He seeks to save the least, the last, and the lost. Are these our priorities too?

*December 2*

## The Genealogy

**Dr. Craig Blomberg**  
Distinguished Professor of  
New Testament

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

MATTHEW 1:16 (TNIV)

## December 3

### Who is This?

Dr. W. David Buschart  
Assoc. Dean and Professor of  
Theology and Historical Studies

*“He replied, ‘You of little faith, why are you so afraid?’ Then he got up and rebuked the wind and the waves, and it was completely calm.”*

MATTHEW 8:26

The story of Jesus calming a storm is not among the passages most often associated with Advent. Yet, a closer look reveals that it has everything to do with God coming to earth as a human being.

The story clearly leads us to the conclusion that there is more to Jesus than meets the eye. Jesus is not “merely” a human being. He is different. He is the one to whom His friends turn when the storm threatens to drown them—“Lord, save us!” (v. 25). He is the one who calms the storm by rebuking wind and wave (v. 26). Clearly, Jesus is something—Someone—more. As even demon-possessed people declare in the story following this one (vv. 28-34), He is the Son of God (v. 29).

Yet, while only blindness or stubbornness would prevent a reader from recognizing in this story a person who is unique, the very message of divine uniqueness is grounded in another equally important reality: Jesus is genuinely human. While rightly awed by His sovereignty over nature demonstrated here, we must not miss the fact that this divine power is exercised through One who is genuinely human.

One who is God does not need to travel by boat. Nor does He sleep. Yet, in this story, Jesus does both (vv. 23-24). And we see Him behaving in other thoroughly human ways, for when He calms the storm those who have been living and traveling with Him are slack-jawed and ask, “What kind of a man is this?” (v. 27). Had the disciples been unconvinced, or perhaps simply overlooked the obvious fact, that Jesus was human like them, they would not have been shocked by His authority over nature.

Indeed, here is a story for Advent, for here is the story of God assuming genuine human form.

Old Simeon was good at waiting. Like all Israel, Simeon lived in anticipation of “the consolation” promised to his weary people. A devout man of God, patient and watchful, the Spirit was upon him. When Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to Jerusalem where Simeon was waiting, I imagine that Simeon’s fingers tingled and his heart skipped a beat as he took the Consolation of Israel, the Salvation of God, into his arms. But Simeon’s words of prophesy over the child may have surprised many.

“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.”

God has drawn *the* line in the sand. In Jesus, the Father has given us the indisputable, singular point of decision. *What will you do with this Jesus?*

Some who look honest and devout on the outside will be unmasked and their hearts of greed and self-interest will be exposed. Some will fall from power and positions of significance while others will be raised from humble circumstances and humility of heart to become agents of influence for the glory of God. And, this infant of innocence will bring division and discord.

No longer the infant in Simeon’s arms, Jesus said of Himself, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6), and later, “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me” (John 15:4).

Jesus continues to expose us today. He reveals our hidden secrets and lays bare all the incongruities we foolishly believe we have safely tucked away from others. Jesus is a threat to our illusions of self-importance and self-righteousness. He unmasks our attempts to earn God’s favor through acts of service. Yes, Jesus is a blessed threat.

*What will you do with this Jesus?*

*December 4*

## The Line in the Sand

Nancy R. Buschart  
Mentoring Director

LUKE 2:21-35

*December 5*

## Saved for Good Works

Dr. Sung Wook Chung  
Assoc. Professor of Theology and  
Director of Korean Initiatives

*“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 1:21

This is what an angel of the Lord said to Joseph in a dream. Undoubtedly, this statement is closely connected with the purpose of the Messiah’s coming to the world: He came to save His people from their sins. In other words, salvation is the very purpose of God the Son’s incarnation. So it is appropriate for us to reflect again on how sinners are saved from their sins in this Advent season.

The passage in Ephesians 2:8-10 clearly teaches that sinners cannot save themselves by their own works:

“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Why are sinners unable to save themselves by works? It is because they are dead in their transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Therefore, salvation must come from God as a heavenly gift. Salvation is by grace through faith alone.

However, we need to remember that saving faith is an end in itself. Verse 10 teaches us that we have become God’s masterpiece and created anew *for* good works. This means the purpose of our salvation is to do good works. In other words, we are saved not by good works, but for good works. Amazingly, God prepared the good works in advance for us to do. Here we encounter God’s double grace—the grace of salvation and the grace of preparing good works for us to do.

What a wonderful and amazing grace.  
Hallelujah!

“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! Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!’

“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. . . the Mighty One has done great things for me—holiness is his name...”

Two women. One old, one young. Both set apart, chosen by God. Within each is an act of the divine. The younger runs to the older. The angel was right, nothing is impossible with God. They celebrate.

For three months they stay together. The mothers long to look upon the face of their sons, to know the color of their eyes, the curves of their cheeks, the pout in their lips. The anticipation is wonderfully torturous. The hope of what the lives within their bodies will bring is uniquely understood and shared between the two of them. One boy will prepare the way for the other. The younger will be the way for all.

Like Mary, we have not yet seen the face of the Savior. In celebrating His birth, do we long to know the face of Christ the way Mary longed to know the face of her son? Do we cry out as Mary did to Elizabeth, proclaiming the glory of the Lord, praising all He has done, while looking ahead to what is to be accomplished through Christ? Let us approach the season of advent with the same yearning as Mary and Elizabeth, with meditations full of anticipation, hope, preparation, and longing as we look to the birth of our Redeemer.

Lord, we humbly pray that, like our sisters of ages past, we would celebrate the birth of your Son. May our souls glorify you and our spirits rejoice in You. You have done great things for us. Holy is Your Name. Amen.

*December 6*

## Yearning

Natalie Corbin  
Student, M.A. Biblical Studies  
and Communications Assistant

LUKE 1:41-49

December 7

## Awaiting the Coming of the Child

Dr. Hélène Dallaire

Assoc. Professor of Old Testament

*“Now Sarai was barren, she had no children (GENESIS 11:30); ... Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren (GENESIS 25:21); ... but Rachel was barren (GENESIS 29:31); ... for to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given (ISAIAH 9:6.)”*

Yearning for a day when they would cry out with exhilaration, “I am with child,” Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah had their hopes of motherhood dashed by barrenness. Day after day, these women suffered severe personal and social consequences because of their inability to have children. Cynicism grew in Sarah’s broken heart, causing her to laugh when she overheard the messengers of God proclaiming the news of her upcoming pregnancy (Genesis 18:9-15). Rebekah’s husband Isaac was forty years old when he married his lovely wife, only to discover that she could not bear him a child (Genesis 25:20-21). Rachel, the beautiful and beloved wife of Jacob, became jealous of her fertile sister Leah, and even considered suicide at the thought of never giving birth to a son (Genesis 30:1). Elkanah’s favorite wife Hannah experienced severe depression, wept incessantly, and refused to eat because of her barrenness (1 Sam 1:5-16).

In his mercy, God heard the heart cry of these women and healed their barrenness, giving them the joy of holding their own little baby in their arms. What an amazing transformation took place in their lives when their social status finally changed from “barren” to “fruitful” women. How great an impact a little child can have on a human being! How much more so can this be said of the Child Jesus who was born 2,000 years ago through a miracle of God, who came to restore mankind to the Creator, to bring everlasting peace on the earth, to heal broken hearts, and to cause endless joy to grow in those who love Him. May we always remember the amazing transformation that has taken place in our lives because of the Divine Child. May we continually celebrate the purpose for his coming, especially during this Advent season.

At Advent hearts are lifted, excitement mounts, and a spirit of goodwill reigns. Charlie Brown from the Peanuts cartoon noted, “Christmas is a time of hope, a time of loving, and a time of joy. Christmas makes the rest of the year worthwhile.”

How do we explain Advent’s delight? How do we account for the poems, hymns, and paintings inspired by the birth of an obscure baby 2,000 years ago? The answer lies in the promises God gave to His ancient people.

The first is the promise of an *historical event*. Micah wrote when Assyrians threatened to invade Israel, “But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, although you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come one who will be ruler of Israel . . .” (Micah 5:2).

Eight centuries later Micah’s prophecy was fulfilled. Luke 2:1-7 relates that in Bethlehem a male baby was born when Caesar Augustus ruled the Mediterranean world. The birth of Jesus is not a myth, but an event deeply rooted in history. We exult at Christmastime because of the joy that His birth brings.

We also exult at Christmas because of the promise of a *redemptive event*. Twenty years after Micah’s prophecy, Isaiah met Ahaz outside the city and told the wicked king that if he trusted God Assyria would cease to threaten him. The Lord invited Ahaz to ask a sign of His power to save the nation. When the king refused, God announced a greater, redemptive sign: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

The promise remained unclear until an angel announced to Joseph that Mary, his betrothed, would give birth to a son named Jesus. “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord 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).’”

December 8

## The Joy of Christmas

Dr. Bruce Demarest  
Professor of Christian Theology  
and Spiritual Formation

December 9

## The Importance of Being

Elodie Emig  
Instructor of Greek

PHILIPPIANS 2

Through the hymn to Christ in Philippians 2 may not be on your list of favorite Christmas passages, it has moved towards the top of mine. In early December some years ago, I was listening to the radio on my way to seminary. I was thinking about Greek participles when the radio intruded on my train of thought. A child asked if Jesus had to be born in a stable. I actually answered out loud, “Of course!” and then spent the rest of the drive contemplating my strong reaction. Bottom line, a participle precipitated my talking to a radio.

Paul tells us that Christ Jesus, *being* in the form of God, did not cling to His equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant (Philippians 2:6-7). The participle *being* has been understood in two main ways: first, as concessive—“although He was ...”; second, a minority of scholars have taken it as causal—“because He was ...” It is undeniably true that there is an adversative relationship between Christ’s being God and not clinging to His divine prerogatives; “although” certainly fits with Christ’s eternal majesty. But that child on the radio made it clear to me that C.D.F. Moule was equally correct in stating, “Precisely *because* he was in the form of God he reckoned equality with God not as a matter of getting but of giving.” Precisely because He was and is God, He had to be born in a stable.

Clearly, Jesus could have been born in a palace; He could have waited for indoor plumbing and a private jet. In fact, He could have entered history as a grown man, a second Adam spared the indignities of babyhood. But doing any of these things would have obscured His message that His kingdom really is for the poor and oppressed, the least of humanity. Jesus didn’t do what many of His contemporaries had expected of the Messiah. He wasn’t the kind of king earthly rulers have wanted to emulate. His unfathomable humility from stable to cross puts all human notions of majesty and regal entitlements in perspective. There will never be an earthly palace worthy of the Son of God precisely because He inaugurated His kingdom as a helpless baby in the straw and muck of a stable. Until we get this, we will not understand our Lord.

I have spent some Christmas vacations in beautiful places. While I was a missionary in the Philippines, the white sands of Boracay were a welcome change from the slush and ice of Christmases in many parts of North America. But even on the beach, one of the things I missed most during the Christmas season was family.

Perhaps this was part of being a missionary kid, and then an adult missionary, when so many Christmases were spent missing extended family. But I know I'm not the only one for whom Christmas is a special family time. It is a theme we hear mentioned often over the Christmas season: "Will you be visiting family this year?" or "We will have special family time together this Christmas" or "We had a great family celebration."

Separation from family is also an element of the Christmas story in Scripture. Christ's birth is surrounded by family. Of course His mother and father are prominent in the nativity scene, but, though far from home, "family" in the broader sense was there as well. The shepherds came to share in this intimate family experience.

In my many years of missing family at Christmas I have learned to remind myself that having family around at Christmas is more than just being surrounded by nuclear and extended family but surrounding myself with "family," those with whom I can share the celebration of the birth of our Lord and anyone with whom I can share hospitality as we remember His birth together. Christmas is about hospitality, welcoming others as we welcome the Christ child.

So for those of us who, like me, miss their family at Christmas because of distance, death of a loved one, or the disintegration of family relationships, remember that it's about the celebration of His birth and how He set in motion a future in which He will return and wipe every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:4). It is then that we will be with our family of sisters and brothers in the presence of our Father.

*December 10*

## Family

**Dr. Fred Gingrich**  
Associate Professor of  
Counseling

*"So they hurried off and found  
Mary and Joseph, and the baby,  
who was lying in the manger."*

LUKE 2:16

## December 11

### Waiting

Dr. Heather Davediuk Gingrich  
Associate Professor of Counseling

*“Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: ‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation...’”*

LUKE 2:28-30

With tears streaming down my face, I handed the end of a wet sheet of brightly striped wallpaper to my husband who was on the ladder. We had just found out that the baby we were adopting was not going to be placed with us in time for Christmas after all. Too upset to go to the service at church, we decided to spend Christmas Eve wallpapering the baby’s future bedroom. I knew he had been promised to us, and we were trying to rejoice in the fact that our baby would eventually arrive. But after more than nine years of infertility treatments and Christmas celebrations, where the yearning for a child was only exacerbated by watching the delight of my nieces and nephews in the holiday season, it was hard to maintain a positive perspective.

Then a miracle happened! We received a phone call informing us that the foster mother had arranged for a surprise—she had received permission from social services for us to “babysit” Nathan for Christmas Day. So, not telling anyone in advance, we brought two-month old Nathan to our family Christmas celebration where he was introduced to his extended family for the first time. I will never forget the delight on the faces of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins as they held this tiny babe after such a long, painful wait.

As I reminisced about this, my most special Christmas memory, I could not help but think of how Simeon felt when he held the long-promised Messiah—the one for whom he had waited all his life, and whose coming the nation of Israel had anticipated for hundreds of years. The joy that the birth and life of our son brought to so many people pales in comparison to the wonder of the birth and life of Christ. Nathan’s name means “Gift of God,” and he truly has been a gift to all who know him. Yet, the best gift of all remains the birth of the baby boy who God sent to earth that first Christmas.

At first blush, this verse seems simple enough—most of the human race, or “seed of the woman,” will dislike snakes for all that they are and do. Snakes will attack people and, because they slither along the ground, they will attack the heels. The human response, however, will be to kill the snake with an assault on the vital organ of its head. This seems straightforward. However, more is involved.

It is unusual for the woman to have seed. Normally, the man bears seed and it is his seed that one might expect as a reference here. The fact that the seed belongs to a woman opens the door to a greater interpretation regarding the virgin birth and the coming of Jesus Christ. This verse is often called the *proto-evangelium*, or “the early gospel” because here, before Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23, Luke 1:27, or Luke 1:34 lies the beginnings of an expectation that would be fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus Christ who comes to earth in the form of a baby born of a virgin.

In this sense, the struggle between the woman’s child and the snake—notice God speaks to the single snake, not its descendants—also has greater significance. The serpent is of course the Devil and the coming of Christ sparks the greatest struggle between two enemies in the history of the world. Although the serpent appears to win with the death of Jesus on the cross, Jesus’ final victory over the serpent begins with the resurrection and is promised to be complete in Revelation 12, where the woman and her son overcome Satan.

Thus the promise of the birth of Jesus and the story of our redemption begins the moment of the first sin in Genesis 3. Grace follows the sin and provides for our redemption through the birth and sacrifice of God’s Son, Jesus Christ.

December 12

## Grace from the Beginning

Dr. Richard S. Hess  
Earl S. Kalland Professor of  
Old Testament and Semitic  
Languages

*“I will make an enemy out of you  
and the woman, and out of your  
seed and her seed. He will crush  
you with respect to the head and  
you will crush him with respect to  
the heel.”*

GENESIS 3:15

December 13

## The Wise Men

Dr. Bill Klein  
Professor of New Testament

In this season of economic woes, how many of us are crying out to God to show up? Beyond the economy, we wait for God to heal the pain of loss, fix our circumstances, restore things we have lost, or maybe even prove that He is God and worth trusting.

Do you ever wonder what the wise men expected as they made their long journey from the exotic East to Palestine? The signs in the skies piqued their interest, and they felt compelled to travel from their palaces to see what the signs meant.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory—this was during Herod’s kingship—a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, “Where can we find and pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We’re on pilgrimage to worship him.” (Matthew 2:1-2, *The Message*)

What would motivate these men to make such a long journey? They must have considered it important enough to risk life and limb, time and energy, and a considerable fortune.

Some first-century Jews longed for God to split open the heavens and have the conquering Messiah rout the Romans and bring peace and freedom. God answered their prayers, but not in the manner they expected. Instead of military power, God sent a baby born in a cave whose cradle was a feeding trough for animals. Many of those Jews missed Him. But the Magi found Him. They saw the signs and followed them, full of expectation.

I wonder if we miss what God wants to do for us today because we’re preoccupied with our own agendas, or because we’re looking for the wrong things and in the wrong places.

This is the time to wait, listen, expect—to see how God will show up.

Have you ever considered the significance of the manger? Raised in the agrarian world of northern Minnesota, I have seen my share of mangers first hand. As a small child, I recall playing the role of Joseph, dutifully standing in my flannel bathrobe next to a manger where the plastic baby lay. I was always curious why Mary used such an unsanitary place to lay her baby. Ever watch a cow eat? Not a pretty picture. Why a nasty, worn, wooden feed trough to hold this most precious newborn? Practical availability I suppose. However, I think there are some lessons to be found in the choice of a manger.

Mangers are not designed to hold babies, they are intended to hold food. Scripture calls Jesus the “Bread of Life”—*“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”* John 6:51.

But why not just throw the food on the floor? A second purpose a manger serves is that it brings what an animal needs for sustenance up to a level it can reach. If God had not sent his Son to our level—to our world—we would have no hope. He came to our level, because we cannot hope to reach His.

Most mangers I have seen are wooden structures. It seems significant that the first place Jesus occupied was a rough wooden structure. Years later, he was laid on another rough wooden structure. This time it was not with the gentle, loving hands of a mother, but with the hands of those who hated Him. The infant lying in the manger is a picture of Christ laying down His life for our sin years later.

When you see the manger this season, let it serve as a reminder that Jesus is the bread of life, He came to our level, and His life began, and was sacrificed, humbly on a rough wooden structure.

December 14

## Why a Manger?

Dr. Larry Lindquist  
Assistant Professor of Pastoral  
Ministry and Evangelism

*“You will find a baby wrapped in  
cloths and lying in a manger.”*

LUKE 2:12

December 15

## A Teenager Worth Following

Dr. Randy MacFarland  
Provost/Dean

*“This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit”*

MATTHEW 1:18 (NLT)

We are usually encouraged to follow the example of those who are older and wiser. In selecting mentors we look for those further along either vocationally or spiritually. Someone recently introduced me to a book entitled *Reverse Mentoring* by Earl Creps. Who hasn't been mentored by someone younger when it comes to using technology? The scriptural snapshot of Mary presents a teenager worth following and having as our mentor.

Mary submits to the call and will of God even though it may jeopardize her marriage to Joseph and make her the object of public disgrace. Are we willing to submit to His will when the call seems outrageous and say with Mary, “Yes, I see it all now: I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve. Let it be with me just as you say” (Luke 1:38, *The Message*)?

Mary's song of praise reveals a young woman who knows the Scriptures and has an intimate relationship with the living God. Her words of praise cite God's concern for the marginalized and disenfranchised. There are clear parallels between her song and Hannah's prayer in I Samuel 2. Mary is quick to acknowledge God's mercy, power and faithfulness. Does what we believe about God affect our lives that way?

Mary provides a powerful example of steadfastness and commitment under pressure. She does not abandon her call when informed by Simeon that being Jesus' mother will bring personal suffering, “*And a sword will pierce your very soul*” (Luke 2:35b). Motherhood would be far from normal for her, requiring a certain distancing from her son and acute suffering (witnessing His crucifixion at Golgotha). Our last glimpse of Mary (attending a prayer meeting with Jesus' closest followers in Acts 1:14) reflects her ongoing commitment to a life of discipleship. Are we as steadfast when there is a cost to follow Jesus?

Mary is a teenager worth following and having as a mentor. By God's grace may we submit to His call and will, have a deep and intimate relationship with the Living God, and persevere in our commitment through the vicissitudes of life.

Can you imagine Mary's fear? She is an unwed teenager and an angel tells her that she has found "favor" with the Lord and that she will become pregnant by holy supernatural means and will bear the "the Son of God." No wonder she was "greatly troubled." Was this real or a nightmare?

The angel's annunciation is even more frightening from a cultural perspective. Teenagers were often promised in marriage to older men they might not even know. A good match was one who could provide the basics of life. Love and choice didn't count. The engagement period was meant to prove the girl a virgin—or at least not pregnant. If she was, the law called for her to be killed. Are you beginning to feel her fear when Mary says, "How shall this be...I have no husband(?)" Gabriel tells her to verify that her older, presumed barren, cousin is pregnant, for if God can do that, Mary can believe this too.

I suspect there was much in her mind and heart between verse 37 and 38 before Mary was reassured. Yet all that we have is her acceptance of this "Calling": to be the handmaiden of God and do as He asked. And so begins the Christmas story. Mary's brave choice allowed the Son of God to take on flesh and be born for the redemption of all who would believe in Him!

I doubt we will ever hear an angel ask of us what he asked of Mary, yet each of us has the same choice to make that she had: are we brave, courageous, and trusting enough to allow the Son of God to be born (anew) though our witness to those so in need of Him? Are we willing to risk our reputations, plans, and lives? We cannot be the literal Mother of the Lord, but each of us does have the privilege and choice to be the "Bearer of God" to those he sends our way. May we too be bold enough to say, "Let it be to me!"

December 16

## Called to be a God-Leader

Dr. Janet R. McCormack  
Asst. Professor of Chaplaincy  
and Pastoral Counseling

*"Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you! . . . for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."*

LUKE 1:26-38

December 17

## Question and Obedience

Dr. Alemayehu (Alex)  
Mekonnen

Assoc. Professor and Director of  
the Leadership Program

*“Then Mary said to the angel,  
‘How can this be, since I do not  
know a man?’... Then Mary said,  
‘Behold the maidservant of the  
Lord! Let it be to me according to  
your word’”*

LUKE 1:34, 38 (NKJV)

When Mary received the message from the angel Gabriel she was a young virgin Jewish girl, betrothed to Joseph. The opening remarks of Gabriel were affirmative of her acceptance by the God of her fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—“Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women” (Luke 1:28). Mary knew the God Gabriel was talking about. She was not a total stranger to His power in creation and His action in the history of Israel. She also knew the demeaning place the rabbinic law gives to women and the cumbersome do’s and don’ts that every Jew had to go through to win the favor of God. Even though she knew God, the cultural and theological reality she grew up in made it difficult for her to positively entertain the message of Gabriel. Hence, “when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was” (Luke 1:29). For the second time, Gabriel said; “...Mary, you have found favor with God” (Luke 1:30). God’s favor to Mary was based on his grace and mercy towards mankind. She was neither a high priest nor a priest. She was not a prophetess. She was a common Jewish girl planning to get married and lead an ordinary life. Without expectation, she received an unimaginable message—that “she will conceive in [her] womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus” (Luke 1:31).

Mary knew the natural process of conception, pregnancy, and bearing a child. The message doesn’t make sense and she asked, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” The angel Gabriel had to explain the whole process (Luke 1:35-37), and when Mary believed that “for with God nothing will be impossible” (v.37), she said, “Behold the maid servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (v.38). Despite the shame and ridicule she could face, she submitted herself to God’s plan in total obedience.

During this advent season, you might have a “how can this be?” question for God. Do you stop there or will you submit yourself to God who can do all things for good according to His will?

This text is one of my favorite Advent passages. I like it because it addresses squarely the purpose of Christ's coming and challenges us to conform our lives to it. As we follow Paul's train of thought, we detect three parts to that purpose: spiritual, existential, and ethical.

Spiritually, Christ came to alter the human condition for good, offering the remedy necessary for humanity's healing and transformation. He brought the only vaccine capable of neutralizing the destructive virus that has infected the human race—salvation secured with His own life. He graciously offers this vaccine to everyone. Have you taken Him up on this offer?

Existentially, he came to bring meaning to life. In John 10:10, Jesus declares that He came to make the enjoyment of life possible. In our text from Titus, Paul mentions an element which is essential to meaningful living: Hope. Jesus came once in humility to purchase our salvation, but that first coming only pointed to His glorious return, which will complete our salvation and glorification (Romans 8:23). When He appears again we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). This expectation is our blessed hope which allows us to live with meaning and purpose (Romans 8:18).

Ethically, he came to exert a salutary impact on our world with a view to making it more conducive to community life. In our text, Paul does not mince his words about the sorry condition of this age. Sandwiched as it is between the two comings, it is not a pretty time characterized as it is by so much evil, fuelled by pervasive unrighteousness, rampant wickedness, and audacious ungodliness. But it is to this immoral world he came, not to rescue us from it, but to help us live counter-culturally and influence it for good. In this world that has lost its moral compass, we are called to be zealots, enthusiasts, of good works.

As we celebrate Advent may we embrace the challenge to live according to his spiritual, existential, and ethical purposes.

December 18

## Spiritual, Ethical and Existential Purposes

Dr. Dieumème Noelliste  
Professor of Theological Ethics  
and Director of the Grounds  
Institute of Public Ethics

*"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 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 glorious appearing of our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."*

TITUS 2:11-13

December 19

## The Loss at Christmas

Dr. David Osborn  
Director of the Doctor of  
Ministry Program

*"[Christ Jesus] made himself  
nothing, taking the very  
nature of a servant."*

PHILIPPIANS 2:7

When my son and daughter were little they had a quarrel. They shouted at each other, "You're supposed to share with me!" They were both right and wrong. Both were supposed to share, but they were also supposed to be focused on "my sharing," not "your sharing." They both wanted more, not less. But they could not share without being willing to have less.

Do we want to get or to give? Do we want to gain possessions or change lives? Paul said that the Macedonians' "overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity" (2 Corinthians 8:2). They had less, but rejoiced in giving to others. Jesus taught, "Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves" (Luke 16:9). We don't buy friends. We give because we value people more than possessions. They respond when they sense our love.

For sharing to happen, we must give up something, resulting in fewer possessions and more relationships. For Jesus to be born as a baby in Bethlehem He had to give up more than we can comprehend. In giving up everything, Himself and His status with God, He gained us.

What will you give this Christmas? Christians are known as stingy tippers. Will you tip generously to encourage those who wait on you? Will you give to those who are struggling?

One year, our young children wanted to give Christmas gifts to twelve boys and twelve girls about their age in a children's home. We collected Pringles containers months before. Our son and daughter chose gifts that could be placed inside (matchbox cars was one gift for the boys). We sent it off in time for Christmas and then read the thank you notes in January. It was a special Christmas.

The question is "what do we value most—possessions or people?" Jesus chose people. Do we?

The announcement to the shepherds of the birth of Jesus and of peace on earth gives us a warm feeling. But “peace” is actually a challenge. There is a cost to peace.

Peace is first of all a result of Christ’s death, not of his birth. In his death Christ was “making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:20). Isaiah prophesied of the coming “Prince of Peace” (9:6) but also writes, “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed (53:5).

The contrast between peace and the making of peace is seen in a statement by Paul: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan” (Romans 16:20). Things that break the peace must be dealt with for peace to reign.

There is a cost to making peace. Jesus followed the beatitude “blessed are the peacemakers” with “blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness” (Matthew 5:9,10). He later said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24).

Peace on earth comes at a cost—first to Christ and now to us. He came to pay for it and we are called to pay for it. That is the challenge of Christmas.

*December 20*

## The Challenge of Christmas

**Dr. David Osborn**  
Director of the Doctor of  
Ministry Program

*“Glory to God in the highest, and  
on earth peace. . .”*

LUKE 2:14

*December 21*

## The Creator Joins His Creation

DJ Turner

Director of Communications

PHILIPPIANS  
2:1-15

On the first Christmas, God, who created the universe and everything in it, joined His creation. I don't know about you, but I find this difficult to really comprehend. I understand it on an elementary level, because I, probably like you, have sung Christmas carols and heard the Christmas story told in many different ways most of my life. But I can't say that I completely understand how the Creator of the universe—the Word who simply spoke and the world came into existence—could choose to humiliate Himself and join us in this dirty and dark world. It would be as if I chose to become part of the stew I made my family for dinner last week. It's just incomprehensible.

Yet that is exactly what Christ did. Entering His creation through the messy and painful means of birth, Jesus emptied Himself to become like you and like me. He chose to limit himself in time and space. He chose to bind Himself to the physicality of the world that He had created. It was a singularly beautiful act of love in which the holy and the profane, the sacred and the broken, the just and the scandalous were brought together, so that creation might be healed and redeemed through Him. As C.S. Lewis put it, "The Son of God became the Son of Man so that the sons of men might become sons of God."

But Christmas is a beginning, not an end. The grand purpose of God in this creation does not end when you or I become His son or daughter through Christ. God sent His Son as an act of love. It is a gift to change the world; a process that transforms not only my life and yours but also, through His work in us, transforms our communities. Just as His stars shine across the universe, so His love shines through us into the world. All because of that first Christmas when He humbled Himself to be like us.

In O. Henry's classic story, "The Gift of the Magi," a young man and woman, deeply in love, give each other gifts from the heart at Christmas. The young woman sells her beautiful, long hair to pay for a chain for the man's prized watch. He sells the watch to pay for combs for her hair. The selfless acts of this young couple have touched many hearts since O. Henry penned the story in 1906.

In today's busy world, even at Yuletide, too many of us think first of ourselves and then of others. Paul's words in Ephesians 5:2 remind us that we are to "walk in love," just as Christ did in the sacrifice of His life for our salvation. Walking in love with those around us does not have to involve extensive time or financial commitment—it is not the size of the gift that Paul and O. Henry were referring to. It is the condition of the heart that matters.

What motivates you this Holiday season? Think about the gifts you spend so much money and time on. Is your intention to impress the receiver with the amazing gift you have chosen, or to sacrifice a part of yourself through the act of giving? Paul suggests that our Savior has provided the model of sacrifice and gift-giving that we are to follow.

Take some time to consider what you can truly give of yourself. Instead of rushing around to seven different stores to buy the "perfect" gift, spend some time with God to ask how He can use you to walk in love with those around you. Listen to Paul's words and make an offering of yourself to others in ways you have never done before.

This Christmas season, challenge yourself to give gifts of the heart, gifts of sacrifice and selflessness. Give the gift of the Magi, and marvel at what God can do when we truly give of ourselves in His service.

*December 22*

## What Will You Give?

Dr. Ronald D. Welch  
Associate Professor of  
Counseling

*"And walk in love, as Christ also  
hath loved us, and hath given  
himself for us an offering and a  
sacrifice to God for a sweet-  
smelling savour"*

EPHESIANS 5:2 (KJV)

December 23

## Telling the Christmas Glory

Dr. Keith P. Wells

Director of Library and  
Assoc. Professor of Theological  
Bibliography and Research

*“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he has provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”*

HEBREWS 1:1-3

Glory is one of the great words of the English language,” writes Bernard Ramm in his little book, *Them He Glorified*. “It is so rich in connotations,” he says, “that no single word can serve as a good synonym. It means honor, praise, splendor, radiance, pomp, power, exultation, and supreme worthiness.”

In the Old Testament, God is the “King of Glory” as contrasted with the gloryless gods of surrounding nations. The “Shekinah” glory, or God dwelling in the midst of his people, is a clear indication of God’s presence and power. When we come to the New Testament we find continuity in ascribing glory to God. Peter refers to God as the “Majestic Glory” and Paul calls God the “Father of Glory.” Many of Paul’s doxological statements ascribe glory to God and call the church to praise affirming the glory of God.

As we celebrate this Advent season and prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ child, let us reflect on the glory of God that surrounds the first Advent. The angels sang, “Glory to God in the Highest,” and the shepherds experienced glory shone all around. In the prologue to his gospel the Apostle John asserts, “We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” The writer to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus Christ as the “radiance” or “effulgence” of God’s glory. Like the image on a coin, Jesus exactly represents God so that there is no mistaking that he embodies the glory of God dwelling among his people.

Such an exalted view of the Christ should inform our worship, our devotion, and our mission this Advent season. If we do not bow in reverence, awe, and wonder at the Son, who is the Lord of Glory, and call others to do the same, then we have missed the Christmas story. Indeed, we have missed the Christmas glory.

How good are you at waiting? More specifically, how good are you at waiting in traffic? Or waiting for other people? How patient are you while standing in line at the grocery store?

And what, exactly, are you waiting for? Are you waiting for a child to come home for the holidays? Waiting for a prodigal to return to the Lord? Or perhaps you're waiting for marriage or for a child or for physical or emotional healing.

Simeon was a righteous man who had waited his entire life for the consolation of Israel. When Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus into the Temple, Simeon took him in his arms and made some sweeping claims about the salvation this child would bring. Then, suddenly, an old prophetess named Anna who had been serving in the Temple for over 50 years appeared “and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Israel” (Luke 2:38).

An amazing and disturbing reality is that God sometimes likes to make us wait. It seems that one of the reasons is because He's trying to build hope within us. As the apostle Paul stated in Romans 8, “Hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” Through their long years of waiting, Simeon and Anna nurtured their hope that God would, in His time and in His way, fulfill the promise of the coming Messiah.

During the Christmas season, we often find ourselves waiting—in line buying gifts, or for family and friends to arrive, or for the plane to take us home. And more often than not, we're reminded of what our hearts most deeply desire—the love we crave, the joy we yearn to feel, and the peace which “surpasses all understanding.”

So, this holiday season, may we imitate Simeon and Anna who saw the promise of salvation in the Christ child. May we nurture the hope in our hearts that He will meet our deepest desires in His chosen time and in His loving way.

*December 24*

## Waiting

**Dr. Scott Wenig**  
Haddon W. Robinson Chair of  
Biblical Preaching; Associate  
Professor of Applied Theology

*“[Simeon] was waiting for the  
consolation of Israel. . .”*

LUKE 2:25

December 25

## Who Is This?

Dr. Mark S. Young  
President

*“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 upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God. . . .”*

LUKE 2:25-28

Simeon was a simple man. And he was a committed man. We have no idea why the Holy Spirit chose to reveal to Simeon that, before he died, he would see the One he longed to see. Waiting. Watching. Expectant. Days spent wondering, “When, Lord?” didn’t erode his anticipation; they heightened his excitement.

And then He was there, the One that Simeon yearned for. Carried into the temple courts in the arms of a humble couple faithfully fulfilling the duties of their faith, Simeon touched the Glory of Israel, the Light of the world. “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (vs. 29-32). His praise echoed the marvelous provision of God for all people through the courts of the temple. What could have been a moment of very selfish revelry in receiving a gift long hoped for became a chorus of thanksgiving for God’s gracious intervention for all, Jew and Gentile.

Recalling the language of the prophet Isaiah, Simeon rehearsed the refrain of God written from eternity—salvation would come to all, not just one nation. Imagine! The baby squirming in the arms of a stranger is “a light of revelation” for those trapped in the darkness of worshiping false gods and “glory” for those privileged to receive Him as their own.

Maybe this Christmas you’re tingling with anticipation about a gift that you’ve dreamed of for years. Or, perhaps, you have children who just can’t get to sleep at night because of their excitement over what they will see Christmas morning. Let’s allow Simeon’s story to frame our excitement and anticipation for gifts. Let’s affirm that gifts that matter the most ought to be gifts that matter to all people.



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